

The Quran

Description of Afterlife

Volume Seven

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Description of Afterlife
Death and Beyond, The Last Hour, Resurrection,
Judgment Day, Hell, and Heaven

The First-Ever Rendition of the Quran
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Note to the Readers

The seven-volume Quran series is based on the brilliant work The Message of the Quran by Muhammad Asad. I have faithfully kept the translation in all seven volumes in the original form as it appears in The Message of the Quran. For the sake of brevity, I have condensed some of the explanations and deleted duplications. Without the original work by Muhammad Asad, this Quran series would have been impossible to conceive.

The series is not meant as a substitute for the Quran but is intended as a study and reference aid to the Quran in its original form. I recommend that all serious students of the Quran read Muhammad Asad's masterpiece, The Message of the Quran.

Farooq Mirza, MD

Dedication

This book is dedicated to the memory of Muhammad Asad, whose work titled *The Message of the Quran* was the first-ever attempt at an idiomatic, explanatory rendition of the Quranic message into English. This work is based upon *The Message of the Quran* by Muhammad Asad, which, in my humble opinion, is the best translation and explanation of the Quran.

Muhammad Asad was born Leopold Weiss in July 1900 in the city of Lvov (German Lemberg), now in Poland, then part of the Austrian Empire. He was the descendant of a long line of rabbis, a line broken by his father, who became a barrister. Asad himself received a thorough religious education that would qualify him to keep alive the family's rabbinical tradition. He left Europe for the Middle East in 1922 for what was supposed to be a short visit to an uncle in Jerusalem. There, he came to know the Arabs and was struck by how Islam infused their everyday lives with existential meaning, spiritual strength, and inner peace. Weiss then became, at the remarkably young age of 22, a correspondent for *The Frankfurter Zeitung*, one of the most prestigious newspapers in Germany and Europe. As a journalist, he traveled extensively, mingled with ordinary people, held discussions with Muslim intellectuals, and met heads of state in Palestine, Egypt, Transjordan, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan.

Back in Berlin from the Middle East a few years later, Weiss underwent an electrifying spiritual epiphany—reminiscent of the experience of some of the earliest Muslims—that changed his mind and his life. “Out of the Quran spoke a voice greater than the voice of Muhammad,” Weiss said. Thus, it was that Weiss became a Muslim. He converted in Berlin before the head of the city’s small Muslim community and took the names Muhammad, to honor the Prophet, and Asad—meaning “lion”—as a reminder of his given name, Leopold, which is derived from the Latin word for lion.

Asad spent some six years in the holy city of Mecca, where he studied Arabic, the Quran, the *hadith*—the Traditions of the Prophet and Islamic history. He mastered the Arabic language, not only through academic study but also by living with the tribe who spoke the Arabic dialect of the Quran. At the age of eighty, after seventeen years of effort, he completed the work that had been his life’s dream, and for which he felt that all his life up to then had been an apprenticeship: a translation and exegesis, or *tafsir*, of the Quran in English—*The Message of the Quran*.

Contents

Preface: Why Afterlife and Resurrection Is Central to Islamic Theology?	1
Chapter 1 Death	9
Part 1: <i>Al-Ghayb</i>	15
Chapter 2 <i>Al-Ghayb</i> (Realm beyond the Reach of Human Perception)	17
Chapter 3 Angels	22
Chapter 4 Satan, the Fallen Angel	27
Chapter 5 <i>Jinn</i>	42
Part 2: The End of the World and Resurrection of the Dead	51
Chapter 6 The Last Hour and the First Blast of the Trumpet	53
Chapter 7 Resurrection of Humanity after the Second Blast of the Trumpet	65
Chapter 8 Humanity Divided into Three Groups (Foremost, Unrepentant Sinners, and Those Who Attained Righteousness after Sinning)	81
Part 3: Accounting of Unrepentant Sinners	85
Chapter 9 Evil Deeds	87

Chapter 10	Sinning, Grant of Respite, and the Fate of Unrepentant Sinners	102
Chapter 11	Torments of the Judgment Day for Unrepentant Sinners	109
Chapter 12	Record of Unrepentant Sinners	122
Chapter 13	Appearance before God and Testimonies of Prophets and Satan	129
Chapter 14	Perfect Divine Justice and the Myth of Intercession	138
Chapter 15	Torments of Hell	143
Chapter 16	Dialogue between the Blessed and the Damned	169
Chapter 17	Nineteen Angelic Powers over Hell and Salvation of Pardoned Sinners	177
Part 4: Accounting of Righteous Who Were Sinners Before		183
Chapter 18	Repentance and Atonement of Sin	185
Chapter 19	Good Deeds and Salvation	192
Chapter 20	Record of Those Who Attained Righteousness after Sinning	219
Chapter 21	Accounting of the Righteous of Other Monotheistic Faiths	223
Chapter 22	Accounting of the Righteous among Nonbelievers and Those in Limbo	232
Part 5: Heavenly Bliss, Delights, and Pleasures of Paradise		239
Chapter 23	The Prophet's Night Journey and Glimpse of Heaven	241
Chapter 24	Paradise Brought into View and a Beatific Vision of God	245
Chapter 25	Infinite Gardens Heavenly Drinks and Fruits of Paradise	251
Chapter 26	Reuniting with Family and Spouses in the State of Perfect Happiness	260
References		269

Why This Book?

A New Paradigm in Understanding the Quran

Traditional Arrangement

THE QURAN IS a unique book, and unlike most other books, it does not have a beginning, middle, or end. It is not arranged according to different topics or subject matter. The traditional Quran is arranged in accordance with the inner requirements of its message as a whole and not in the chronological order in which the individual passages were revealed. The seemingly abrupt transition from one subject to another is also in accord with the Quranic principle of deliberately interweaving moral exhortation with practical legislation. This is in pursuance of the teaching that man's life—spiritual and physical, individual and social—is one integral whole, and therefore requires simultaneous consideration of all its aspects if the concept of the good life is to be realized. In accordance with the system prevailing throughout the Quran, a lengthy passage dealing with purely moral or ethical questions is usually followed by verses relating to social legislation, with a view to bringing out the intimate connection between man's spiritual life and his social behavior.

Rearrangement according to the Subject Matter

The Quran as written was meant for the common people to read in its original order and to immerse themselves in it. But for scholars, lawyers, and anyone who needs to study a particular issue, it would be handy to have it arranged by subject matter. For example, the subject of divorce is discussed in the Quran in chapters 2, 33, 58, 60, and 65. Compiling all the verses about divorce in one place gives the reader a quick reference.

The Quran for the Western Readers

The Quran in its original format is likely to be confusing to a Western reader. Thomas Carlyle, a renowned Orientalist, described the Quran as “a wearisome confused jumble, crude, incondite; endless iterations, long-windedness, entanglement; most crude, incondite [sic]; — insupportable stupidity, in short!” Carlyle was by no means an Islamophobe; as a matter of fact, his essay “The Hero as Prophet” was a rare objective analysis of Muhammad’s life. The Quran according to the subject matter will be much easier to understand.

Elliptical Mode of Expression

The bracketed parts throughout this manuscript are an elliptical mode of expression in Arabic. Ellipsis is the omission from speech or writing of a word or words that are superfluous or able to be understood from contextual clues. This ability comes naturally to an Arab by the process of mental osmosis from his early childhood. Not so, however, the non-Arab who becomes acquainted with Arabic only at a mature age. The original Arabic of the Quran omits intermediate thought clauses in order to express the final stage of an idea as concisely as possible. The thought-link phrases must be supplied by the Arabic translator; otherwise, the translation will be a meaningless jumble to a non-Arab. All good translations of the Quran include bracketed phrases in the verses for the benefit of non-Arabs. For more detail, see volume one of this Quran series in the chapter “Ten Principles behind Interpreting the Quran.”

Preface

Why Afterlife and Resurrection Is Central to Islamic Theology?

ARABIAN PAGANISM HAD little sense of cosmic moral purpose or individual or communal ethical responsibility. Belief in fatalism saw no meaning or accountability beyond this life—no resurrection, divine judgment, or punishment or reward in the afterlife. Islam introduced the belief in the afterlife such as the Day of Judgment and resurrection of the body, which added a dimension of human responsibility and accountability that had been absent in Arabian religion.

Life: Two Stages of One Continuous Journey

Ours is [the dominion over] the life to come as well as [over] this earlier part [of your life]. (92:13) To happiness [in the life to come] will indeed attain he who attains to purity [in this world] and remembers his Sustainer's name and prays [unto Him]. But nay, [O men,] you prefer the life of this world, although the life to come is better and more enduring. (87:14–17)

According to the Quran, man's life in this world and the hereafter is but two stages of one continuous entity. Life in this world is but the first stage—a very short stage—of life that continues beyond the hiatus called death. God decides the life span of individuals and communities, and with the death of the body, the individual's soul enters into the hereafter. Death is, therefore, a misnomer, as it is not an end in itself. It is the beginning of a new journey of the human soul liberated from the body's limitations traveling into the realm of eternity. There is very little explanation in the Quran as to what happens from the time between an individual's death and resurrection. All we know is that the soul lives on without the body.

The Quran formulates arguments as to why afterlife and resurrection are a logical necessity from spiritual, moral, and social points of view.

1. Afterlife Satisfies the Demands of Justice and Morality

Would We treat those who have attained to faith and do righteous deeds in the same manner as [We shall treat] those who spread corruption on earth? Would We treat the God-conscious in the same manner as the wicked? [All this We have expounded in this] blessed divine writ which We have revealed unto thee, [O Muhammad,] so that men may ponder over its messages, and that those who are endowed with insight may take them to heart. (38:28–29) Now as for those who indulge in sinful doings—do they think that We place them, both in their life and their death, on an equal footing with those who have attained to faith and do righteous deeds? Bad, indeed, is their judgment: for, God has created the heavens and the earth in accordance with [an inner] truth, and [has therefore willed] that every human being shall be recompensed for what he has earned, and none shall be wronged. (45:21–22)

ONE who is minded to ask might ask about the suffering, which [in the hereafter] is bound to befall those who deny the truth. [Know, then, that] nothing can ward it off. (70:1–2)

It is incomprehensible that lifelong suffering is often the lot of many righteous men and women, while wrongdoers and deniers of the truth apparently remain unscathed and are allowed to enjoy the good things of life. The Quran solves this apparent paradox by making it clear that the afterlife satisfies the demands of justice and morality. If good and evil have one and the same end, the distinction of virtue and vice becomes meaningless. We must assume that God either does not exist or He is unjust, because the concept of injustice is incompatible with that of Godhead. Alternatively, there is a hereafter in which both the righteous and the unrighteous will harvest in full what they morally sowed during their lives on earth.

Without a differentiation between right and wrong—or true and false—there would be no “inner truth” in the concept of a divinely planned creation. A true believer faces worldly tribulations and the moment of death with inner peace and tranquility. Wrongdoers may have feelings of nagging anxiety, which so often accompanies the fear of the unknown at the time of dying.

2. Spiritual and Social Confusion

Say: “Go all over the earth and behold what happened in the end to those [who were thus] lost in sin. But do not grieve over them, and neither be distressed by the false arguments which they devise [against God’s messages]. (27:69–70) Nay, but they [who refuse to believe in resurrection] have been wont to give the lie to this truth whenever it was proffered to them; and so they are in a state of confusion. (50:5)

They deny the reality of life after death and of man's ultimate responsibility for his conscious actions. The unavoidable consequence of this denial is the loss of all sense of right and wrong, which leads to spiritual and social chaos, and hence to the downfall of communities and civilizations. Since they reject all thought of life after death, they are perplexed by the lack of any answer to the "why" and "what for" of man's life, by the evident inequality of human destinies, and by what appears to them as a senseless, blind cruelty of nature. Problems can be resolved only against the background of a belief in a continuation of life after bodily death and in the existence of a purpose and a plan underlying all creation.

As against this, they who are bent on denying the truth say [unto all who are of like mind]: "Shall we point out to you a man who will tell you that [after your death,] when you will have been scattered in countless fragments, you shall—lo and behold!—be [restored to life] in a new act of creation? Does he [knowingly] attribute his own lying inventions to God—or is he a madman?" Nay, [there is no madness in this Prophet—] but they who will not believe in the life to come are [bound to lose themselves] in suffering and in a profound aberration. (34:7–8)

"Profound aberration" refers to the moral and social confusion—and of the individual and social suffering—which is the unavoidable consequence of people's loss of belief in the existence of absolute moral values and in an ultimate divine judgment on the basis of those values.

3. Earthly Pleasures versus Eternal Happiness

Alluring unto man is the enjoyment of worldly desires through women, and children, and heaped-up treasures of

gold and silver, and horses of high mark, and cattle, and lands. All this may be enjoyed in the life of this world—but the most beautiful of all goals is with God. Say: “Shall I tell you of better things than those [earthly joys]? For the God-conscious there are, with their Sustainer, gardens through which running waters flow, therein to abide, and spouses pure, and God’s goodly acceptance. (3:14–15) But the enjoyment of life in this world is but a paltry thing when compared with the life to come! (9:38) The life in the hereafter is by far the better for all who are conscious of God. Will you not, then, use your reason? (6:32) GOD GRANTS abundant sustenance, or gives it in scant measure, unto whomever He wills; and they [who are given abundance] rejoice in the life of this world—even though, as compared with the life to come, the life of this world is nought but a fleeting pleasure. (13:26) The life of this world is nothing but a passing delight and play—whereas, behold, the life in the hereafter is indeed the only [true] life: if they but knew this! (29:64) And [remember:] whatever you are given [now] is but for the [passing] enjoyment of life in this world, and for its embellishment—whereas that which is with God is [so much] better and more enduring. Will you not, then, use your reason? (28:60)

The most important question is why people should be mindful of the hereafter as well as, or even more than, their present life. In comparison with the life to come, the life in this world is but a brief moment, and it is only in the hereafter that man’s destiny reveals itself in all its true aspects. The brief enjoyment of this world is nothing but self-delusion, if it is indulged in without any thought of the hereafter. The implication is that one should strive for both here and hereafter, as the next verses indicate.

Those Who Strive for Here and Hereafter

But there are among them such as pray, "O our Sustainer! Grant us good in this world and good in the life to come and keep us safe from suffering through the fire." It is these that shall have their portion [of happiness] in return for what they have earned. (2:201–202) GOD is most kind unto His creatures: He provides sustenance for whomever He wills—for He alone is powerful, almighty! To him who desires a harvest in the life to come, We shall grant an increase in his harvest. (42:19–20)

Those who live righteously and turn their endeavors toward spiritual ends are sure to receive in the hereafter more than they are hoping for. God would have made a clear-cut distinction between those who look forward to the hereafter and those who care for no more than worldly success, by granting unlimited happiness to the former and causing the latter to suffer. Since it is only in the hereafter that man's life is to be truly fulfilled, God has willed to postpone this distinction until then.

Suffering for Those Who Denied the Afterlife

Verily, as for those who do not believe that they are destined to meet Us, but content themselves with the life of this world and do not look beyond it and are heedless of Our messages—their goal is the fire in return for all [the evil] that they were wont to do. (10:7–8) And some [of the unbelievers] say, "There is nothing beyond our life in this world, for We shall not be raised from the dead." If thou couldst but see [them] when they shall be made to stand before their Sustainer [and] He will say, "Is not this the truth?" They will answer: "Yea, indeed, by our Sustainer!"

[Whereupon] He will say: "Taste, then, the suffering that comes from your having refused to acknowledge the truth!" (6:29–30)

Preference of Here over Hereafter

Is, then, he to whom We have given that goodly promise [of better and enduring happiness in hereafter] which he shall see fulfilled [on his resurrection] comparable to one on whom We have bestowed [all] the enjoyments of this worldly life but who, on Resurrection Day, will find himself among those that shall be arraigned [before Us]? (28:61)

They will be arraigned for having misused God's gifts and attributed them to powers other than God.

Reward and Punishment

Unto Him you all must return: this is, in truth, God's promise—for, behold, He creates [man] in the first instance, and then brings him forth anew to the end that He may reward with equity all who attain to faith and do righteous deeds; whereas for those who are bent on denying the truth there is in store a draught of burning despair and grievous suffering because of their persistent refusal to acknowledge the truth. (10:4) For, [in the life to come,] all shall have their degrees in accordance with whatever [good or evil] they did: and so, He will repay them in full for their doings, and none shall be wronged. (46:19) [Be conscious, then, of] the Day when every human being shall come to plead for himself [alone], and every human being shall be repaid in full for whatever he has done, and none shall be wronged. (16:111)

God Will Make You Understand What You Did in Life

They who are bent on denying the truth claim that they will never be raised from the dead! Say: "Yea, by my Sustainer! Most surely will you be raised from the dead, and then, most surely, will you be made to understand what you did [in life]! For, easy is this for God!" Believe, then, [O men,] in God and His Apostle, and in the light [of revelation], which We have bestowed [on you] from on high! And God is fully aware of all that you do. (64:7-8) And one Day, all [who have ever lived] will be brought back unto Him, and then He will make them [truly] understand all that they were doing [in life]: for, God has full knowledge of everything. (24:64)

1

Death

Rejection of Reincarnation of Soul

ISLAM REJECTS THE suggestion that human souls will be reincarnated in different bodies for reparation and achievement of a higher spiritual level. We have but one opportunity to earn the recompense that will determine the quality of our eternal existence. The Quran stresses, again and again, the principle of man's moral responsibility for all his conscious actions and his behavior, and of the continuation of this responsibility in the shape of inescapable consequences, good or bad, in a person's life in the hereafter. In other words, there is a direct continuity between this life and the next, linking our lives and actions on earth with the final dispensation of justice on Judgment Day.

Stages of Human Life from Birth to Death

He it is who has created you out of clay, and then has decreed a term [for you]—a term known [only] to Him. (6:2) And He it is who has brought you [all] into being out of one living entity, and [has appointed for each of you] a time-limit [on earth] and a resting place [after death]. (6:98) There is no living creature on earth but depends for

its sustenance on God; and He knows its time-limit [on earth] and its resting place [after death]: all [this] is laid down in [His] clear decree. (11:6)

The above reference to man created out of clay and dust points to the evolutionary nature of his origin. Only He knows a lifetime relating both to individual lives and to the world as a whole.

Evolution from Dust and Fertilized Ovum

It is He who creates you out of dust, and then out of a drop of sperm, and after that out of a germ-cell; and He brings you forth as children: and then [He ordains] that you reach maturity, and then, you grow old—though some of you [He causes to] die earlier—: and [all this He ordains] so that you might reach a term set [by Him], and you might [learn to] use your reason. (40:67) It is God who creates you [all in a state] of weakness, and then, after weakness, ordains strength [for you], and then, after [a period of] strength, ordains [old-age] weakness and grey hair. He creates what He wills; and He alone is all-knowing, infinite in His power. (30:54) And God has created you, and in time will cause you to die; and many a one of you is reduced in old age to a most abject state, ceasing to know anything of what he once knew so well. Verily, God is all-knowing, infinite in His power! (16:70)

Sleep and Wakefulness—an Allusion to Life and Death

And He it is who causes you to be [like] dead at night and knows what you work in daytime; and He brings you back to life each day in order that a term set [by Him] be fulfilled. In

the end, unto Him you must return: and then He will make you understand all that you were doing [in life]. (6:60)

Barzakh

We have [indeed] decreed that death shall be [ever-present] among you. (56:60) For behind those [who leave the world] there is a barrier [of death] until the Day when all will be raised from the dead! (23:100)

The entire message of the Quran makes it clear that the person who has died will never be able to return to earth again. The barrier of death (*barzakh*) represents the inability of departed souls to return to earth. What happens to the human soul between death and resurrection is not clear. There are no Quranic verses that shed light on this period of hiatus, and perhaps the dead are just dead until resurrection. After Judgment Day, resurrected souls are sent to either the Garden or the fire. The possible exceptions are the martyrs who made an ultimate sacrifice by giving their life for God's cause; they may enter paradise soon after death.

Timing and Place of Death

Wherever you may be, death will overtake you—even though you are in towers raised high. (4:78) And none that is long-lived has his days lengthened—and neither is aught lessened of his days—unless it be thus laid down in [God's] decree: for all this is easy for God. (35:11) He (God) knows its time-limit [on earth] and its resting-place [after death]: all [this] is laid down in [His] clear decree. (11:6) Whereas no one knows what he will reap tomorrow, and no one knows in what land he will die. Verily, God [alone] is all-knowing, all-aware. (31:34)

Visit from Angels of Death

And He [God] alone holds sway over His servants. And He sends forth heavenly forces to watch over you [guardians over you] until, when death approaches any of you, Our messengers cause him to die: and they do not overlook [anyone]. (6:61) And [always] listen for the day when He who issues the call [of death] shall call [thee] from close-by. (50:41) Say: “[One day,] the angel of death who has been given charge of you will gather you, and then unto your Sustainer, you will be brought back.” [on the Judgment Day] (32:11)

Helplessness of Onlookers and Certainty of Death

Why, then, when [the last breath] comes up to the throat [of a dying man], the while you are [helplessly] looking on—and while We are closer to him than you, although you see [Us] not—why, then, if [you think that] you are not truly dependent [on Us], can you not cause that [ebbing life] to return—if what you claim is true? (56:83–87)

The elliptic implication is: If, then, as you claim, you are independent of any Supreme Power, why are you not able to prevent the death of your loved one?

Everlasting Life Never Granted

And [remind those who deny thee, O Prophet, that] never have We granted life everlasting to any mortal before thee: but do they, perchance, hope that although thou must die, they will live forever? Every human being is bound to taste death; and We test you [all] through the

***bad and the good [things of life] by way of trial: and unto
Us you all must return. (21:34–35)***

The unbelievers of Mecca questioned Muhammad's prophethood as he was a mortal like them, but then all of God's apostles were mortal men. "And so We shall not grant immortality unto you either, and you are bound to die. But if, then, you should die, will they live forever?" implies an assumption on their part that they would not be called to account after death and resurrection. However, in the end, you shall be brought back for judgment.

Part 1: *Al-Ghayb*

2

Al-Ghayb

(Realm beyond the Reach of Human Perception)

His Divine Writ—let there be no doubt about it—is [meant to be] a guidance for all the God-conscious who believe in [the existence of] that which is beyond the reach of human perception. (2:2–3)

Al-ghayb, commonly and erroneously translated as “the Unseen,” is used in the Quran to denote all those sectors or hidden realities that lie beyond the range of human perception and cannot, therefore, be proven or disproven by scientific observation or even adequately addressed within the accepted categories of speculative thought. The concept of the existence of a realm that is beyond the reach of human perception constitutes the fundamental premise for understanding the call of the Quran. It is, indeed, a basic principle of almost every religion, for God Himself belongs to the realm of *al-ghayb*.

All truly religious cognition arises from the fact that only a small segment of reality is open to man’s perception and imagination, and by far the larger part of it escapes his comprehension altogether. For instance, metaphysical subjects such as God’s attributes, the

ultimate meaning of time and eternity, the resurrection of the dead, the Day of Judgment, paradise and hell, the nature of the beings or forces described as angels and *Jinn*, and so forth—all fall into the category of *al-ghayb*. Only a person who is convinced that the ultimate reality comprises far more than our observable environment can attain a belief in God and, thus, to a belief that life has meaning and purpose. By pointing out that it is “guidance for those who believe in the existence of that which is beyond human perception,” the Quran says, in effect, that it will of necessity remain a closed book to all whose minds cannot accept this fundamental premise.

Two Types of Verses

He it is who has bestowed upon you from on high this divine writ, containing messages that are clear in and by themselves—and these are the essence of the divine writ—as well as others that are allegorical. Now those whose hearts are given to swerving from the truth go after that part of the divine writ which has been expressed in allegory, seeking out [what is bound to create] confusion, and seeking [to arrive at] its final meaning [in an arbitrary manner]; but none save God knows its final meaning. (3:7)

Loan Images

And it is not God's will to give you insight into that which is beyond the reach of human perception: but [to that end] God elects whomsoever He wills from among His apostles. Believe, then, in God and His apostles; for if you believe and are conscious of Him, a magnificent requital awaits you. (3:179)

The glimpse of afterlife had been the purview of God's elect Prophets only. It is through these apostles that God vouchsafes to man a

partial glimpse of the reality of which He alone has full knowledge. The next question that arises is how the events that will occur in the afterlife can be explained to common people without the benefit of experience of afterlife or how the metaphysical ideas of religion can be successfully conveyed to us. The answer is by “loan images” derived from our actual—physical or mental—experiences. This is the innermost purport of the term and concept of *al-mutashabihat* or allegory as used in the Quran.

Thus, the Quran tells us clearly that many of its passages and expressions must be understood in an allegorical sense for the simple reason that being intended for human understanding, they could not have been conveyed to us in any other way. Imagine how to explain what a tree looks like to an unborn fetus who has no point of reference in regard to the appearance of the tree. One can compare the placenta to the tree’s root system, an umbilical cord to the tree’s trunk, and various fetal arteries and veins to branches of the tree. It will be an allegorical and highly imperfect and vague description of a tree to a fetus.

If we were to take every Quranic passage, statement, or expression in its outward, literal sense and disregard the possibility of its being an allegory, a metaphor, or a parable, we would be offending the very spirit of the divine writ. All Quranic references to hell, paradise, and men’s conditions in the hereafter are, of necessity, highly allegorical and therefore liable to be grossly misunderstood if one takes them in their literal sense or, conversely, interprets them in an arbitrary manner.

Time-Space Limitation versus Infinity

They know but the outer surface of this world’s life, whereas of the ultimate things they are utterly unaware. Have they never learned to think for themselves? (30:7–8)
Say: “Brief is the enjoyment of this world, whereas the life to come is the best for all who are conscious of

God—since none of you shall be wronged by as much as a hair's breadth." (4:77)

The possibility of an intellectual comparison between the two stages of human existence is, to a large extent, limited by the fact that all our thinking and imagining is indissolubly connected with finite time and space. With the destruction of the cosmos, the canopy of space-time fabric rips apart, and the earthbound concept of time will disappear.

We cannot imagine infinity in either time or space—and therefore cannot imagine a state of existence independent of time and space. It would be improper to explain the events in the afterlife in the literal sense only. The description of the hereafter in the Quran is the concrete expression of an abstract concept. The principle of comparison through allegory is applied to all references to the afterlife.

The question arises as to whether the term "allegorical" means unreal. What is real or unreal from this life perspective cannot be applied to the afterlife. In the realm of infinity, there will emerge a new reality that will be much more real than any reality in this life. Imagine that the people of paradise will stay young and live forever because of the everlasting quality of hereafter. What is more real—the temporary life of this world or living forever?

Having said all that about the afterlife, I will be derelict of my duty if I do not mention that there are two schools of thought within Islamic theology. Let's take the example of paradise. Some Muslim theologians believe that paradise will be a spiritual experience. They advance the following argument. The joy of joys consists in the beatific vision in which the veil that divides man from God will drop to disclose His heavenly glory to the soul freed from its earthly flesh. Supporting the non-materialistic interpretation of paradise is the Prophet's statement for the favored of God, to "see his Lord's face

night and morning is a felicity which will surpass all the pleasures of the body, as the ocean surpasses a drop of sweat.”

Others believe the descriptions of paradise are literal as well as metaphorical. The conditions of heavenly bliss are described with all the vividness of Eastern imagery for people who lived in an arid climate. The paradise is referred to as Gardens, plural. The description of a paradise as vast as the “heavens and the earth” is the Quranic metaphor for the entire created universe. We have the image of Gardens abounding with deep rivers of cool, crystal water, of milk, honey, and wine. There is neither too much heat in the Garden nor is it bitter cold. Springs sprout everywhere, lush vegetation of wondrous hues, blissful shade, flowering meadows, boundless fertility, fruits of every kind.

There will always be a sincere difference of opinion in understanding and interpreting the Quran. One should be fully conscious of the Prophet’s profound saying: “The differences of opinion among the learned men of my community are an outcome of divine grace.” The human endeavor to understand God’s words will never be complete.

Say: “if all the sea were ink for my Sustainer’s words, the sea would indeed be exhausted ere my Sustainer’s words are exhausted! (18:109) But none save God knows its final meaning. (3:7)

3

Angels

THERE IS NO mention in the Quran about the nature of origin of angels. According to the Prophet's saying: "The Angels were born out of light, and the *Jinns* were born out of the spark of fire, and Adam was born out of clay." Believing in angels is one of Islam's five articles of faith. Angels do not have free will and can only do God's will with the exception of fallen angels.

Who do not disobey God in whatever He has commanded them, but [always] do what they are bidden to do. (66:6)

Among the more prominent angels are Gabriel, Michael, and Israfael. All the angels appear in a graduated, individuated hierarchy. These ranks of angels offer God their praise, and they appear active throughout the universe as messengers from God and executors of divine will. They also function as guardians and recorders.

Angels Surrounding the Throne of God's Almightyness

They extol His limitless glory by night and by day, never flagging [therein]. (21:20) They who bear [within themselves the knowledge of] the throne of [God's] almighty, as

well as all who are near it, extol their Sustainer's limitless glory and praise, and have faith in Him, and ask forgiveness for all [others] who have attained to faith. (40:7)

God is encircled with a boundless realm of angels, who express their love and devotion to Him. Angels “bearing” of God’s throne of almightiness (*al-arsh*) need to be understood in a metaphorical sense. Their carrying and surrounding the throne, or being near it, can be seen as a metaphor of their being mindful of it and acting in accordance therewith, or as a metonym for their closeness to the Lord of the Throne, their dignity in His sight, and their being instrumental in the realization of His will.

Respect for Angel Gabriel and Angel Michael

Say [O Prophet]: “Whosoever is an enemy of Gabriel”—who, verily, by God’s leave, has brought down upon thy heart this [divine writ] which confirms the truth of whatever there still remains [of earlier revelations], and is a guidance and a glad tidings for the believers—“whosoever is an enemy of God and His angels and His message-bearers, including Gabriel and Michael, [should know that,] verily, God is the enemy of all who deny the truth.” (2:97–98)

According to several Traditions of the Prophet, some of the learned men from among the Jews of Medina described Gabriel as “the enemy of the Jews,” for three reasons. First, all the prophecies of the misfortune that was to befall the Jews throughout their early history were said to have been transmitted to them by Gabriel, who thus became in their eyes a “harbinger of evil” (in contrast to the angel Michael, whom they regarded as a bearer of happy predictions and, therefore, as their “friend”). Second, the Quran states repeatedly that it

was Gabriel who conveyed its message to Muhammad, whereas the Jews were of the opinion that a legitimate claim of divine revelation could only come from descendants of Israel. Third, the Quran—revealed through Gabriel—abounds in criticism of certain Jewish beliefs and attitudes and describes them as contrary to the genuine message of Moses.

Angels and Divine Revelations

All praise is due to God, Originator of the heavens and the earth, who causes the angels to be [His] message-bearers, endowed with wings, two, or three, or four. (35:1) And [the angels say]: “We do not descend [with revelation], again and again, other than by thy Sustainer’s command: unto Him belongs all that lies open before us and all that is hidden—from us and all that is in-between.” And never does thy Sustainer forget [anything]—the Sustainer of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them! Worship, then, Him alone, and remain steadfast in His worship! Do you know any whose name is worthy to be mentioned side by side with His?” (19:64–65)

Angels are a transmitter of God’s message, communicating divine revelations to the prophets. Thus, Gabriel (Jibril) brought down the Quran to Muhammad. The “wings” of the spiritual beings or forces comprised within the designation of angels are a metaphor for the speed and power with which God’s revelations are conveyed to His prophets. Their multiplicity (“two, or three, or four”) is perhaps meant to stress the countless ways in which He causes His commands to materialize within the universe created by Him, an assumption that is supported by an authentic *hadith* to the effect that on the night of his Ascension, the Prophet saw Gabriel “endowed with six hundred wings.”

Angels' Prayer for Forgiveness

“O our Sustainer! Thou embracest all things within [Thy] grace and knowledge: forgive, then, their sins unto those who repent and follow Thy path and preserve them from suffering through the blazing fire! And, O our Sustainer, bring them into the gardens of perpetual bliss which Thou hast promised them, together with the righteous from among their forebears, and their spouses, and their offspring—for, verily, Thou alone art almighty, truly wise—and preserve them from [doing] evil deeds: for anyone whom on that Day [of Judgment] Thou wilt have preserved from [the taint of] evil deeds, him wilt Thou have graced with Thy mercy: and that, that will be the triumph supreme!” (40:7–9)

Watchful Forces over Human Beings

There are ever-watchful forces over you, noble, recording, aware of whatever you do! (82:10–12)

This is a reference to the guardian angels who record, allegorically, all of men's deeds. However, there may be another explanation; the “watchful force” (*hafiz*) set over every human being is his conscience, which “records” all his motives and actions in his subconscious mind. Since it is the most precious element in man's psyche, it is described as “noble.”

Angels Descending on Doers of Good

As for those who say, “Our Sustainer is God,” and then steadfastly pursue the right way—upon them do angels often descend, [saying:] “Fear not and grieve not, but

receive the glad tiding of that paradise which has been promised to you! We are close unto you in the life of this world and [will be so] in the life to come; and in that [life to come] you shall have all that your souls may desire, and in it you shall have all that you ever prayed for, as a ready welcome from Him who is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace!" And who could be better of speech than he who calls [his fellow-men] unto God, and does what is just and right, and says, "Verily, I am of those who have surrendered themselves to God"? (41:30–33)

4

Satan, the Fallen Angel

Definitions: Iblis, Satan, *Shaytan*

AT THE OPPOSITE end of the spectrum from God, the principle of good, is Satan (*shaytan*), the principle of evil. Satan is the leader of other fallen angels, disobedient servants of God who tempt human beings in their earthly moral struggle.

The term *shaytan*—derived from the verb *shatana* (“he was or became remote”)—often denotes in the Quran a force or influences remote from and opposed to all that is true and good. Satan refers specifically to the chief fallen angel who does his bidding through evil impulses planted into the hearts of men in the form of temptations and ungodly tendencies. In its widest, most abstract sense, it denotes “satanic force” or evil impulse that is contrary to every valid ethical postulate. These evil forces are inherent in man as well as in the spiritual world. The term *shaytan* appears in the Quran in both the singular and the plural, often interchangeably with Iblis, the defiant angel ejected from heaven for disobeying God. Iblis, as a *shaytan*, tempts Adam and Eve into disobedience. The English word “devil” is derived from the Greek *diablos*, which is a Hellenized form of the Arabic name Iblis, fallen angel. The term Iblis originates from the root verb *ablasa*, which means “he despaired” or “gave up hope.”

And when they meet those who have attained to faith, they assert, "We believe [as you believe]"; but when they find themselves alone with their evil impulses, they say, "Verily, we are with you; we were only mocking!" (2:14)

Their evil impulses are literally, "their satans" (*shayatin*, plural of *shaytan*). In accordance with ancient Arabic usage, this term often denotes people "who, through their insolent persistence in evildoing, have become like Satan" (Zamakhshari). According to several Traditions, the Prophet was asked, *Are there satans from among men?* He replied, "Yes, and they are more wicked than the Satans from among the invisible beings [*al-jinn*] and Satan circulates in the human body as blood does."

And Lo! Thy Sustainer said unto the angels: "Behold, I am about to establish upon earth one who shall inherit it." They said: "Wilt Thou place on it such as will spread corruption thereon and shed blood—whereas it is we who extol Thy limitless glory, and praise Thee, and hallow Thy name?" [God] answered: "I know that which you do not know." (2:30) When We told the angels, "Prostrate yourselves before Adam!"—they all prostrated themselves, save Iblis, who refused and gloried in his arrogance: and thus he became one of those who deny the truth. (2:34) [Whereupon Iblis] said: "Now that Thou hast thwarted me, I shall most certainly lie in ambush for them all along Thy straight way and shall most certainly fall upon them openly as well as in a manner beyond their ken, and from their right and from their left: and most of them Thou wilt find ungrateful." (7:16–17)

Satan Is Not the Primary Cause of Sin

The Satan of the Quran is not an all-powerful monster lurking above human beings forcing them to commit evil. All Satan can do is tempt man. In Islam, there is no such excuse as "Satan made me do it," as it

contradicts the very concept of free will. After committing a grave sin, some people blame their actions upon Satan in an attempt to avoid responsibility. Evil is not an independent, esoteric factor of life but rather a result of men succumbing to the temptations arising from their own moral failings. The power of the negative principle symbolized by Satan has no intrinsic reality. It becomes real only through men choosing willfully a wrong course of action.

Behold, he has no power over those who have attained to faith and in their Sustainer place their trust: he has power only over those who are willing to follow him, and who [thus] ascribe to him a share in God's divinity. (16:99–100)

Satan will thus address the sinners on Resurrection Day:

"I had no power at all over you: I but called you—and you responded unto me. Hence, blame not me, but blame yourselves." (14:22)

Satan's Guile Is Weak Indeed

Those who have attained to faith fight for the cause of God, whereas those who are bent on denying the truth fight in the cause of the powers of evil. Fight, then, against those friends of Satan: Satan's guile is weak indeed! (4:76)

Fight against the power of evil; Satan's crafty or artful deception is weak indeed. In other words, Satan is not an invincible foe somewhere out there, and human beings are not merely helpless victims of evil.

Satan Tempts Man to Distinguish Righteous from Evildoers

Now, indeed, Iblis did prove that his opinion of them had been right... And yet, he had no power at all over them:

[for if We allow him to tempt man,] it is only to the end that We might make a clear distinction between those who [truly] believe in the life to come and those who are in doubt thereof: for thy Sustainer watches over all things. (34:20–21)

Man Is Free to Accept or Reject Evil

Are thou not aware that We have let loose all [manner of] satanic forces upon those who deny the truth—[forces] that impel them [towards sin] with strong impulsion? Hence, be not in haste [to call down God’s punishment] upon them: for We but number the number of their days. (19:83–84)

The expression “We release all [manner of] satanic forces upon those who deny the truth” has here the meaning of “We have allowed them to be active among them,” leaving it to man’s free will to accept or to reject those evil influences or impulses. Do not ask for hasty punishment because God has granted respite to all sinners.

Strategies of Satan

Deceptions—When Evil Deeds Seem Good

By God, [O Prophet,] even before thy time have We sent apostles unto [various] communities: but [those who were bent on denying the truth have always refused to listen to Our messages because] Satan has made all their doings seem goodly to them: and he is [as] close to them today [as he was to the sinners of yore]; hence, grievous suffering awaits them. (16:63)

Satan Instills Fears of His Allies

It is but Satan who instils [into you] fear of his allies: so fear them not, but fear Me, if you are [truly] believers! And be not grieved by those who vie with one another in denying the truth: they can in no wise harm God. It is God's will that they shall have no share in the [blessings of the] life to come; and tremendous suffering awaits them. (3:175–176)

Whispering Half-Truths

And thus it is that against every prophet We have set up as enemies the evil forces from among humans as well as from among invisible beings that whisper unto one another glittering half-truths meant to delude the mind. But they could not do this unless thy Sustainer had so willed: stand, therefore, aloof from them and all their false imagery! (6:112)

The above verse refers to people who become allies with Satan by deliberately doing wrong. Evil forces whispering embellished speech or varnished falsehood by way of delusion or half-truths entice men by their deceptive attractiveness and cause them to overlook all moral values. Thus, the meaning of the above verse is that every prophet has had to contend with the spiritual—and sometimes physical—enmity of the evil ones who, for whatever reason, refuse to listen to the voice of truth and try to lead others astray.

Sinful Impulses as Masters

Some [of you] He will have graced with His guidance, whereas, for some a straying from the right path will have

become unavoidable: for, behold, they will have taken [their own] evil impulses for their masters in preference to God, thinking all the while that they have found the right path! (7:30)

It becomes unavoidable for them to “stray from a right path” because of the inevitable consequence of their own actions and attitudes. The term “satanic forces” is applied in the Quran to all kinds of wicked impulses or propensities that are near to hearts of those who do not truly believe in God; hence, the term *shayatin* has been rendered as “evil impulses.”

Sowing Discord among Men

Satan is always ready to stir up discord between men—for, verily, Satan is man’s open foe! (17:53) The evil impulses [within men’s hearts] whisper unto those who have made them their own that they should involve you in the argument [as to what is and what is not a sin]; and if you pay heed unto them, lo! You will become [like] those who ascribe divinity to other beings or forces beside God. (6:121)

Your evil impulses are trying to draw you into an argument as to what does and what does not constitute a sin to make you lose sight of God’s clear ordinances in this respect. If you follow their arbitrary, deceptive reasoning, you will elevate them, as it were, to the position of moral lawgivers and thus ascribe to them a right that belongs to God alone.

Satan Casting Doubt in Prophetic Messages

For so it is that against every prophet We have set up enemies from among those who are lost in sin: yet none

can guide and give succor as thy Sustainer does! (25:31) Yet whenever We sent forth any apostle or prophet before thee, and he was hoping [that his warnings would be heeded], Satan would cast an aspersion on his innermost aims: but God renders null and void whatever aspersion Satan may cast; and God makes His messages clear in and by themselves—for God is all-knowing, wise. (22:52)

Sinners' Acceptance of Satan's Aspersions

[And He allows doubts to arise] so that He might cause whatever aspersion Satan may cast [against His prophets] to become a trial for all in whose hearts is disease and all whose hearts are hardened: for, verily, all who are [thus] sinning [against themselves] are most deeply in the wrong. (22:53)

Satan Threatens You with Poverty

Satan threatens you with the prospect of poverty and bids you to be miserly, whereas God promises you His forgiveness and bounty; and God is infinite, all-knowing, granting wisdom unto whom He wills: and whoever is granted wisdom has indeed been granted wealth abundant. But none bears this in mind save those who are endowed with insight. (2:268–269)

The Righteous Reject Satan and Submit to God

And [God renders Satan's aspersions null and void] so that they who are endowed with [innate] knowledge might know that this [divine writ] is the truth from thy Sustainer, and that they might believe in it, and that their

hearts might humbly submit unto Him. For, behold, God does guide onto a straight way those who have attained to faith. (22:54)

Every prophet had to contend with evil forces. Satan cast doubt upon the innermost aim of the message-bearer by insinuating that the spiritual improvement of his community is not the real purpose of his message but rather the attainment of personal power and influence. Those who are prone to sinning readily accept such doubts, and it becomes a source of trial for them. Satan also tempts those who have attained to faith but they reject aspersions cast upon the prophetic message because God's clear message speaks for itself, and any insinuation as to the prophet's hidden motives is automatically disproved.

Followers of Satan

And yet, among men there is many a one who argues about God without having any knowledge [of Him] and follows every rebellious satanic force about which it has been decreed that whoever entrusts himself to it, him will it led astray and guide towards the suffering of the blazing flame! (22:3-4)

Behold, Satan is a foe unto you: so treat him as a foe. He but calls on his followers to the end that they might find themselves among such as are destined for the blazing flame. (35:6)

Sin and a Materialistic Outlook

Tell them what happens to him to whom We vouchsafe Our messages and who then discards them: Satan catches up

with him, and he strays, like so many others, into grievous error. Now had We so willed, We could indeed have exalted him by means of those [messages]: but he always clung to the earth and followed but his own desires. (7:175–176)

The Parable of an Excited Dog

Thus, his parable is that of an [excited] dog: if you approach him threateningly, he will pant with his tongue lolling; and if thou leave him alone, he will pant with his tongue lolling. Such is the parable of those who are bent on giving the lie to Our messages. Tell [them], then, this story, so that they might take thought. (7:176)

Sinning against Oneself

Evil is the example of people who are bent on giving the lie to Our messages: for it is against their selves that they are sinning! He whom God guides, he alone is truly guided; whereas those whom He lets go astray—it is they, they who are the losers! (7:177–178)

They Are like Cattle

And most certainly have We destined for hell many of the invisible beings and men who have hearts with which they fail to grasp the truth, and eyes with which they fail to see, and ears with which they fail to hear. They are like cattle—nay, they are even less conscious of the right way: it is they, they who are the [truly] heedless! (7:179)

The kind of man spoken of here is one who has understood the divine message but refuses to admit its truth because—as is pointed

out in the next verse—his vain desires and a materialistic earthly outlook on life dominate him. His attitudes are influenced by what his earthbound desires represent to him as his immediate advantages or disadvantages—just as a dog follows only his instincts and natural needs and is not conscious of the possibility or necessity of a moral choice. The type of man alluded to in this passage is always—whatever the outward circumstances—a prey to a conflict between his reason and his base urges and thus to inner disquiet and imaginary fears. He cannot attain peace of mind, which a believer achieves through his faith.

Destined for the Blazing Flame

Behold, Satan is a foe unto you: so treat him as a foe. He but calls on his followers to the end that they might find themselves among such as are destined for the blazing flame—[seeing that] for those who are bent on denying the truth there is suffering severe in store, just as for those who have attained to faith and do righteous deeds there is forgiveness of sins, and a great reward. Is, then, he to whom the evil of his doings is [so] alluring that [in the end] he regards it as good [anything but a follower of Satan]? For, verily, God lets go astray him that wills [to go astray], just as He guides him that wills [to be guided]. Hence, [O believer,] do not waste thyself in sorrowing over them: verily, God has full knowledge of all that they do! (35:6–8)

Role of Evil in God's Plan

But as for those who are bent on giving the lie to Our messages—we shall bring them low, step by step, without their perceiving how it came about: for, behold, though

I may give them rein for a while. My subtle scheme is exceedingly firm! (7:182–183)

The term “subtle scheme” represents God’s unfathomable plan of creation, of which man can glimpse only isolated fragments and never the totality; a plan in which everything and every event happening has a definite function and nothing is accidental. Indirectly, the above passage alludes to the question of why God allows so many evil persons to enjoy their lives to the full, while so many of the righteous are allowed to suffer. The answer is that during his life in this world, man cannot really understand where apparent happiness and unhappiness ultimately lead and what role they play in God’s “subtle scheme” of creation.

Evil Soul Mates

For [when they became oblivious of Us,] We assigned to them [their own evil impulses as their] other selves, and these made appear goodly to them whatever lay open before them and whatever was beyond their ken. And so, the sentence [of doom] will have fallen due upon them together with the [other sinful] communities of invisible beings [jinn] and humans that passed away before their time: verily, they [all] will indeed be lost! (41:25)

The “other selves” refer to evil soul mates (see 4:38) intimately associated or yoked together, one thing with another. Their evil impulses, which had become their “other selves,” made alluring to them the unrestrained enjoyment, without any moral discrimination. Their overindulgence in all the worldly attractions that lay open before them cause them, at the same time, to dismiss as an illusion the idea of resurrection and God’s judgment—thus giving them a false sense of security about something that was beyond their ken.

Satan: Companion of Evildoers

But as for anyone who chooses to remain blind to the remembrance of the Most Gracious, to him We assign an [enduring] evil impulse, to become his other self: whereupon, behold, these [evil impulses] bar all such from the path [of truth], making them think that they are guided aright! But in the end, when he [who has thus sinned] appears before us [on Judgment Day], he will say [to his other self]: "Would that between me and thee there had been the distance of east and west!"—for, evil indeed [has proven] that other self! On that Day, it will not profit you in the least [to know] that, since you have sinned [together], you are now to share your suffering [as well]. (43:36–39)

The above address is formulated in the plural and not in the dual; it relates to all sinners who were driven by their evil impulses—their “other selves,” as it were—to “remain blind to the remembrance of the Most Gracious.”

Worship God and Shun Evil

And indeed, within every community have We raised up an apostle [entrusted with this message]: "Worship God and shun the powers of evil!" (16:36)

In the Quranic terminology, “worship of God” implies the concept of man’s sense of responsibility before Him. Hence, the above commandment comprises, in the most concise formulation imaginable, the sum total of all ethical injunctions and prohibitions. It is the basis and source of all morality as well as the one unchanging message inherent in every true religion.

Satanic Forces

Suffering in Hell for the Hosts of Iblis

Thereupon they will be hurled into hell—they, as well as all [others] who had been lost in grievous error, and the hosts of Iblis—all together. And there and then, blaming one another, they [who had grievously sinned in life] will exclaim: “By God, we were most obviously astray when we deemed you [false deities] equal to the Sustainer of all the worlds—yet they who have seduced us [into believing in you] are the truly guilty ones! And now we have none to intercede for us, nor any loving friend.” (26:94–101)

The “hosts of Iblis” are the forces of evil, or Satan, frequently mentioned in the Quran in connection with man’s sinning.

Worship of Satan

Did I not enjoin on you, O you children of Adam, that you should not worship Satan—since, verily, he is your open foe—and that you should worship Me [alone]? This would have been a straight way! And [as for Satan—] he had already led astray a great many of you: could you not, then, use your reason? “This, then, is the hell of which you were warned again and again: endure it today as an outcome of your persistent denial of the truth!” (36:59–64)

The phrase “this, then, is the hell” points to the sinners’ realization of their having gone astray despite repeated warnings by the prophets and will, in itself, be a source of intense suffering in the life to come. The element of repetition or persistence is implied in both this and the next verse.

Seek Refuge with God from Satan

And but for God's bounty towards you, and His grace, all but a few of you would certainly have followed Satan. (4:83) And say: "O my Sustainer! I seek refuge with Thee from the promptings of all evil impulses, and I seek refuge with Thee, O my Sustainer, lest they come near unto me!" (23:97-98) Now whenever you happen to read this Qur'an, seek refuge with God from Satan, the accursed. (16:98)

Man is always, by virtue of his nature, prone to question the very validity of the moral standards established through revelation. The believer is now called upon to seek, whenever he reads or meditates on this divine writ, God's spiritual aid against the whisperings of what the Quran describes as "Satan, the accursed."

Surah 113

Al-Falaq (The Rising Dawn)

In The Name of God, The Most Gracious, The Dispenser of Grace: Say: "I seek refuge with the Sustainer of the rising dawn, "from the evil of aught that He has created, "and from the evil of the black darkness whenever it descends, "and from the evil of all human beings bent on occult endeavors, "and from the evil of the envious when he envies." (113:1-5)

The term *al-falaq* (or "the rising dawn") is often used to describe "the emergence of the truth after (a period of) uncertainty" (*Taj al-Arus*); hence, the "Sustainer of the rising dawn" implies that God is the source of all cognition of truth and that one's "seeking refuge" with Him is synonymous with striving after truth. The evil of black

darkness refers to the darkness of despair or of approaching death. Occult endeavors, or literally “of those that blow upon knots” is an idiomatic phrase from pre-Islamic Arabia to designate all occult endeavors. It was probably derived from the practice of witches and sorcerers who used to tie a string into a number of knots while blowing upon them and murmuring magic incantations. In his explanation of the above verse, Zamakhshari categorically rejects all belief in the reality and effectiveness of such practices as well as of the concept of magic as such. The reason why the believer is enjoined to “seek refuge with God” from such practices despite their palpable irrationality is due to inherent sinfulness of such endeavors, and from the mental danger in which they may involve their author, such as the moral and social effects that another person’s envy may have on one’s life, as well as from succumbing to the evil of envy.

5

Jinn

SOMEWHERE BETWEEN HUMANS and angels are the invisible, intelligent spirits called *jinn*. God is frequently spoken of as “the Sustainer of all the worlds” (*rabb al-amin*), and the use of the plural clearly indicates that side-by-side with the world open to our observation, there are other worlds as well. The other forms of life are different from ours and presumably from one another, and yet they subtly interact and perhaps even permeate one another in a manner beyond our ken.

In ancient pre-Islamic Arabian folklore, the term *jinn* came to denote all manners of demons in the most popular sense of this word. This folkloristic image has somewhat obscured the original connotation of the term and self-explanatory verbal derivation. The root verb is *janna* (see 6:76 “he or it concealed” or “covered with darkness”).

Spiritual Forces without Corporeal Existence

The most commonly encountered of these is that of spiritual forces with no corporeal existence and that are beyond the perception of our physical senses. Our inability to observe such phenomena doesn't justify denying their existence. Our physical senses can establish contact with them only under very exceptional circumstances. The very rare crossing of paths between their modes and ours may well give rise to strange and unexplainable manifestations, which man's

primitive fantasy has subsequently interpreted as ghosts, demons, and other such supernatural apparitions.

Legends of *Jinn*

References to *jinn* are sometimes meant to recall certain legends deeply embedded in the consciousness of the people to whom the Quran was addressed in the first instance (e.g., in 34:12–14, 21:82, see under Solomon)—the purpose being, in every instance, not the legend as such but the illustration of a moral or spiritual truth.

Creation of *Jinn*

The invisible beings We had created, [long] before that, out of the fire of scorching winds. (15:27) The invisible beings He has created out of a confusing flame of fire. (55:15)

Jinn can assume the visible form and, like humans, can be good and bad.

Surah 114

An-Nas (Men)

In The Name of God, The Most Gracious, The Dispenser of Grace: Say: "I seek refuge with the Sustainer of men, the Sovereign of men, the God of men, from the evil of the whispering elusive tempter who whispers in the hearts of men—[Satan] from all [temptation to evil by] invisible forces as well as men." (114:1–6)

In *Surah* 114 (*An-Nas*), there is perhaps the oldest Quranic mention of the term and concept of *al-jinnah* (synonymous with *al-jinn*). The term probably denotes the intangible, mysterious forces of nature to which man's psyche is exposed and which sometimes make it

difficult for us to discern between right and wrong. It is also possible to conclude that the “invisible forces” from which we are told to seek refuge with God are the temptations to evil emanating from the blindness of our own hearts, from our gross appetites, and of the erroneous notions and false values that may have been handed down to us by our predecessors.

Confession of Faith

Jinn Accepting the Quran

And lo! We caused a group of unseen beings to incline towards thee, [O Muhammad,] so that they might give ear to the Qur’an; and so, as soon as they became aware of it, they said [unto one another], “Listen in silence!” And when [the recitation] was ended, they returned to their people as warners. (46:29)

Jinn of Mosaic Faith

They said: “O our people! We have been listening to a revelation bestowed from on high after [that of] Moses, confirming the truth of whatever there still remains [of the Torah]: it guides towards the truth, and onto a straight way.” “O our people! Respond to God’s call and have faith in Him: He will forgive you [whatever is past] of your sins and deliver you from grievous suffering [in the life to come]. But he who does not respond to God’s call can never elude [Him] on earth, nor can he have any protector against Him [in the life to come]: all such are most obviously lost in error.” (46:30–32)

The occurrence mentioned in the passage above is said to have taken place in the small oasis of Nakhlah, on the way leading from Mecca

to Taif. To the recitation of the Quran by the Prophet, the “unseen beings” immediately perceived their truth and accepted them and returned to their fellow beings as preachers and Warners of the Quranic creed.

It transpires that the *jinn* in question were followers of the Mosaic faith, as they refer to the Quran as “a revelation bestowed from on high after (that of) Moses,” thus omitting any mention of the intervening prophet, Jesus.

Surah 72

***Al-Jinn* (The Unseen Beings)**

The confession of faith of this group of *jinn* continues below in *Surah* 72, *al-jinn* (verses 1–17).

Wonderful Discourse

Say: “It has been revealed to me that some of the unseen beings gave ear [to this divine writ], and thereupon said [unto their fellow-beings]: ‘Verily, we have heard a wondrous discourse, guiding towards consciousness of what is right; and so We have come to believe in it.’” (72:1–2)

God Has Not Begotten a Son

“And we shall never ascribe divinity to anyone beside our Sustainer, for [we know] that sublimely exalted is our Sustainer’s majesty: no consort He has ever taken unto Himself, nor a son! And [now we know] that the foolish among us were wont to say outrageous things about God, and that [we were mistaken when] we thought that neither man nor [any of] the invisible forces would ever tell a lie about God.” (72:2–5)

The invisible beings also rejected the Christian concept of the Trinity (72:3). Whatever the nature of these “unseen beings” matters little, for the context makes it abundantly clear that the speech of those beings is but a parable of the guidance that the Quran offers to a mind intent on attaining “consciousness of what is right.”

The term *jinn* refers to what is described as “occult powers” or, rather, to a person’s preoccupation with them. These forces apparently “tell a lie about God,” as they induce their devotees to conceive all manner of fantastic, arbitrary notions about the nature of His Being and of His alleged relations with the created universe— notions exemplified in all mystery-religions, in the various Gnostic and theosophical systems, in cabalistic Judaism, and in the many medieval offshoots of each of them.

God Will Never Send Another Apostle

“Yet [it has always happened] that certain kinds of humans would seek refuge with certain kinds of [such] invisible forces: but these only increased their confusion so much so that they came to think, as you [once] thought, that God would never [again] send forth anyone [as His apostle].” (72:6–7)

“Seeking refuge” is synonymous with seeking help or protection, which is an allusion to the hope of certain kinds of humans that the occult powers to which they have turned would successfully guide them through life and thus make it unnecessary for them to look forward to the coming of a new prophet. The overwhelming majority of the Jews were convinced that no prophet would be raised after those who were explicitly mentioned in the Old Testament—hence their rejection of Jesus and, of course, Muhammad.

Consciousness of Right and Wrong

“And, withal, we have come to know that we can never elude God [while we live] on earth, and that we can never elude Him by escaping [from life]. Hence, as soon as we heard this [call to His] guidance, we came to believe in it: and he who believes in his Sustainer need never have a fear of loss or injustice. Yet [it is true] that among us are such as have surrendered themselves to God—just as there are among us such as have abandoned themselves to wrongdoing. Now as for those who surrender themselves to Him—it is they that have attained to consciousness of what is right, but as for those who abandon themselves to wrongdoing—they are indeed but fuel for [the fires of] hell! [Know,] then, that if they [who have heard Our call] keep firmly to the [right] path, We shall certainly shower them with blessings abundant, so as to test them by this means: for he who shall turn away from the remembrance of his Sustainer, him will He cause to undergo suffering most grievous.” (72:12–17)

With the above assertion ends the “confession of faith” of the beings described at the beginning of this passage as *jinn*. The phrase “water abundant” is rendered as blessing abundant above, a metaphor of happiness, echoing the allegorical reference so frequently occurring in the Quran to the running waters of paradise. God’s bestowal of blessings is not just a reward of righteousness but, rather, a test of man’s remaining conscious of, and therefore, grateful to, Him.

Astrology to Foretell the Future

“And [so it happened] that we reached out towards heaven: but we found it filled with mighty guards and

***flames, notwithstanding that we were established in positions [which we had thought well-suited] to listening to [whatever secrets might be in] it: and anyone who now [or ever] tries to listen will [likewise] find a flame lying in wait for him! And [now we have become aware] that we [created beings] may not know whether evil fortune is intended for [any of] those who live on earth, or whether it is their Sustainer's will to endow them with consciousness of what is right: just as [we do not know how it happens] that some from among us are righteous, while some of us are [far] below that: we have always followed widely divergent paths."* (72:8–11)**

The above may refer to the old Jewish practice of astrology as a means to foretell the future. Their "reaching out towards heaven" may be a metaphorical description of a state of mind that causes a man to regard himself as self-sufficient and to delude himself into thinking that he is bound to achieve mastery over his fate. But we failed, despite our status and all our abilities and learning. We do not know whether evil fortune awaits earthlings or if God will endow them with "consciousness of what is right," which is equated with the opposite of evil fortune—happiness. As the sequence shows (and as has been pointed out in 15:18), this relates to all attempts at predicting the future by astrology or esoteric calculations or at influencing the course of future events by occult sciences.

Foretelling Future and Occult Endeavors

And, indeed, We have set up in the heavens great constellations, and endowed them with beauty for all to behold; and We have made them secure against every satanic force accursed—so that anyone who seeks to learn [the unknowable] by stealth is pursued by a flame clear to see. (15:16–18)

The phrase “every satanic force accursed” refers to endeavors strongly condemned in Islam, to predict the future by astrological speculations. God has made the heavens secure against such satanic forces, implying that He has made it impossible for the latter to obtain, through astrology or what is popularly described as occult sciences, any real knowledge of “that which is beyond the reach of humans perception” (*al-ghayb*). Any attempt at fathoming the mysteries of the unknowable by such illicit means (“by stealth”) is inevitably followed by “a flame clear to see”—i.e., by burning, self-evident frustration).

Behold, We have adorned the skies nearest to the earth with the beauty of stars, and have made them secure against every rebellious, satanic force, [so that] they [who seek to learn the unknowable] should not be able to overhear the host on high, but shall be repelled from all sides, cast out [from all grace], with lasting suffering in store for them [in the life to come]; but if anyone does succeed in snatching a glimpse [of such knowledge], he is [henceforth] pursued by a piercing flame. (37:6–10)

The host on high is the angelic forces whose “speech” is a metonym for God’s decrees. The passage above points to the fact that human beings are precluded from really grasping the variety and depth of the universe created by Him. We have here an echo of 34: 9—“Are they, then, not aware of how little of the sky and the earth lies open before them, and how much is hidden from them?”—and, thus, a new, oblique approach to the theme of resurrection, which is taken up in the sequence in the form of an indirect question.

Part 2: The End of the World and Resurrection of the Dead

6

The Last Hour and the First Blast of the Trumpet

BEFORE THE DISCOVERY of Big Bang, many scientists believed in the “steady State theory,” of evolution of universe. Without any objective evidence, they believed that the universe is eternal—that is, without beginning and end and can never cease to exist. The implication was to deny the existence of God who alone is eternal and of resurrection and divine judgment as symbolized by the Last Hour. In other words, it is a denial of life after death and of all significance and purpose attached to human life.

As God appoints the life span of every individual, so, too, He determines the fixed limit of the earth and the duration of humanity as a whole upon it. At each instant, we are drawing near to the climax of time and history when all will be brought into the awesome presence of the Creator. In God’s hands lies the fate of all that He has brought into being. One day, there will be the end of the world, followed by resurrection and the Last Judgment.

Derisive Query of Advent of the Last Day

Say: “There has been appointed for you a Day which you can neither delay nor advance by a single moment.” (34:30)

Behold, men look upon that [reckoning] as something far away—but, We see it as near! (70:6–7) Say thou: “It may well be that something of that which [in your ignorance] you so hastily demand has already drawn close unto you.” (27:72) And thus it is: if We defer their suffering until a time-limit set [by Us] [the Day of Judgment], they are sure to say, “What is preventing it [from coming now]?” Oh, verily, on the Day when it befalls them there will be nothing to avert it from them; and they shall be overwhelmed by the very thing which they were wont to deride. (11:8) And for all thou knowest, the Last Hour may well be near! Those who do not believe in it [mockingly] ask for its speedy advent—whereas those who have attained to faith stand in awe of it, and know it to be the truth. Oh, verily, they who call the Last Hour in question have indeed gone far astray! (42:17–18)

The Prophet’s contemporaries who refused to regard the Quran as a divine revelation mockingly challenge Muhammad to bring about the exemplary punishment with which, according to him, God threatens them. The repeated Quranic references about the derisive query of the advent of the Last Hour and the Day of Judgment are meant to show the attitude of mind responsible for it. Such sarcasm is not restricted to an isolated historic incident but is symptomatic of most, if not all, people “who are bent on denying the truth.”

“I do not know whether that [judgment] which you are promised [by God] is near or far [in time]... But [as for me,] I do not know whether, perchance, this [delay in God’s judgment] is but a trial for you, and a [merciful] respite for a while.” Say: “O my Sustainer! Judge Thou in truth!” (21:109, 111–112)

The Quranic allusions to the “nearness” of the Last Hour and the Day of Resurrection are not based on the human concept of time. “Drawn close unto you” is the end of their own life, which must precede resurrection. The rejection by “those who are bent on denying the truth” of all revelation is motivated by their refusal to believe in the resurrection and God’s judgment, and to admit the validity of absolute moral standards as postulated by every higher religion.

Suddenness of the Last Hour

“Heavily will it weigh on the heavens and the earth; [and] it [the last hour] will not fall upon you otherwise than of a sudden.” (7:187) And so, the advent of the Last Hour will but manifest itself [in a single moment] like the twinkling of an eye, or closer still: for, behold, God has the power to will anything. (16:77) “[Answer this] if you are men of truth!” [And they are unaware that] nothing awaits them beyond a single blast [of God’s punishment], which will overtake them while they are still arguing [against resurrection]: and so [sudden will be their end that] no testament will they be able to make, nor to their own people will they return! (36:48–50)

Nay, but [the Last Hour] will come upon them of a sudden and will stupefy them: and they will be unable to avert it, and neither will they be allowed any respite. (21:40) Are, then, they [whose hearts are sealed] waiting for the Last Hour [waiting] that it come upon them of a sudden? But it has already been foretold! And what will their remembrance [of their past sins] avail them, once it has come upon them? Know, then, [O man,] that there is no deity save God, and [while there is yet time,] ask forgiveness for thy sins and for [the sins of] all other believing men

and women: for God knows all your comings and goings as well as your abiding [at rest]. (47:18–19)

The manifestation of the Last Hour will be characterized by utter suddenness and unpredictability, both of them an outcome of the absence of any time interval between God's decreeing it and its materialization. "Already been told," is a reference to the many Quranic predictions of its inevitability as well as to the evidence accessible to every unprejudiced mind of the temporal finality of all creation. When the Last Hour comes, of what benefit will be to them their dawning awareness of having sinned and their belated repentance?

Last Hour and Good Deeds

Behold, [although] I have willed to keep it hidden, the Last Hour is bound to come, so that every human being will be recompensed in accordance with what he strove for [in life]. (20:15)

The expression "what he strove for" implies a consciousness of endeavor and thus excludes involuntary actions as well as involuntary omissions, irrespective of whether the relevant action or omission is morally good or bad. By enunciating the above principle, the Quran stresses the essential identity of the ethical concepts underlying all true religions.

[People] who are filled with fear [at the thought] of the Day on which all hearts and eyes will be convulsed, [and who only hope] that God may reward them in accordance with the best that they ever did, and give them, out of His bounty, more [than they deserve]: for, God grants sustenance unto whom He wills, beyond all reckoning. (24:37–38)

Worship God Alone as the Last Hour Draws Near

This is a warning like those warnings of old: that [Last Hour] which is so near draws ever nearer, [although] none but God can unveil it... Do you, perchance, find this tidings strange? And do you laugh instead of weeping, and divert yourselves all the while? [Nay,] but prostrate yourselves before God, and worship [Him alone]! (53:56–62)

Signs of the Hour: Destruction of the Rampart

Said [the King], "This is a mercy from my Sustainer! Yet when the time appointed by my Sustainer shall come, He will make this [rampart] level with the ground: and my Sustainer's promise always comes true!" (18:98)

Hence, it has been unfailingly true of any community whom We have ever destroyed that they [were people who] would never turn back [from their sinful ways] until such a time as Gog and Magog are let loose [upon the world] and swarm down from every corner [of the earth]. (21:95–96)

The breakthrough of the godless forces of Gog and Magog is to be one of the signs of the approach of the Last Hour. The terms Gog and Magog or *Yajuj* and *Majuj* in Arabic are also used in the Quran in purely allegorical terms, referring to a series of social catastrophes that would cause a complete destruction of man's civilization before the coming of the Last Hour.

"It has been unfailingly true" expresses the impossibility of conceiving anything to the contrary, that whenever God consigns a community to destruction, He does it not because of its people's occasional lapses but only because of their irremediable, conscious unwillingness to forsake their sinful ways. This will be until the Day of Resurrection, heralded by the allegorical breakthrough of Gog

and Magog (see 18:98 above)—for it is on that Day that even the most hardened sinner will realize his guilt and be filled with belated remorse. The expression “from all directions” or “from every corner [of the earth]” is used here idiomatically, signifying the irresistible nature of the social and cultural catastrophes that will overwhelm mankind before the coming of the Last Hour.

Lost indeed are they who consider it a lie that they will have to meet God—till the Last Hour suddenly comes upon them, [and] they cry, “Alas for us, that we disregarded it!”—for they shall bear on their backs the burden of their sins: oh, how evil the load with which they shall be burdened! (6:31) But nay—the Last Hour is the time when they shall truly meet their fate, and that Last Hour will be most calamitous, and most bitter: for, behold, those who are lost in sin [will at that time come to know that it is they who] were sunk in error and folly! On the Day when they shall be dragged into the fire on their faces, [they will be told:] “Taste now the touch of hell-fire!” (54:46–48)

The signs by which to recognize the beginning of the end are the cataclysmic events upsetting the rhythm of the natural world, described in very vivid Quranic imagery. There is no specific mention in the Quran of moral decay before the signs of the hour. Much of this material is derived from the Prophet’s Traditions. However, it is alluded to in the invasion of Gog and Magog. One of the popular myths among Muslims is the second coming of Jesus before the end of the world. There is no mention of the second coming of Jesus or the anti-Christ in the Quran.

Denial of the Last Hour Even When Approaching

But if they [who reject all thought of the Last Hour] were to see a sign [of its approach], they would turn aside and

say, "An ever-recurring delusion!"—for they are bent on giving it the lie [to the prediction of the Last Hour], being always wont to follow their own desires. Yet everything reveals its truth in the end. (54:2–3)

Everything has an intrinsic reality of its own and is bound to reveal that reality either in this world or the next; hence, everything must have a purpose or goal of its own. These two complementary interpretations reflect the repeated Quranic statement that everything that exists or happens has a meaning and a purpose (see 3:191, 10:5, and 38:27).

The Approach of the Last Hour

Wait, then, for the Day when the skies shall bring forth a pall of smoke which will make obvious [the approach of the Last Hour], enveloping all mankind. (44:10–11) [It will take place] on a Day when the sky will be like molten lead (70:8) and becomes red like [burning] oil (55:37). [It will come to pass] on the Day the skies will be convulsed in [a great] convulsion (52:9)... the sky is cleft asunder (82:1) and when the skies are opened [as wide-flung] gates. (78:19) On that Day We shall roll up the skies as written scrolls are rolled up. (21:104) The last hour draws near, and the moon is split asunder! (54:1) And the moon is darkened, and the sun and the moon are brought together. (75:8–9) When the sun is shrouded in darkness, and when the stars lose their light. (81:1–2) Thus, [it will come to pass] when the stars are effaced (77: 8). Behold, all that you are told to expect will surely come to pass. (77:7)

There will be a sudden and surprising change of color of the sky at the Last Hour. The sky or the heavens in the Quran often has the connotation of "universe." Allegorically, the mysteries of the sky will

be opened to man's understanding, thus further amplifying the concept of "the Day of Distinction between the true and the false." Sun, moon, earth, and all the stars, galaxies, nebulae, and other heavenly bodies that traverse the vast cosmic spaces will be destroyed. The sun and the moon will either lose their light, or they will collide with each other.

Reaction of Mankind to the Last Hour

Women Will Forget Their Nurslings

O, men! Be conscious of your Sustainer: for, verily, the violent convulsion of the Last Hour will be an awesome thing! On the Day when you behold it, every woman that feeds a child at her breast will utterly forget her nursing, and every woman heavy with a child will bring forth her burden [before her time] (22:1-2)

Now We Believe in Thee

[Causing the sinners to exclaim:] "Grievous is this suffering! O our Sustainer, relieve us of suffering, for, verily, we [now] believe [in Thee]!" [But] how shall this remembrance avail them [at the Last Hour], seeing that an apostle had previously come unto them, clearly expounding the truth, whereupon they turned their backs on him and said, "Taught [by others] is he, a madman"?... On the Day when We shall seize [all sinners] with a most mighty onslaught, We shall, verily, inflict Our retribution [on you as well]!" (44:11-14, 16)

"Taught by others" is a reference to the allegation of the Prophet's opponents that someone else had imparted to him the ideas expressed in the Quran or at least had helped him to compose it.

Men Swarming Like Moths in Confusion

Oh, the sudden calamity! How awesome the sudden calamity! And what could make thee conceive what that sudden calamity will be? [It will occur] on the Day when men will be like moths swarming in confusion, and the mountains will be like fluffy tufts of wool. (101:1–5) It will seem to thee that all mankind is drunk, although they will not be drunk—but vehement will be [their dread of] God’s chastisement. (22:2) Yet in the end, when they shall see that [fulfilment] close at hand, the faces of those who were bent on denying the truth will be stricken with grief; and they will be told, “This it is that you were [so derisively] calling for!” (67:27)

Hearts Throbbing and Eyes Downcast

[Hence, think of] the Day when a violent convulsion will convulse [the world], to be followed by further [convulsions]! On that Day will [men’s] hearts be throbbing, [and] their eyes downcast... [And yet,] some say, “What! Are we indeed to be restored to our former state even though we may have become [a heap of] crumbling bones?” [And] they add, “That, then, would be a return with loss!” [But,] then, that [Last Hour] will be [upon them of a sudden, as if it were] but a single accusing cry—and then, lo, they will be fully awakened [to the truth]! (79:6–14)

Men’s heart will be throbbing and eyes downcast upon realizing the evidence of God’s almightiness and of man’s subjection to His ultimate judgment. If resurrection is real, implying derisively that in such a case they would be proven wrong—because they now consider a “reasonable” assumption that resurrection will never come—and that would be a return with loss!

The First Blast of the Trumpet

(Destruction of the Cosmos, Earth, and Death of All Living Creatures)

And [on that Day,] the trumpet [of judgment] will be sounded, and all [creatures] that are in the heavens and all that are on earth will fall down senseless, unless they be such as God wills [to exempt]. (39:68) Hence, [bethink yourselves of the Last Hour,] when the trumpet [of judgment] shall be sounded with a single blast, and the earth and the mountains shall be lifted up and crushed with a single stroke! (69:13–14) And they will ask thee about [what will happen to] the mountains [when this world comes to an end]. Say, then: “My Sustainer will scatter them far and wide, and leave the earth level and bare, [so that] thou wilt see no curve thereon, and no ruggedness. (20:105–107) And thou shalt behold the earth void and bare. (18:47) When the earth is shaken with a shaking [severe] and the mountains are shattered into [countless] shards. (56:4–5) On the Day when the earth and the mountains will be convulsed, and the mountains will [crumble and] become like a sand-dune on the move! (73:14) And the mountains will move with [an awesome] movement. (52:10) And when the mountains are made to vanish as if they had been a mirage. (78:20) And thou wilt see the mountains, which [now] thou deemest so firm, pass away as clouds pass away: a work of God, who has ordered all things to perfection! (27:88) And when the seas boil over (81:6) and... burst beyond their bounds. (82:3)

God has ordered all things to perfection in consonance with the purpose for which He has created them. In this particular instance,

stress is laid on the God-willed transitory nature of the world in contrast with the lasting reality of the life to come.

The whole of the earth will be as a [mere] handful to Him on Resurrection Day, and the heavens will be rolled up in His right hand. (39:67) And when the earth is leveled, and casts forth whatever is in it, and becomes utterly void, [and loses all its reality] obeying its Sustainer, as in truth it must. (84:3–5)

The above is a metaphorical use of the term “hand” in reference to God’s absolute power and dominion. All that was hidden in the earth, including the bodies or the remnants of the dead, are revealed. On the Day of Judgment, the earth will bear witness to all that has ever been done by man, an explanation given by the Prophet.

Verily, it is God [alone] who upholds the celestial bodies and the earth, lest they deviate [from their orbits] for if they should ever deviate, there is none that could uphold them after He will have ceased to do so. [But,] verily, He is ever-forgiving, much-forgiving! (35:41)

This describes the total, cataclysmic change on the Last Day of all-natural phenomena and of the universe as known to man. God is “ever forbearing,” and He does not speed up the end of the world despite the sinfulness of most of its inhabitants, nor does He punish without giving the sinner time to reflect and to repent.

[His promise will be fulfilled] on the Day when the earth shall be changed into another earth, as shall be the heavens [universe]. (14:48) And the earth will shine bright with her Sustainer’s light. (39:69) On that Day all will be sun-dered. (30:43) And so, that which must come to pass will on that Day have come to pass. (69:15)

Transformation, Not Annihilation, of the Universe

The earth will shine brightly with a clear revelation of His will, an allusion to the transformation or reverse creation of the universe. In the eschatology of the Quran, the end of the world does not signify annihilation—reduction to nothingness—of the physical universe but rather its fundamental, cataclysmic transformation. The earth and the universe will be transformed into something new, which men cannot now visualize. In other words, the disruption of the natural order can be seen as a reverse process of the creation. Since that change will be beyond anything that man has ever experienced or what the human mind can conceive, all the Quranic descriptions of what is to happen on that Last Day are expressed in allegorical terms.

7

Resurrection of Humanity after the Second Blast of the Trumpet

AFTER THE SECOND or the final blast of the trumpet, all the dead will be brought back to life in the second act of creation. For His justice and mercy to be demonstrated, there must be life again with the living breath of God, by which humans will be brought forth whole, before the Divine.

And then it will sound again [the second blast of the trumpet]—***and lo! standing [before the Seat of Judgment], they will begin to see [the truth]! (39:68) Verily, the Day of Distinction [between the true and the false] has indeed its appointed time: the Day when the trumpet [of resurrection] is sounded and you all come forward in multitudes. (78:17) [And bethink thyself, too, of] the Day on which all [human beings] will in truth hear the final blast—that Day of [their] coming-forth [from death]. (50:42) For what day has the term [of all this] been set? (77:12) And what could make thee conceive what that Day of Distinction will be? Woe on that Day unto those who give the lie to the truth! (77:14)***

Out of their graves towards their Sustainer will they all rush forth! They will say: "Oh, woe unto us! Who has roused us from our sleep [of death]?" [Whereupon they will be told:] "This is what the Most Gracious has promised! And His message-bearers spoke the truth!" (36:51–52) Herein, behold, lies a message indeed for all who fear the suffering [which may befall them] in the life to come, [and are conscious of the coming of] that Day on which all humankind shall be gathered together—that Day [of Judgment] which shall be witnessed [by all that ever lived], and which We shall not delay beyond a term set [by Us]. (11:103–104)

Gathering of Mankind after Resurrection

On the Day when the earth is riven asunder all around them as they hasten forth [towards God's judgment]: that gathering will be easy for Us [to encompass]. (50:44) And well do we know [the hearts and deeds, of all human beings—both] those who lived before you and those who will come after you; and, behold, it is thy Sustainer who will gather them all together [on Judgment Day]: verily, he is wise, all-knowing! (15:24–25) [Remember all this: for] in the end, when He will call you forth from the earth with a single call—lo! you will [all] emerge [for judgment]. For, unto Him belongs every being that is in the heavens and on earth; all things devoutly obey His will. And He it is who creates [all life] in the first instance, and then brings it forth anew: and most easy is this for Him, since His is the essence of all that is most sublime in the heavens and on earth, and He alone is almighty, truly wise. (30:25–27) The Day when they shall come forth in haste from their graves, as if racing towards a goal-post, with downcast eyes, with ignominy overwhelming them:

***that Day which they were promised again and again.
(70:43–44)***

The Day of Distinction

For that [resurrection which they deride] will be [upon them of a sudden, as if it were] but a single accusing cry—and then, lo! they will begin to see [the truth] and will say: “Oh, woe unto us! This is the Day of Judgment!” [And they will be told:] “This is the Day of Distinction [between the true and the false—the Day] which you were wont to call a lie!” (37:19–21)

The Day When Children’s Hair Will Turn Grey

How, then, if you refuse to acknowledge the truth, will you protect yourselves on that Day which shall turn the hair of children grey, [the Day] on which the skies shall be rent asunder, [and] His promise [of resurrection] fulfilled? This, verily, is a reminder: let him who wills, then set out on a way to his Sustainer! (73:17–19)

In ancient Arabian usage, a day full of terrifying events was described metaphorically as “a day on which the locks of children turn gray”—hence the use of this phrase in the Quran. It’s purely metaphorical character is obvious since, according to the teachings of the Quran, children are considered sinless—not accountable for what they do—and will remain untouched by the ordeals and terrors of the Day of Judgment.

The Summoning Voice

On the Day when the Summoning Voice will summon [man] unto something that the mind cannot conceive, they will

come forth from their graves, with their eyes downcast, [swarming about] like locusts scattered [by the wind], running in confusion towards the Summoning Voice; [and] those who [now] deny the truth will exclaim, "Calamitous is this Day!" (54:6–7)

Judgment Day for the Jews and Christians Also

It may not accord with your wishful thinking—nor with the wishful thinking of the followers of earlier revelation—[that] he who does evil shall be requited for it, and shall find none to protect him from God, and none to bring him succor. (4:123)

Above is an allusion to the spiritual arrogance of the Jews that they are God's chosen people and assured of His grace in the hereafter and to the Christian dogma of vicarious atonement, which promises salvation to all who believe in Jesus as God's son.

The End of the Earthbound Concept of Time

And when the Last Hour dawns, those who had been lost in sin will swear that they had not tarried [on earth] longer than an hour: thus were they wont to delude themselves [all their lives]! But those who [in their lifetime] were endowed with knowledge and faith will say: "Indeed, you have been tardy in [accepting as true] what God has revealed, [and you have waited] until the Day of Resurrection: this, then, is the Day of Resurrection: but you were determined not to know it!" And so, on that Day their excuse will be of no avail to those who were bent on evildoing, nor will they be allowed to make amends. (30:55–57)

“What God has revealed” is that the dead shall be resurrected and judged by Him. Some have persistently closed their minds to this promise of resurrection and judgment.

On the Day when they see [the fulfillment of] what they were promised, [it will seem to them] as though they had dwelt [on earth] no longer than one hour of [an earthly] day! (46:35) And on the Day when He shall gather them [unto Himself, it will seem to them] as if they had not tarried [on earth] longer than an hour of a day, knowing one another, and lost indeed will be they who [in their lifetime] considered it a lie that they were destined to meet God, and [thus] failed to find the right way. And whether We show thee [in this world] something of what We hold in store for those [deniers of the truth], or whether We cause thee to die [before that retribution takes place—know that, in the end], it is unto Us that they must return; and God is witness to all that they do. (10:45–46) On the Day when they behold it, [it will seem to them] as if they had tarried [in this world] no longer than one evening or [one night, ending with] its morn! (79:46) All who shall turn away from it [God's guidance] will bear a [heavy] burden on the Day of Resurrection: they will abide in this [state], and grievous for them will be the weight [of that burden] on the Day of Resurrection—on the Day when the trumpet is blown: for on that Day We will assemble all such as had been lost in sin, their eyes dimmed [by terror], whispering unto one another, “You have spent but ten [days on earth]...” [But] We know best [We alone understand fully] what they will be saying when the most perceptive of them shall say, “You have spent [there] but one day!” (20:100–104) On a Day when He will call you, and you will answer by praising Him, thinking all the while that you have tarried [on earth] but a little while. (17:52)

The number ten is often used in Arabic to denote “a few.” “Answering God’s call by praising Him” implies that as soon as they are resurrected, they will become fully aware of His existence and almightiness.

The resurrected sinners will realize the infinitesimal shortness of their lives on earth as compared with the timeless realm in the hereafter. Sinners will guess as to how long they lived on earth, such as an hour, one night, a few days, and so forth. In this parabolic manner, the Quran points to the illusory concept of time as experienced by the human mind—a concept that has no bearing on the ultimate reality to be unfolded in the hereafter. The sinners will offer self-deluding excuses that their lives on earth had been too short to allow them to realize their errors and mend their ways. Subsequently, man will become fully aware of the quality of his past life and be freed from all self-deception.

The Quranic Rebuttal to Those Who Deny Resurrection

The Meccans received with extreme skepticism and even ridicule the message of the Prophet Muhammad that all bodies will be resurrected.

Bring Back Our Forefathers

And yet they say: “There is nothing beyond our life in this world. We die as we come to life [by accident, or as an outcome of blind forces of nature], and nothing but time destroys us. But of this they have no knowledge whatever: they do nothing but guess. And [so,] whenever Our messages are conveyed to them in all their clarity, their only argument is this: “Bring forth our forefathers [as witnesses], if what you claim is true!” Say: “It is God who gives you life, and then causes you to die; and in the end, He will gather you together on Resurrection Day, [the coming of] which is beyond all doubt—but most human beings understand it not.” (45:24–26)

Not only did the pagans of Arabia deny life after death but some among younger generations also reject life after death and resurrection as the following verses indicate.

Rejection by the Younger Generations

But [there is many a one] who says to his parents [whenever they try to imbue him with faith in God]: “Fie upon both of you! Do you promise me that I shall be brought forth [from the dead], although [so many] generations have passed away before me?” And [while] they both pray for God’s help [and say]: “Alas for thee! For, behold, God’s promise always comes true!”—he but answers: “All this is nothing but fables of ancient times!” (46:17)

The parabolic dialogue is not only meant to illustrate the ever-recurring and perhaps natural conflict between older and younger generations but it also points to the transmission of religious ideas as the most important function of parenthood and as the basic element of all social continuity.

Man’s resurrection will be a result of what the Quran describes as “a new act of creation,” and it must be perhaps entirely different from anything that man can and does experience in this world. The Quran appeals directly to man’s intellect, using metaphors, allegories, and parables, each of them stressing the absolute dissimilarity of all that man will experience after the resurrection from whatever he did or could experience in this world. The purpose of such an appeal is a kind of visualization of the consequences in the hereafter of one’s conscious acts and omissions here on earth.

Doubt in God’s Unlimited Power of Creation

Consider the sky full of great constellations, and [then bethink thyself of] the promised Day [Resurrection Day],

and [of] Him who witnesses [all], and [of] that unto which witness is borne [by Him]! (85:1–3) Are they, then, not aware that God, who has created the heavens and the earth, has the power to create them anew in their own likeness, having, beyond any doubt, set a term for their resurrection? (17:99)

A denial of the possibility of resurrection implies doubt as to God's unlimited power of creation and of His Godhead in the true sense of this concept. By creating the universe, God bears witness to His own almightiness and uniqueness. It is meant to illustrate God's creativeness, as if to say, "Is not He who has created the universe equally able to resurrect and recreate man in whatever form He deems necessary?"

Sustainer of This Universe

Say: "In whose hand rests the mighty dominion over all things, and who is it that protects, the while there is no protection against Him? [Tell me this] if you happen to know [the answer]!" [And] they will reply: "[All this power belongs] to God." Say: "How, then, can you be so deluded?" [as to deny the prospect of resurrection]. Nay, we have conveyed unto them the truth: and yet, behold, they are intent on lying [to themselves]! (23:88–90) It is God who has raised the heavens without any supports that you could see, and is established on the throne of His almightiness... He governs all that exists. Clearly does He spell out these messages, so that you might be certain in your innermost that you are destined to meet your Sustainer [on Judgment Day]. (13:2) Is, then, He who has created the heavens and the earth not able to create [anew] the like of those [who have died]? Yea, indeed—for He alone is the

all-knowing Creator: His Being alone is such that when He wills a thing to be, He but says unto it, "Be"—and it is. (36:81–82)

The "raising of the heavens without any supports" refers to the cosmic space in which the stars, the solar systems (including our own), and the galaxies pursue their course. You might realize that He who has created the universe and governs all that exists is equally able to resurrect the dead and to judge you in the life to come in accordance with what you did when you were alive on earth.

Rebirth of Man Is Easy for God

[For Him,] the creation of you all and the resurrection of you all is but like [the creation and resurrection of] a single soul. (31:28) Are, then, they [who deny the truth] not aware of how God creates [life] in the first instance, and then brings it forth anew? This, verily, is easy for God! Say: "Go all over the earth and behold how [wondrously] He has created [man] in the first instance: and thus, too, will God bring into being your second life—for God has the power to will anything! (29:19–20)

Creation, Subsistence, Dissolution, and Recreation

Out of this [earth] have We created you, and into it shall We return you, and out of it shall We bring you forth once again. (20:55) As We brought into being the first creation, so We shall bring it forth anew a promise which We have willed upon Ourselves: for We are able to do [all things]! (21:104) Verily, thy Sustainer's grip is exceedingly strong! It is He who creates [man] in the first instance, and He [it is who] will bring him forth anew. (85:12) Say: "It is He who

has multiplied you on earth, and it is unto Him that you shall be gathered [on resurrection].” (67:24)

The creation of man’s body “out of the earth” and “return into it” signifies the dissolution of this body, after death, into the elementary organic and inorganic substances of which it was composed. All these facts—creation, subsistence, and dissolution—contain the message of God’s almightiness, of the ephemeral nature of man’s life on earth and of his future resurrection. “Brings forth anew” relates to man’s life on earth and his resurrection after bodily death.

Reflect Upon Your Own Creation

O men! If you are in doubt as to the [truth of] resurrection, [remember that,] verily, We have created [every one of] you out of dust. (22:5) Let man, then, observe out of what he has been created: he has been created out of a seminal fluid issuing from between the loins [of man] and the pelvic arch [of woman]. Now, verily, He [who thus creates man in the first instance] is well able to bring him back [to life] on the Day when all secrets will be laid bare and [man] will have neither strength nor helper! (86:5–10)

The expression “created out of dust” is meant to indicate man’s lowly biological origin and his affinity with other earthy substances. The “pelvic arch,” according to most of the authorities who have specialized in the etymology of rare Quranic expressions, relates specifically to female anatomy.

Raising Men from Bones and Dust

If thou sayest [unto men], “Behold, you shall be raised again after death!”—they who are bent on denying the

truth are sure to answer, "This is clearly nothing but an enchanting delusion." (11:7) "A strange thing is this! Why—[how could we be resurrected] after we have died and become mere dust? Such a return seems far-fetched indeed!" Well do We know how the earth consumes their bodies, for with Us is a record unfailing? (50:2–4) I call to witness the Day of Resurrection! But nay! I call to witness the accusing voice of man's own conscience! Does man think that We cannot [resurrect him and] bring his bones together again? Yea indeed, We are able to make whole his very finger-tips! None the less, man chooses to deny what lies ahead of him, asking [derisively], "When is that Resurrection Day to be?" (75:1–6)

By "calling it to witness," and by speaking of the Day of resurrection as if it had already occurred, the above phrase is meant to convey the certainty of its coming. The accusing voice of man's subconscious makes him aware of his own shortcomings and failings.

And [thus, too,] they say, "After we will have become bones and dust, shall we, forsooth, be raised from the dead in a new act of creation?" Say: "[You will be raised from the dead even though] you be stones or iron or any [other] substance which, to your minds, appears yet farther removed [from life]!" And [if] thereupon they ask, "Who is it that will bring us back [to life]?"—say thou: "He who has brought you into being in the first instance." And [if] thereupon they shake their heads at thee [in disbelief] and ask, "When shall this be?"—say thou: "It may well be soon." (17:49–51) [And so] he says, "Who could give life to bones that have crumbled to dust?" Say: "He who brought them into being in the first instance will give them life [once again], seeing that He has full knowledge of every act of creation." (36:78–79)

Parable of Rain (Life–Death–Life)

Do, then, they [who deny resurrection] never gaze at the clouds pregnant with water, [and observe] how they are created? (88:17) It is God who sends forth the winds, so that they raise a cloud, whereupon we drive it towards dead land and thereby give life to the earth after it had been lifeless: even thus shall resurrection be! (35:9) And He it is who sends down, again and again, waters from the sky in due measure: and [as] We raise therewith dead land to life, even thus will you be brought forth [from the dead]. (43:11)

Have they ever observed the miraculous, cyclic process of the evaporation of water, the skyward ascension of vapor, its condensation, and, finally, its precipitation over the earth? The ever-recurring emergence, decay, and reemergence of life, so vividly exemplified in all organic nature, is often cited in the Quran—not merely in support of the doctrine of resurrection but also as evidence of a consciously devised plan underlying creation and of the existence of the Creator. Denial of resurrection and life in the hereafter renders the concept of a conscious Creator utterly meaningless.

Miraculous Transformation of Dead Land to Life

And We send down from the skies water rich in blessings, and cause thereby gardens to grow, and fields of grain, and tall palm-trees with their thickly clustered dates, as sustenance apportioned to men; and by [all] this We bring a dead land to life: [and] even so will be [man's] coming-forth from death. Could We, then, be [thought of as being] worn out by the first creation? [First creation of the universe or man] Nay—but some people are [still] lost in doubt about [the possibility of] a new creation! (50:9–11, 15)

Decay and Reemergence of Life

Behold, then, [O man,] these signs of God's grace—how He gives life to the earth after it had been lifeless! Verily, this Selfsame [God] is indeed the One that can bring the dead back to life: for He has the power to will anything!... Verily, God's promise [of resurrection] is true indeed—so let not those who are devoid of all inner certainty disquiet your mind! (30:50, 60)

Parable of Fertile or Barren Land

As for the good land, its vegetation comes forth [in abundance] by its Sustainer's leave, whereas from the bad it comes forth but poorly. (7:58) And [if, O man, thou art still in doubt as to resurrection, consider this:] thou canst see the earth dry and lifeless—and [suddenly,] when We send down waters upon it, it stirs and swells and puts forth every kind of lovely plant! All this [happens] because God alone is the Ultimate Truth, and because He alone brings the dead to life, and because He has the power to will anything. (22:5–6)

By the exercise of the same life-giving power by which God causes plants to grow, He will resurrect the dead at the end of time. The next sentence continues the parable by likening those whose hearts are open to the voice of truth to fertile earth, and those who are bent on denying it, to barren earth.

All Animals Are Gathered

And when she-camels big with young, about to give birth, are left untended, and when all beasts are gathered together. (81:4–5) Although there is no beast that walks on earth and no bird that flies on its two wings which is

not [God's] creature like yourselves: no single thing have We neglected in Our decree. And once again: Unto their Sustainer shall they [all] be gathered. (6:38)

It is also said that the animals, which were loved by human beings, will live in the hereafter together with those who loved them. The animals will crowd together in terror of the manifestation of the Last Hour or to be indemnified by God for man's cruelty to them.

All Things Go Back to Their Source

And God alone comprehends the hidden reality of the heavens and the earth: for, all that exists goes back to Him [as its source]. (11:123) But if they [whose minds are perverted] give thee the lie, [O Prophet, remember that] even so, before they time, have [other] apostles been given the lie: for [the unbelievers always refuse to admit that] all things go back to God [as their source]. O men! Verily, God's promise [of resurrection] is true indeed: let not, then, the life of this world delude you, and let not [your own] deceptive thoughts about God delude you! (35:4-5) His is the dominion over the heavens and the earth, and all things go back unto God [as their source]. (57:5)

Do Not Ask for a Speedy Doom

Remain, then, [O believer,] patient in adversity, just as all of the apostles, endowed with a firmness of heart, bore themselves with patience. And do not ask for a speedy doom of those [who still deny the truth]: (46:35) And [know, O man] that the Last Hour is bound to come, beyond any doubt, and that God will [indeed] resurrect all who are in their graves. (22:7)

You Cannot Compel Them to Believe in Resurrection

Fully aware are We of what they [who deny resurrection] do say; and thou canst by no means force them [to believe in it]. Yet, none the less, remind, through this Qur'an, all such as may fear My warning. (50:45) Whoever looks forward [with hope and awe] to meeting God [on Resurrection Day, let him be ready for it]: for, behold, the end set by God [for everyone's life] is bound to come—and He alone is all-hearing, all-knowing! (29:5)

Parable of Bringing a Dead Man to Life after a Hundred Years

Or [Art thou, O man, of the same mind] as he who passed by a town deserted by its people, with its roofs caved in, [and] said, "How could God bring all this back to life after its death?" Thereupon God caused him to be dead for a hundred years; whereafter He brought him back to life [and] said: "How long hast thou remained thus?" He answered: "I have remained thus a day, or part of a day." Said [God]: "Nay, but thou hast remained thus for a hundred years! But look at thy food and thy drink—untouched is it with the passing of years—and look at thine ass [donkey] [and observe that it is alive]! And [We did all this so that We might make thee a symbol unto men. And look at the bones [of animals and men]—how We put them together and then clothe them with flesh!" And when [all this] became clear to him, he said: "I know [now] that God has the power to will anything!" (2:251–255) How can you refuse to acknowledge God, seeing that you were lifeless, and He gave you life, and that He will cause you to die and then will bring you again to life, whereupon unto Him you will be brought back? (2:28)

The story told above is a parable meant to illustrate God's power to bring the dead back to life. The Quran frequently points to the ever-recurring miracle of birth, preceded by the gradual evolution of the embryo in its mother's womb, as a visible sign of God's power to create—and also to recreate life. This point out that God has the power to grant life indefinitely as well as to resurrect the dead.

8

Humanity Divided into Three Groups

(Foremost, Unrepentant Sinners and Those Who Attained Righteousness after Sinning)

[On that Day,] then, you shall be [divided into] three kinds. (56:7)

After the events of resurrection, all human beings will be gathered for the final judgment. Based upon their record of good and evil deeds as described above, Humanity will be divided into three groups:

1. The Foremost

And some who, by God's leave, are foremost in deeds of goodness: [and] this, indeed, is a merit most high! (35:32) But the foremost shall be [they who in life were] the foremost [in faith and good works]: they who were [always] drawn close unto God! In gardens of bliss [will they dwell]—a good many of those of olden times, but [only] a few of later times. (56:10–14)

The foremost among the righteous will be those who excelled in their faith and good works in their earthly life. They kept their covenant with God and man; refrained from doing evil; were truthful,

penitent, and contrite of heart; they fed the needy and orphans; and some of them made the ultimate sacrifice in the cause of faith. The Prophet said: "Those who have excelled in good works (the foremost) shall enter paradise without accountability."

No Accounting for the Foremost

Some faces will on that Day be bright with happiness, looking up to their Sustainer. (75:22) Laughing, rejoicing at the glad tidings. (80:39) The supreme awesomeness [of the Day of Resurrection] will cause them no grief, since the angels will receive them with the greeting, "This is your Day [of triumph—the Day] which you were promised!" (21:101–103) Now if one happens to be of those who are drawn close unto God, happiness [awaits him in the life to come], and inner fulfilment, and a Garden of bliss. (56:88–89) [But unto the righteous God will say,] "O thou human being that hast attained to inner peace! Return thou unto thy Sustainer, well-pleased [and] pleasing [Him]: enter, then, together with My [other true] servants—yea, enter thou My paradise!" (89:27–30)

They will not endure the torments of Judgment Day and they will enter paradise without accounting. This is the highest stage of development of the soul. The above stress on the "many" and the "few" contains an allusion to the progressive diminution, in the historical sense, of the element of excellence in men's faith and ethical achievements.

2. Unrepentant Sinners (See Part 3: Accounting of Unrepentant Sinners)

At the other end of the extreme spectrum will be the unrepentant group of sinners who did not mend their ways. They will continue

their spiritual journey in the form of suffering on Judgment Day. All those lost in sins in their worldly life will go through the process of catharsis or cleansing of their soul through spiritual punishment. During the agonizing wait after the resurrection, sinners will be given ample opportunity to contemplate the imminent punishment for their past deeds. Among unrepentant sinners are two distinctions:

Lesser Guilty among Unrepentant Sinners

Those who were less guilty among unrepentant sinners will suffer only the agony and intense fear of the Day of Judgment, and God will spare them from the ultimate punishment of fire of Hell. The Prophet said, "As for those who have been unjust to themselves (by sinning), they are detained throughout the long period of resurrection. Then God shall cover them with His mercy, and they are the ones who will say, 'thanks to God Who has removed the sorrow from us!'"

Hardened Criminals and Truly Guilty

Hardened criminals and truly guilty will be driven toward hell as a thirsty herd, and they will be gathered on their knees around hell. Even some among this group of worst sinners who were vaguely conscious of God will be spared from the fire because God's mercy will prevail over His wrath. In the end, the ones who had been most determined in their disdainful rebellion against the Most Gracious will suffer from the fire of hell.

3. Those Who Attained Righteousness after Sinning

And when the Last Hour dawns—on that Day will all [men] be sorted out: as for those who attained to faith and did righteous deeds, they shall be made happy in a garden of delight. (30:14–15) Thus, there shall be such as will have attained to what is right: oh, how [happy] will be they who have attained to what is right! (56:8) And as for

him whose record shall be placed in his right hand, he will in time be called to account with an easy accounting and will [be able to] turn joyfully to those of his own kind [who were righteous in life]. (84:7–9)

The group in between will be those who were not always “foremost in faith and good works,” and after erring and sinning have gradually attained righteousness. It is through true repentance, which flows from one’s realization of moral failure during one’s life in this world; they mended their ways and finally attained faith. They will undergo a light accounting. The Prophet said: “Those who followed the middle course shall be subjected to light accountability.” Though they may not have been as perfect in life as the “foremost,” their ultimate achievement brings them to the same state of spiritual fulfillment as the foremost.. For Light Accounting, see Part 4: **Accounting of Righteous Who Were Sinners Before.**

The Righteous Are Secure from the Terror of Judgment Day

[But,] behold, as for those for whom [the decree of] ultimate good has already gone forth from Us these will be kept far away from that [hell]: no sound thereof will they hear; and they will abide in all that their souls have ever desired. The supreme awesomeness [of the Day of Resurrection] will cause them no grief, since the angels will receive them with the greeting, “This is your Day [of triumph—the Day] which you were promised!” (21:101–103)

Part 3: Accounting of Unrepentant Sinners

9

Evils Deeds

Sin

THE CONCEPT OF sin has been present in many cultures throughout history, usually equated with an individual's failure to live up to external standards of conduct or moral codes. Sinful acts are viewed as a misuse of free will and defiance of God's commandments, attributable to human false pride and self-centeredness. Like Judaism, Islam teaches that sin is an act and not a state of being. Sin is disobedience or refusal to submit to the moral law. It is the arrogance and ingratitude of those who forget or turn away from their Creator and Sustainer. Repentance is simply remembering or returning to God's path, the straight path of Islam.

Spiritual Sins

Breaking Bond with God and Blood Ties

But as for those who break their bond with God after it has been established [in their nature] and cut asunder what God has bidden to be joined and spread corruption on earth—their due is rejection [by God], and theirs is a

most evil fate [in the life to come]. (13:25) As for those who will not believe—in their ears is deafness, and so (the Quran) remains obscure to them: they are [like people who are] being called from too far away. (41:44)

The fundamental sin, according to the Quran, is denying the existence of God. The “bond with God” stands for something that is rooted in human nature. It can be perceived instinctively and to some extent through human reasoning. Without belief in God and His ultimate judgment, there is no basis for an acceptance of absolute moral values—that is, values that are independent of time and social circumstances. Denying the existence of God can gradually stifle the voice of conscience until it becomes a distant call coming “from a far-off place” and they only hear the sound of the words but cannot understand their meaning. The phrase “what God has bidden to be joined” refers to all ties arising from human relationships—for example, the bonds of family.

And yet there are people who choose to believe in beings that allegedly rival God, loving them as [only] God should be loved: whereas those who have attained to faith love God more than all else. If they who are bent on evildoing could but see—as see they will when they are made to suffer [on Resurrection Day]—that all might belongs to God alone, and that God is severe in [meting out] punishment! (2:165) Do not set up any other deity side by side with God, lest thou find thyself disgraced and forsaken: for thy Sustainer has ordained that you shall worship none but Him. (17:22–23) Say: “Verily, my Sustainer has forbidden only shameful deeds, be they open or secret, and [every kind of] sinning, and unjustified envy, and the ascribing of divinity to aught beside Him—since He has never bestowed any warrant therefor from on high and

the attributing unto God of aught of which you have no knowledge.” (7:33)

Do not set up any other deity side by side with God, lest thou find thyself disgraced and forsaken: for thy Sustainer has ordained that you shall worship none but Him. (17:22) Hence, do not set up any other deity side by side with God,⁴⁸ lest thou be cast into hell, blamed [by thyself] and rejected [by Him]! (17:39)

Whenever they commit a shameful deed, they say, “We found our forefathers doing it, and God had enjoined it upon us.” Say: “Never does God enjoin deeds of abomination. Would you attribute unto God something of which you have no knowledge?” (7:28)

Distorting God's Message

They who distort the meaning of Our messages are not hidden from Us: hence, which [of the two] will be in a better state—he that is [destined to be] cast into the fire, or he that shall come secure [before Us] on Resurrection Day? Do what you will: He sees all that you do. (41:40) And who could be more wicked than he who attributes his own lying inventions to God, or gives the lie to the truth when it comes unto him [through revelation]? Is not hell the [proper] abode for all who [thus] deny the truth? (29:68)

This refers to an arbitrary or false attribution to God of commands or prohibitions in excess of what has been clearly ordained by Him. “Own lying inventions,” by persuading himself that there is, side by side with God or even independently of Him, any power that could govern men’s destinies.

Turning Others Away from God

Those who are bent on denying the truth, and on turning others away from the path of God, have indeed gone far astray. God will indeed not forgive them, nor will He guide them onto any road but the road that leads to hell. (4:167–168)

Misleading Others into Sin

They who are bent on denying the truth speak to those who have attained to faith: "Follow our way [of life], and we shall indeed take your sins upon ourselves!" But never could they take upon themselves the sins of those [whom they would thus mislead]: behold, they are liars indeed! (29:12–13)

Denial of Afterlife

And on the Day when those who were bent on denying the truth will be brought within sight of the fire, [they will be told:] "You have exhausted your [share of] good things in your worldly life, having enjoyed them [without any thought of the hereafter]. And so today you shall be requited with the suffering of humiliation for having gloried on earth in your arrogance, offending against all that is right, and for all your iniquitous doings!" (46:20)

False Pride

Turn not thy cheek away from people in [false] pride and walk not haughtily on earth: for, behold, God does not love anyone who, out of self-conceit, acts in a boastful

manner. (31:18–19) Pursue, then, the right course, as thou hast been bidden [by God], together with all who, with you, have turned unto Him; and let none of you behave in an overweening manner: for He sees all that you do. (11:112) He (God) does not love those who are given to arrogance, and [who], whenever they are asked, “What is it that your Sustainer has bestowed from on high?” They answer, “Fables of ancient times!” [And not divine revelations] Hence, on Resurrection Day they shall bear the full weight of their own burdens, as well as some of the burdens of those ignorant ones whom they have led astray. Oh, how evil the load with which they shall be burdened! (16:23–25) And walk not on earth with haughty self-conceit: for, verily, thou canst never rend the earth asunder, nor canst thou ever grow as tall as the mountains! The evil of all this is odious in thy Sustainer’s sight: this is part of that knowledge of right and wrong with which thy Sustainer has inspired thee. (17:37–39)

Making Mockery of God’s Message

Woe unto every sinful self-deceiver who hears God’s messages when they are conveyed to him, and yet, as though he had not heard them, persists in his haughty disdain! Hence, announce unto him grievous suffering—for when he does become aware of any of Our messages, he makes them a target of his mockery! For all such, there is shameful suffering in store. (45:7–11)

Hypocrisy

God has promised the hypocrites, both men and women—as well as the [outright] deniers of the truth—the fire

of hell, therein to abide: this shall be their allotted portion. For, God has rejected them, and long-lasting suffering awaits them. (9:68) The hypocrites shall be in the lowest depth of the fire, and you will find none who could succor them. (4:145) Apostasy As for those who are bent on denying the truth after having attained to faith, and then grow [ever more stubborn] in their refusal to acknowledge the truth, their repentance [of other sins] shall not be accepted: for it is they who have truly gone astray. (3:90) On the Day [of Judgment] when some of the faces will be dark [with grief]. And as for those with faces darkened, [they shall be told:] "Did you deny the truth after having attained to faith? Taste then, this suffering for having denied the truth!" (3:106) But as for him who, after guidance has been vouchsafed to him, cuts himself off from the Apostle and follows a path other than that of the believers—him We shall leave unto that which he himself has chosen, and shall cause him to endure hell: and how evil a journey's end. (4:115) Such as these who have the hell for their goal: and they shall find no way to escape therefrom. (4:121) Contentiousness We send [Our] message-bearers only as heralds of glad tidings and as warners—whereas those who are bent on denying the truth contend [against them] with fallacious arguments, so as to render void the truth thereby, and to make My messages and warnings a target of their mockery. (18:54–57)

Astrology

And, indeed, We have adorned the skies nearest to the earth with lights, [stars] and have made them the object of futile guesses for the evil ones [from among men]:

and for them have We readied suffering through a blazing flame—for, suffering in hell awaits all who are [thus] bent on blaspheming against their Sustainer: and how vile a journey's end! (67:5–6)

The “evil ones” are the astrologers. They have made stars object of their guesswork, presuming to know what will happen in the future from the position and the aspects of the stars. Since only God knows about future and “that which is beyond the reach of a created being’s perception” (*al-ghayb*), any such attempt is a blasphemy (*kufr*).

Sinful Thoughts versus Evil Deeds

The Prophet said, “God has forgiven my followers the evil thoughts that occur to their mind, as long as such thoughts are not put into action or uttered.”

Entertainment and Music

There is no reference to music in the Quran; however, there are many occasions where the Prophet was involved in singing or encouraged others to do likewise. Call to prayer and recitation of the Quran are forms of singing. Horse racing was one of the pastimes for the Prophet and his companions. When a deputation of Africans came to Medina and performed in the compound of the Mosque, the Prophet himself showed this performance to his wife Aishah.

Sins against Fellow Man

Sin of Devouring an Orphan’s Possessions

Behold, those who sinfully devour the possessions of orphans but fill their bellies with fire: for [in the life to come] they will have to endure a blazing flame! (4:10)

Mistreating Your Old Parents

And [do not offend against but, rather,] do good unto your parents. (6:151) Should one of them, or both, attain to old age in your care, never say “Ugh” to them or scold them, but [always] speak unto them with reverent speech and spread over them humbly the wings of your tenderness, and say: “O my Sustainer! Bestow Thy grace upon them, even as they cherished and reared me when I was a child!” (17:22–24)

Three Cardinal Sins: Idol Worship, Murder, and Adultery

But whoever deliberately slays another believer; his requital shall be hell, therein to abide; and God will condemn him, and will reject him, and will prepare for him awesome suffering. (4:93) Never invoke any [imaginary] deity side by side with God, and do not take any human being’s life—[the life] which God has willed to be sacred—otherwise than in [the pursuit of] justice, and do not commit adultery. And [know that] he who commits aught thereof shall [not only] meet with a full requital [but] shall have his suffering doubled on Resurrection Day: for on that [Day] he shall abide in ignominy (25:68–69)

Zina means any heterosexual sex outside marriage whether one is married or not. It includes both adultery and fornication (24:2). There is no comparably broad word in English, so “adultery” is used in translation to convey *zina*. Murder, *zina*, and idol worship are heinous crimes because the sinner will receive double punishment, especially idol worship, which is an unforgivable sin.

Envy

Say: "My Sustainer has forbidden only shameful deeds, be they open or secret, and [every kind of] sinning, and unjustified envy. (7:33)

Blaming Others for One's Own Sin

He who commits a fault or a sin and then throws the blame therefore on an innocent person, burdens himself with the guilt of calumny and [yet another] flagrant sin. (4:112)

Breaking an Oath

And do not use your oaths as a means of deceiving one another—or else [your] foot will slip after having been firm, and then you will have to taste the evil [consequences] of your having turned away from the path of God, with tremendous suffering awaiting you [in the life to come]. (16:94)

By a false pledge, you will offend against God because every pledge given by man to man is synonymous with a pledge to God. The breaking of a pledge unavoidably leads to a gradual disappearance of all mutual trust and to the decomposition of the social fabric.

Anger

Hence, if it should happen that a prompting from Satan stirs thee up [to blind anger], seek refuge with God: behold, He alone is all-hearing, all-knowing! (41:36)

Persecution of Believers

As for those who persecute believing men and believing women, and thereafter do not repent, hell's suffering awaits them: yea, suffering through fire awaits them! (85:10)

Cruelty to Animals

Although there is no direct Quranic reference to cruelty to animals, the Prophet's Traditions have made it clear that those who inflict cruelty to animals risk damnation in the eternal life. In the story of the tribe of Thamud and prophet Salih, she camel was treated cruelly resulting in the destruction of the tribe of Thamud.

Social Sins

Spreading Baseless Rumors

O you who have attained to Faith! If any iniquitous person comes to you with a [slanderous] tale, use your discernment, lest you hurt people unwittingly and afterwards be filled with remorse for what you have done. (49:6–7)

Slander

As for those who like [to hear] foul slander spread against [any of] those who have attained to faith—grievous suffering awaits them in this world and in the life to come: for God knows [the full truth], whereas you know [it] not. (24:19)

Self-Righteousness

He is fully aware of you when He brings you into being out of dust, and when you are still hidden in your mothers'

wombs: do not, then, consider yourselves pure—[for] He knows best as to who is conscious of Him. (53:32)

Do Not Deride, Defame, Insult, Spy, and Backbite

Avoid most guesswork [about one another]—for, behold, some of [such] guesswork is [in itself] a sin; and do not spy upon one another, and neither allow yourselves to speak ill of one another behind your backs. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? No, you would loathe it! And be conscious of God. God is an acceptor of repentance, a dispenser of grace! (49:11–12)

Intrigue and Conspiracy

No good comes, as a rule, out of secret confabulations—save those which are devoted to enjoining charity, or equitable dealings, or setting things to rights between people. (4:114).

Although, the “secret confabulations” spoken of in this passage relate to intrigues aimed against the Prophet and his followers by some of their unbelieving contemporaries, the passage also has a general import, and is, therefore, valid for all times.

General Antisocial Conduct

Defer not to the contemptible swearer of oaths, [or to] the slanderer that goes about with defaming tales, [or] the withholder of good, [or] the sinful aggressor, [or] one who is cruel, by greed possessed, and, in addition to all this, utterly useless [to his fellow-men]. (68:10–13) [Whereupon God will command:] “Cast, cast into hell

every [such] stubborn enemy of the truth, [every] withholder of good [and] sinful aggressor [and] fomenter of distrust [between man and man—everyone] who has set up another deity beside God: cast him, then, cast him into suffering severe!” (50:24–29)

Corrupt and Oppressive Leaders

Blame attaches but to those who oppress [other] people and behave outrageously on earth, offending against all right: for them, there is grievous suffering in store! (42:42) And you will see them exposed to that [doom], humbling themselves in abasement, looking [around] with a furtive glance. Oh, the evildoers will fall into long-lasting suffering. (42:45)

Sectarianism

Verily, as for those who have broken the unity of their Faith and have become sects—thou hast nothing to do with them. Behold, their case rests with God: and in time He will make them understand what they were doing. (6:159) And be not like those who have drawn apart from one another and have taken to conflicting views after all evidence of the truth has come unto them: so, for these it is for whom tremendous suffering is in store. (3:105)

The followers of the Bible became Jews and Christians—sects of monotheistic religion—and broke up into even smaller sects of those larger sects. Likewise, the followers of the Quran, Muslims, split into various sects, although all three communities have a common belief source in the Quran.

Tribalism, Nationalism, and Jingoism

Say: "If your fathers and your sons and your brothers and your spouses and your clan, and the worldly goods which you have acquired, and the commerce whereof you fear a decline, and the dwellings in which you take pleasure—[if all these] are dearer to you than God and His Apostle and the struggle in His cause, then wait until God makes manifest His will. (9:24)

While recognizing differences in status, wealth, and tribal origin, the Quran teaches unity and equality of all believers before God. It includes Jews, Christians, Muslims, and followers of other monotheist faiths. Common faith, not tribal or family ties, binds the community together. The passage above rejects the tendency to regard ties of kinship and national affiliation, expressed in the term "your clan," as the decisive factors of social behavior. This may be an allusion to the inevitable degeneration and decline of communities, which place narrow self-interest above ethical values.

Worship of Wealth

To him who cares for [no more than the enjoyment of] this fleeting life, We readily grant thereof as much as We please, [giving] to whomever it is Our will [to give]; but in the end, We consign him to [the suffering of] hell, which he will have to endure disgraced and disowned! (17:18) Is it because he is possessed of worldly goods and children that whenever Our messages are conveyed to him, such a one says, "Fables of ancient times"? [For this], We shall brand him with indelible disgrace! (68:14–16)

The criteria of righteousness in the materialistic mind are the signs of material success in the form of wealth and children or sons. These evildoers think that their material success is evidence of their righteousness, hence proof of needing no further guidance. We shall stigmatize him with indelible disgrace.

Discarding Laws of inheritance

These are the bounds set by God (referring to laws of inheritance). And whoever rebels against God and His Apostle and transgresses His bounds, him will He commit unto fire, therein to abide; and shameful suffering awaits him. (4:13–14)

Severe punishment has been promised for breaking the laws of inheritance, such as depriving women or weaker family members of their due inheritance, a widespread practice in many Islamic societies.

Amassing Wealth without Giving Charity

All [that awaits him] is a raging flame, tearing his skin! It will claim all such as turn their backs [on what is right], and turn away [from the truth], and amass [wealth] and thereupon withhold [it from their fellow-men]. (70:15–18) As for those who return to it (usury)—they are destined for the fire, therein to abide. (2:275)

Lust for Wealth by Religious Leaders

O you who have attained to Faith! Many of the rabbis and monks do indeed wrongfully devour men's possessions and turn [others] away from the path of God. But as for all who lay up treasures of gold and silver and do not spend

them for the sake of God—give them the tidings of grievous suffering [in the life to come]. On the Day when that [hoarded wealth] shall be heated in the fire of hell and their foreheads and their sides and their backs branded therewith, [those sinners shall be told:] “These are the treasures which you have laid up for yourselves! Taste then, [the evil of] your hoarded treasures!” (9:34–35)

Above is a reference to the wealth of the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim religious leaders and communities and their misuse of this wealth, or any who hoard their wealth without spending anything thereof on righteous causes.

10

Sinning, Grant of Respite, and the Fate of Unrepentant Sinners

MAN IS CREATED weak (4:28) and therefore he is prone to sinning, but God “has willed upon Himself the law of grace and mercy” (6:12) and, consequently, does not punish sinners without taking all their circumstances into consideration. All people have a life-term decreed by God, during which they are at liberty to accept or to reject the guidance offered to them through revelation. God invariably grants a period of respite to sinners in their lives on earth, during which they may reflect, repent, and mend their ways.

Sinning and Respite Period

Now if God were to hasten for human beings the ill [which they deserve by their sinning] in the same manner as they [themselves] would hasten [the coming to them of what they consider to be] good, their end would indeed come forthwith! But We leave them alone [for a while]—all those who do not believe that they are destined to meet

Us: [We leave them alone] in their overweening arrogance, blindly stumbling to and fro. (10:11)

The “time limit” signifies the end of the sinners’ life on earth—the “point of no return.”

What If the Punishment for Sins Is Immediate?

Now were it not for a decree that has already gone forth from thy Sustainer, setting a term [for each sinner’s repentance], it would inescapably follow [that all who sin must be doomed at once]. Hence, bear with patience whatever they [who deny the truth] may say and extol thy Sustainer’s limitless glory and praise Him before the rising of the sun and before its setting; and extol His glory, too, during some of the hours of the night as well as during the hours of the day, so that thou might attain to happiness. (20:129–130)

Yet, [withal,] thy Sustainer is the Truly-Forgiving One, limitless in His grace. Were He to take them [at once] to task for whatever [wrong] they commit, He would indeed bring about their speedy punishment [then and there]: but nay, they have a time-limit beyond which they shall find no redemption—as [was the case with all] those communities that We destroyed when they went on and on doing wrong: for We had set a time-limit for their destruction. (18:58–59)

Now if God were to take men [immediately] to task for all the evil that they do [on earth], He would not leave a single living creature upon its face. However, He grants them respite until a term set [by Him]: but when the end

of their term approaches, they can neither delay it by a single moment, nor can they hasten it. (16:61)

Granting of Respite before the Dying Hour

For all people a term has been set: and when [the end of] their term approaches, they can neither delay it by a single moment, nor can they hasten it. (7:34) God's acceptance of repentance relates only to those who do evil out of ignorance and then repent before their time runs out: [before the actual approach of death] and it is they unto whom God will turn again in His mercy—for God is all-knowing, wise; whereas repentance shall not be accepted from those who do evil deeds until their dying hour and then say, "Behold, I now repent" nor from those who die as deniers of the truth: it is these for whom We have readied grievous suffering. (4:17–18)

In Arabic usage, the term "hour" signifies not merely the astronomical hour—that is, the twenty-fourth part of a mean solar day—but also "time" in an absolute sense, or any fraction of it, whether large or small. In the above context, it has been used in the sense of "a least fraction of time" or "a single moment."

Fate of Unrepentant Sinners

Punishment in This Life

Those who lived before them did [too] give the lie to the truth—whereupon suffering befell them without their having perceived whence it came: and thus, God let them taste ignominy [even] in the life of this world. Yet, how much greater will be the [sinners'] suffering in the life

***to come—if they [who now deny the truth] but knew it!
(39:25–26)***

Under exceptional conditions, sometimes God chooses to punish the sinner in this life, but generally, God grants a period of respite to sinners in their lives.

Sinning against Themselves

***Are they [who deny the truth] but waiting for the angels to appear unto them or for God’s judgment to become manifest? Even thus did behave those [stubborn sinners] who lived before their time; and [when they were destroyed], it was not God who wronged them, but it was they who had wronged themselves. For all the evil that they had done fell [back] upon them and they were overwhelmed by the very thing which they had been won’t to deride.³⁰
(16:33–34)***

The Quran points out here that this “chastisement” or “suffering” is but a natural, unavoidable consequence of deliberate wrongdoing. Hence, he who becomes guilty of it is, in reality, “doing wrong to himself” or “sinning against himself” as he destroys his own spiritual integrity and must subsequently suffer for it. Similar phrases occur in many places in the Quran, always with reference to the derision of divine messages, and particularly of predictions relating to God’s chastisement of reprobate sinners.

Death of an Unrepentant Sinner

And [then,] the twilight of death brings with it the [full] truth [full insight into one’s own self]—that [very thing, O man,] from which you would always look away! (50:19)

The unbelievers because of self-pride and arrogance will not humble themselves before God and thus forgo the opportunity to reduce the burden of sins. Those who were lost in sins and failed to repent will go through the process of catharsis or cleansing of their soul. Their spiritual punishment will begin just after death in the form of the torments of grave. More punishment awaits them on the Judgment Day, after the destruction of the cosmos and upon resurrection of the dead.

Hence, leave them alone until they face that [Judgment] Day of theirs, when they will be stricken with terror. The Day when none of their scheming will be of the least avail to them, and they will receive no succor. (52:45–46)

Futility of Repentance Close to Death

When [the last breath] comes up to the throat [of a dying man], and people ask, “Is there any wizard [that could save him]?” the while he [himself] knows that this is the parting and is enwrapped in the pangs of death-: at that time towards thy Sustainer does he feel impelled to turn! [Useless, though, will be his repentance:] for [as long as he was alive] he did not accept the truth, nor did he pray [for enlightenment], but, on the contrary, he gave the lie to the truth and turned away [from it], and then went arrogantly back to what he had come from. [And yet, O man, thine end comes hourly] nearer unto thee, and nearer and ever nearer unto thee, and nearer! Does man, then, think that he is to be left to himself to go about at will? (75:26–36)

He returned to the arrogant belief, rooted in the materialism of his social environment, that man is self-sufficient and therefore not in need of any divine guidance. He does not think that he will be held morally responsible for his actions.

Realization of Existence of the Hereafter Close to death

Whatever has been decreed to be their lot [in life] will be theirs—till there shall come unto them Our messengers [angels of death] to cause them to die, [and] shall say, “Where, now, are those beings whom you used to invoke beside God?” And [those sinners] will reply, “They have forsaken us!”—and [thus] they will bear witness against themselves that they had been denying the truth. (7:37) [As for those who will not believe in the life to come, they go on lying to themselves] until, when death approaches any of them, he prays: “O my Sustainer! Let me return [to life], so that I might act righteously in whatever I have failed [aforetime]!” Nay, it is indeed but a [meaningless] word that he utters. (23:99–100)

They will have in their lifetime, like all other people, all the good or bad fortune envisaged for them in God’s eternal decree, until the “messengers” referred as the angels of death pay a visit.

Torments of Grave

Angels Strike Their Faces and Back

If thou couldst but see [how it will be] when these evildoers find themselves in the agonies of death, and the angels stretch forth their hands [and call]: “Give up your souls!” (6:93) And if thou couldst but see [how it will be] when He causes those who are bent on denying the truth to die: the angels will strike their faces and their backs, and [will say]: “Taste suffering through fire in return for what your own hands have wrought—for, never does God do the least wrong to His creatures!” (8:50–51) Hence, how [will they

fare] when the angels gather them in death, striking their faces and their backs? This, because they were wont to pursue what God condemns, and to hate [whatever would meet with] His goodly acceptance: and so He has caused all their [good] deeds to come to nought. (47:27–28)

The beating of the sinners' faces and backs is an allegory of their suffering in the life to come, in consequence of their having denied the truth while alive in this world. The torments of the grave both prefigure and predict the final outcomes; however, this is not the final judgment that will occur after the destruction of the cosmos and subsequent resurrection of all humans.

11

Torments of the Judgment Day for Unrepentant Sinners

MAN'S FATE IN the hereafter will be a consequence of, and invariably conditioned by, his spiritual attitude and the manner of his life during the earthly stage of his existence. The suffering of the damned in the life to come because they were lost in suspicions that all moral postulates were but meant to deprive them of what they considered to be the legitimate advantages of life in this world.

Why Judgment Is Delayed till Resurrection?

Why is the judgment not immediate after death? The Prophet said: "Whoever calls others to the right way shall have a reward equal to the combined rewards of all who may follow him until resurrection Day, without anything being lessened of their rewards. Whoever calls to the way of error will have to bear a sin equal to the combined sins of all who may follow him until Resurrection Day, without anything being lessened of their sins." Since man's action in this life may continue to accrue both rewards and sins after his earthly demise, man will be judged on the Day of Judgment rather than after death.

Shrink in Terror and Nowhere to Escape

If thou couldst but see [how the deniers of the truth will fare on Resurrection Day,] when they will shrink in terror, with nowhere to escape since they will have been seized from so close nearby—and will cry, “We do [now] believe in it!” But how can they [hope to] attain [to salvation] from so far away, seeing that aforetime they had been bent on denying the truth, and had been wont to cast scorn, from far away, on something that was beyond the reach of human perception? And so, a barrier will be set between them and all that they had [ever] desired, as will be done to such of their kind as lived before their time: for, behold, they [too] were lost in doubt amounting to suspicion. (34:51–54)

The expression “seized from close by” means from within their own selves because of the burden of the sins that they were carrying. They will be unable to attain salvation because of their utterly different past life and their denial of life after death. The expression “from far away” refers to their utterly different past life on earth.

Day Devoid of Any Hope

Whereas those who are bent on denying the truth will not cease to be in doubt about Him until the Last Hour comes suddenly upon them and [supreme] suffering befalls them on a Day void of all hope. (22:55) And do not think that God is unaware of what the evildoers are doing. He but grants them respite until the Day when their eyes will stare in horror, the while they will be running confusedly to and fro, with their heads upraised [in supplication], unable to look away from what they shall behold, and their hearts an abysmal void. (14:42)

The Day of Regrets

Hence, a Day of distress will it be for all who deny the truth, and a Day on which the evildoer will bite his hands [in despair], exclaiming: "Oh, would that I had followed the path shown to me by the apostle! Oh, woe is me! Would that I had not taken so-and-so for a friend! Indeed, he led me astray from the remembrance [of God] after it had come unto me!" For [thus it is:] Satan is ever a betrayer of man. (25:26–29)

Regrets of Past Life and Request for Second Chance

Follow the most goodly [teaching] that has been revealed unto you by your Sustainer, lest any human being should say [on Judgment Day]. "Alas for me for having been remiss in what is due to God, and for having been indeed one of those who scoffed [at the truth]!"—or lest he should say, "If God had but guided me, I would surely have been among those who are conscious of Him!"—or lest he should say, when he becomes aware of the suffering [that awaits him], "Would that I had a second chance [in life], so that I could be among the doers of good!" [But God will reply:] "Yea, indeed! My messages did come unto thee, but thou gavest them the lie, and wert filled with false pride, and wert among those who deny the truth!" (39:55–59)

Ignominy and Misery

And then, on Resurrection Day, He will cover them [all] with ignominy, and will say: "Where, now, are those beings to whom you ascribed a share in My divinity, [and] for whose sake you cut yourselves off [from My guidance]?"

[Whereupon] those who [in their lifetime] were endowed with knowledge will say: "Verily, ignominy and misery [have fallen] this day upon those who have been denying the truth—those whom the angels have gathered in death while they were still sinning against themselves!" (16:27–28)

God will cover them with ignominy, or disgrace, for only on the Day of Resurrection will they be requited in full for whatever they have done (3:185). "Endowed with knowledge" are those who had availed themselves of the knowledge of good and evil, which God offers to mankind through His prophets.

Twice Birth and Death

[But,] behold, as for those who are bent on denying the truth—[on that same Day] a voice will call out to them. "Indeed, greater than your [present] loathing of yourselves was God's loathing of you [at the time] when you were called unto faith but went on denying the truth!" [Whereupon] they will exclaim: "O our Sustainer! Twice hast Thou caused us to die, just as twice Thou hast brought us to life! But now that we have acknowledged our sins, is there any way out [of this second death]?" [And they will be told]: "This [has befallen you] because, whenever the One God was invoked, you denied this truth; whereas, when divinity was ascribed to aught beside Him, you believed [in it]! But all judgment rests with God, the Exalted, the Great!" (40:10–12)

This relates to the sinner's feeling of self-loathing on belatedly realizing his past sinfulness: "Thou hast brought us to life on earth, and then caused us to die; thereupon Thou have resurrected us, and now

condemned us to spiritual death in consequence of our willful spiritual blindness on earth.”

“God’s loathing” of those sinners is a metonym for His rejection of them, similar to the metonymic use of the expression “God’s wrath” in the sense of His condemnation.

Day of Loss and Gain

[Think of] the time when He shall gather you all together on the Day of the [Last] Gathering—that Day of Loss and Gain! (64:9) Woe, then, on that Day to all who give the lie to the truth—all those who [throughout their lives] but idly played with things vain. (52:11–12) Nay, but [most of] you love this fleeting life and give no thought to the life to come [and to Judgment Day]! (75:20) He who has denied the truth will have to bear [the burden of] his denial... Verily, He [God] does not love those who refuse to acknowledge the truth. (30:44–45)

The good deeds of sinners will be negligible when compared to their evil acts.

Blindness in the Hereafter

But as for him who shall turn away from remembering Me—his shall be a life of narrow scope; and on the Day of Resurrection We shall raise him up blind. [And so, on Resurrection Day, the sinner] will ask: “O my Sustainer! Why hast Thou raised me up blind, whereas [on earth] I was endowed with sight?” [God] will reply: “Thus it is: there came unto thee Our messages, but you were oblivious of them, and thus shalt thou be today consigned to oblivion!” For, thus shall We recompense him who wastes

his own self... and does not believe in his Sustainer's messages: and, indeed, the suffering [of such sinners] in the life to come shall be most severe and most enduring! (20:124–127) For whoever is blind [of heart] in this [world] will be blind in the life to come [as well], and still farther astray from the path [of truth]. (17:72)

This passage shows that man's life in the hereafter is not merely conditioned by the manner of his life on earth but is also an extension of the latter. A life of narrow scope is sterile and spiritually hollow, without any real meaning or purpose, and as indicated in the subsequent clause, will be a source of their suffering in the hereafter.

No Grant of Respite

Hence, warn men of the Day when this suffering may befall them, and when those who did wrong [in their lifetime] will exclaim: "O our Sustainer! Grant us respite for a short while, so that we might respond to Thy call and follow the apostles!" [But God will answer:] "Why—were you aforesaid to swear that no kind of resurrection and retribution awaited you? And yet, you dwelt in the dwelling-places of those who had sinned against their own selves [before your time], and it was made obvious to you how We had dealt with them: for We have set forth unto you many a parable [of sin, resurrection and divine retribution]. (14:44–45)

God grants respite to evildoers for the duration of their lifetime only. The wrongdoers mentioned here are those who indulge in the belief that there are other powers that can rival God, and thus commit the unforgivable sin of idol worship. They also denied the afterlife, attended by God's retribution of sins, and God's ultimate judgment.

They lived on the same earth, and in basically the same human environment as those earlier generations who offended against all ethical values and thereby brought destruction upon themselves; their tragic fate should have been a warning to them. The stories of earlier generations, such as pharaoh's enslavement of Israelites, Noah's people, tribe of Ad and Thamud, and others who offended all moral values, were well known to Arabs.

He governs all that exists, from the celestial space to the earth; and in the end, all shall ascend unto Him [for judgment] on a Day the length whereof will be [like] a thousand years of your reckoning. (32:5)

The Day of Judgment will seem to be endless—a thousand years—to those who are judged. In the ancient Arabic idiom, a day that is trying or painful is described as “long,” just as a happy day is spoken of as “short.”

Offer of Ransom for Sufferings

And some people [agnostics] ask thee, “Is all this true?” Say: “Yea, by my Sustainer! It is most certainly true, and you cannot elude [the final reckoning]!” And all human beings that have been doing evil would surely, if they possessed all that is on earth, offer it as ransom [on Judgment Day]; and when they see the suffering [that awaits them], they will be unable to express their remorse. But judgment will be passed on them in all equity, and they will not be wronged... Oh, verily, God's promise always comes true—but most of them know it not! (10:53–55)

The above phrase “unable to express their remorse” must be understood in the sense of an involuntary concealment that is the sinners' inability to express the full depth of their remorse.

Offer of Twice the Treasures of Earth

But if those who are bent on evildoing possessed all that is on earth, and twice as much, they would surely offer it as ransom from the awful suffering [that will befall them] on the Day of Resurrection: for, something with which they had not reckoned before will [by then] have been made obvious to them by God; and obvious to them will have become the evil that they had wrought [in life]: and thus shall they be overwhelmed by the very truth which they were wont to deride. (39:47–48)

Offer of Family as a Ransom in Utter Desperation

[For,] everyone who was lost in sin will on that Day but desire to ransom himself from suffering at the price of his own children, and of his spouse, and of his brother, and of all the kinsfolk who ever sheltered him, and of whoever [else] lives on earth, all of them—so that he could but save himself. (70:11–14)

Wish to Avoid Judgment Day as Long as Possible

On the Day when every human being will find himself faced with all the good that he has done, and with all the evil that he has done, [many a one] will wish that there was a long span of time between himself and that [Day]. Hence, God warns you to beware of Him; but God is most compassionate towards His creatures. (3:30)

Parable of Scum (Falsehood) over Clear Water (Truth)

[Whenever] He sends down water from the sky, and [once-dry] riverbeds are running high according to their

measure, the stream carries scum on its surface [while the water beneath is clear]; and, likewise, from that [metal] which they smelt in the fire in order to make ornaments or utensils, [there rises] scum. In this way does God set forth the parable of truth and falsehood: for, as far as the scum is concerned, it passes away as [does all] dross; but that which is of benefit to man abides on earth. In this way does God set forth the parables of those who have responded to their Sustainer with a goodly response, and of those who did not respond to Him. [As for the latter,] if they possessed all that is on earth, and twice as much, they would surely offer it as a ransom [on the Day of Judgment]: a most evil reckoning awaits them, and their goal is hell: and how evil a resting-place! Can, then, he who knows that whatever has been bestowed from on high upon thee by thy Sustainer is the truth be deemed equal to one who is blind? Only they who are endowed with insight keep this in mind. (13:17–19)

The scum represents falsehood, and the clear water is the truth. The scum of the flood and the minerals smelted passes away as dross, useless refuse, while that which is of use to mankind, in the way of water and minerals, remains. Likewise, falsehood wanes and is effaced, even if it should prevail over the truth at certain times. Truth, on the other hand, is established and enduring.

Gold as Ransom

Verily, as for those who are bent on denying the truth and die as deniers of the truth—not all the gold on earth could ever be their ransom. It is they for whom grievous suffering is in store; and they shall have none to succor them. (3:91)

Separation from Friends and Loved Ones

On Resurrection Day, the sinners will be irretrievably separated from all whom they had loved and all who had been close to them.

Loss of Self and Kith and Kin

Then, when the trumpet [of resurrection] is blown, no ties of kinship will on that Day prevail among them, and neither will they ask about one another. (23:101) Say: "Behold, the [true] losers will be they who shall have lost their own selves and their kith and kin on Resurrection Day: for is not this, this, the [most] obvious loss?" (39:15)

The "loss of one's own self" signifies the destruction of one's true identity and uniqueness as a human being, which is the most obvious loss that man may be made to suffer in the life to come.

When No Human Beings Will Be of Any Avail

And what could make thee conceive what that Judgment Day will be? And once again: What could make you conceive what that Judgment Day will be? [It will be] a Day when no human being shall be of the least avail to another person: for on that Day [it will become manifest that] all sovereignty is God's alone. (82:17–19)

The repetition of this rhetorical question (What could make you conceive ...?) is meant to indicate that man's intellect and imagination cannot possibly answer it. What is described as the Day of Judgment will usher in reality, which as yet is wholly outside our human experience and cannot be grasped conceptually. Only allegory—and our

emotional response to it—can give us an inkling of what that reality might be.

When Parents Will Be of No Avail

O men! Be conscious of your Sustainer and stand in awe of the Day on which no parent will be of any avail to his child, nor a child will be in the least avail his parent! Verily, God's promise [of resurrection] is real indeed: let not, then, the life of this world delude you, and let not [your own] deceptive thoughts about God delude you! (31:33–34)

The term *gharur* denotes “anything that deludes” a person in the moral sense, whether it be Satan, or another human being, or an abstract concept, or wishful thinking—for instance, the self-deluding expectation that God will forgive you while you are deliberately committing a sin.

When Friends Are of No Avail

Verily, the Day of Distinction [between the true and the false] is the term appointed for all of them: the Day when no friend shall be of the least avail to his friend, and when none shall be succored save those upon whom God will have bestowed His grace and mercy: for, verily, He alone is almighty, a dispenser of grace. (44:40–42) And [when] no friend will ask about his friend, though they may be in one another's sight. (70:10–11) And so, when the piercing call [of resurrection] is heard on a Day when everyone will [want to] flee from his brother, and from his mother and father, and from his spouse and his children: on that Day, to every one of them will his own state be of sufficient concern. (80:33–37)

No Escape from Final Judgment

Suffering Will Not Be Lightened

...We shall have taken to task, through suffering, those from among them who [now] are lost in the pursuit of pleasures—they cry out in [belated] supplication. [But they will be told:] “Cry not today: for, behold, you shall not be succored by Us! (23:64–65) And when they who were bent on evildoing behold the suffering [that awaits them, they will realize that] it will not be lightened for them [by virtue of their pleading]; and neither will they be granted respite. (16:85)

The “taking to task through suffering” spoken of here may refer to the Day of Judgment or to the inevitable social ruin, which wrong beliefs and actions bring with themselves in this world.

Never can they elude [their final reckoning, even if they remain unscathed] on earth: never will they find anyone who could protect them from God. [In the life to come] double suffering will be imposed on them for having lost the ability to hear [the truth] and having failed to see [it]. It is they who have squandered their own selves—for [on the Day of Resurrection] all their false imagery will have forsaken them: truly it is they, they who in the life to come shall be the losers! (11:20–22) [One day] We shall take you to the task, O you sin-laden two [men and women]! Which, then, of your Sustainer’s powers can you disavow? O you who live in close communion with [evil] invisible beings and humans! [If you [think that you] can pass beyond the regions of the heavens and the earth, pass beyond them [to escape God’s judgment and chastisement]!... [But] you

***cannot pass beyond them, save by a sanction [from God]!
(55:31–33)***

God's punishment may or may not befall the sinners during their life on earth; it will certainly befall them in the hereafter.

The End of Journey

***On that Day will man exclaim, "Whither to flee?" But nay:
no refuge [for thee, O man]! With thy Sustainer, on that
Day, the journey's end will be! (75:10–12) Verily, it is We
who grant life and deal death, and with Us will be all jour-
neys' end. (50:43)***

12

Record of Unrepentant Sinners

Earth to Bear Witness of Man's Doings

When the earth quakes with her [last] mighty quaking, and [when] the earth yields up her burdens, and man cries out, "What has happened to her?"—on that Day will she recount all her tidings, as thy Sustainer will have inspired her to do. (99:1–5) Now, [as for the deaf and blind of heart]—when the word [of truth] stands revealed against them, We shall bring forth unto them out of the earth a creature which will tell them that mankind had no real faith in Our messages. (27:82)

Many inanimate objects will assume a different identity. The earth will acquire the ability to recount all the tragic events it witnessed caused by man. The "creature," parabolically, tells men that their submergence in exclusively materialistic values—and their approaching self-destruction—is an outcome of their lack of belief in God.

Eyewitness against Himself

For on that Day neither man nor invisible being will be asked about his sins. (55:39) Nay, but man shall against

himself be an eye-witness, even though he may veil himself in excuses. (75:14–15) On that Day We shall set a seal on their mouths—but their hands will speak unto Us, and their feet will bear witness to whatever they have earned [in life]. (36:65) On the Day when their own tongues and hands and feet will bear witness against them by [recalling] all that they did! (24:24) Till, when they come close to it, their hearing and their sight and their [very] skins will bear witness against them, speaking of what they were doing [on earth]. And they will ask their skins, “Why did you bear witness against us?” [and] these will reply: “God, who gives speech to all things, has given speech to us [as well]: for He [it is who] has created you in the first instance—and unto Him you are [now] brought back. And you did not try to hide [your sins] lest your hearing or your sight or your skins bear witness against you: nay, but you thought that God did not know much of what you were doing. (41:20–22) And one part of him will say: “This it is that has been ever-present with me!” (50:23) Man’s other self will say: “O our Sustainer! It was not I that led his conscious mind into evil—nay, but it had gone far astray [of its own accord]! [And] He will say: “Contend not before Me, [O you sinners,] for I gave you a forewarning [of this Day of Reckoning]. The judgment passed by Me shall not be altered; but never do I do the least wrong unto My creatures!” (50:27–29)

“We shall set a seal on their mouths” is a metaphor for their being unable to excuse or defend their past actions and attitudes. Inner urges and man’s primal desires drive him into unrestrained self-indulgence and sin. The lifting of the veil forces him to bear witness against himself. The awakened moral consciousness of the sinner will plead that he had always been more or less conscious, and perhaps even critical, of the urges and appetites that drove him into

evildoing. But, as is shown in the sequence, this belated and morally ineffective rationale does not diminish man's guilt.

Evil Record of Sinners

And [on that Day] thou wilt see all people kneeling down [in humility]: all people will be called upon to [face] their record: "Today you shall be requited for all that you ever did! This Our record speaks of you in all truth: for, verily, We have caused to be recorded all that you ever did!" (45:28–29) But as for him whose record shall be placed in his left hand, he will exclaim: "Oh, would that I had never been shown this my record, and neither known this my account! Oh, would that this [death of mine] had been the end of me! Of no avail to me is all that I have [ever] possessed, [and] all my power of argument has died away from me!" (69:25–29)

The record placed in the left hand signifies that he had been unrighteous in his earthly life. "Today, the power of argument against the ideas of life after death and divine judgment has died away from me."

Record of the Wicked Ingrained Permanently

Nay, verily, the record of the wicked is indeed [set down] in a mode inescapable! And what could make thee conceive what that mode inescapable will be? A record [indelibly] inscribed! Woe on that Day unto those who give the lie to the truth those who give the lie to the [coming of] Judgment Day: for, none gives the lie to it but such as are wont to transgress against all that is [and are] immersed in sin: [and so,] whenever Our messages

are conveyed to them, they but say, "Fables of ancient times!" Nay, but their hearts are corroded by all [the evil] that they were wont to do! Nay, verily, from [the grace of] their Sustainer shall they on that Day be debarred; and then, behold, they shall enter the blazing fire and be told: "This is the [very thing] to which you were wont to give the lie!" (83:7–17)

The term *sijjin* signifies "a prison." Thus, in its metaphorical application to a sinner's "record," it is meant to stress the latter's inescapable quality, as if its contents were lastingly imprisoned, or set down indelibly, with no possibility of escaping. The denial of ultimate responsibility before God—and, hence, of His judgment—is invariably conducive to sinning and to transgression against all moral imperatives. Their persistence in wrongdoing has gradually deprived them of all consciousness of moral responsibility and, hence, of the ability to visualize the fact of God's ultimate judgment.

Men Choose Their Own Destiny

And every human being's destiny have We tied to his neck; and on the Day of resurrection We shall bring forth for him a record which he will find wide open; [and he will be told:] "Read this thy record! Sufficient is thine own self today to make out thine account!" (17:13–14)

The Quranic concept of "destiny" relates not so much to the external circumstances of and events in man's life as to the direction that this life takes as a result of one's moral choices. It relates to man's inclinations, attitudes, and conscious actions. Man's spiritual fate depends on, and God has made man responsible for, his behavior on earth. He speaks of Himself as having "tied every human being's destiny to his neck." The record and the subsequent account represent man's total

comprehension, on Judgment Day, of his past life (see 50:22—“now We have lifted from you your veil, and sharp is your sight today!”).

Behold, they were not expecting to be called to account, having given the lie to Our messages one and all: but We have placed on record every single thing [of what they did]. [And so We shall say:] “Taste, then, [the fruit of your evil doings,] for now We shall bestow on you nothing but more and more suffering!” (78:27–30)

Sinners’ Reaction to Their Record

And the record [of everyone’s deeds] will be laid open; and thou wilt behold the guilty filled with dread at what [they see] therein; and they will exclaim: “Oh, woe unto us! What a record is this! It leaves out nothing, be it small or great, but takes everything into account!” For they will find all that they ever wrought [now] facing them, and [will know that] thy Sustainer does not wrong anyone. (18:49)

Horror at His Record

But as for him whose record shall be given to him behind his back; he will in time pray for utter destruction: but he will enter the blazing flame. Behold, [in his earthly life] he lived joyfully among people of his own kind [people of the same sinful inclinations] for, behold, he never thought that he would have to return [to God]. Yea indeed! His Sustainer did see all that was in him! (84:10–15)

The record given “behind his back” alludes to the sinner’s horror at his record and his wish that he had never been shown it.

Good Deeds Scattered Like Dust

[Yet] on that Day—the Day on which they shall see the angels—there will be no glad tidings for those who were lost in sin; and they will exclaim, “By a forbidding ban [are we from God’s grace debarred]!” For We shall have turned towards all the [supposedly good] deeds they ever wrought and shall have transformed them into scattered dust. (25:22–23)

The Parable of Icy Wind

The parable of what they spend on the life of this world is that of an icy wind which smites the tilth of people who have sinned against themselves and destroys it: for, it is not God who does them wrong, but it is they who are wronging themselves. (3:117)

The above Quranic phrase is meant to stress the completeness of loss of all efforts in the case of those who are bent on denying the truth. The tilth, or the gainful achievement of those who deny the truth, is lost. It is lost in its entirety, with nothing remaining to them in this world and in the life to come. On the other hand, the tilth of a believer is never lost in its entirety: for even if it is seemingly lost, there remains to him the expectation of a reward, in the life to come, for his patience in adversity.

I Wish I Was Mere Dust

Verily, We have warned you of suffering near at hand— [suffering] on the Day when man shall [clearly] see what his hands have sent ahead, and when he who has denied

***the truth shall say, "Oh, would that I was mere dust...!"
(78:40)***

Faces Will Be Humbled

And [on that Day] all faces will be humbled before the Ever-Living, the Self-Subsistent Fount of All Being; and undone shall be he who bears [a burden of] evildoing (20:111).

Send Us Back to Do Good Deeds

If thou couldst but see [how it will be on Judgment Day], when those who are lost in sin will hang their heads before their Sustainer, [saying:] "O our Sustainer! [Now] we have seen, and we have heard! Return us, then, [to our earthly life] that we may do good deeds: for [now], we are certain [of the truth]!" ... "Most certainly will I fill hell with invisible beings as well as with humans, all together!" (32:12–13)

13

Appearance before God and Testimonies of Prophets and Satan

ISLAMIC ETHICS FOLLOW from mankind's special status and responsibility on earth. There will be God's judgment of the quality of lives lived on earth and subsequent recompense carried out with absolute justice through the prerogative of God's merciful will. Men will come forward alone or as separate entities to face justice.

Angels Surrounding the Throne of Almightyness

And on the Day on which the skies, together with the clouds, shall burst asunder, and the angels are made to descend in a mighty descent—on that Day [it will become obvious to all that] true sovereignty belongs to the Most Gracious [alone]. (25:25–26) And the sky will be rent asunder—for, frail will it have become on that Day—; and the angels [will appear] at its ends, and, above them, eight will bear aloft on that Day the throne of thy Sustainer's almighty. (69:16–17) When the earth is crushed with crushing upon crushing, and [the majesty of] thy Sustainer stands revealed, as well as [the true nature of] the angels, rank upon rank? (89:21–22) O man—thou

[that] hast, verily, been toiling towards thy Sustainer in painful toil—then shalt thou meet Him! (84:6) Oh, verily, they are in doubt as to whether they will meet their Sustainer [on Judgment Day]! Oh, verily, He encompasses everything! (41:54) About what do they [most often] ask one another? About the awesome tiding [of resurrection], on which they [so utterly] disagree. Nay, but in time they will come to understand [it]! And once again: Nay, but in time they will come to understand! (78:1–5) High above all orders [of being] is He, in almightiness enthroned. By His Own will does He bestow inspiration upon whomever He wills of His servants, so as to warn [all human beings of the coming] of the Day when they shall meet Him—the Day when they shall come forth [from death], with nothing of themselves hidden from God. With whom will sovereignty rest on that Day? With God, the One who holds absolute sway over all that exists! (40:15–16)

Since God is infinite in space as well as in time, His “throne” has a purely metaphorical connotation, His absolute, unfathomable sway over all that exists. The “bearing aloft” of the throne of His almightiness also is a metaphor to the full manifestation of that almightiness on the Day of Judgment. The Quran is silent as to who or what the “eight” are on whom this manifestation rests. Some assume that they are eight angels; others, that they are eight ranks of angels; while still others admit that it is impossible to say whether “eight” or “eight thousand” is meant. The Quran states elsewhere, “none save God knows its final meaning” (see 3:7).

In man’s earthly life—irrespective of whether one is consciously aware of it or not—sorrow, pain, drudgery, and worry by far outweigh the rare moments of true happiness and satisfaction. Thus, the human condition is described as “painful toiling towards the Sustainer”—toward the moment when God will reveal His transcendental majesty.

Unto Him you shall be made to return: and never—not on earth and not in the skies—can you [hope to] elude Him: and you have none to protect you from God, and none to bring you succor. And [thus it is:] they who are bent on denying the truth of God’s messages or of their [ultimate] meeting with Him—it is they who abandon all hope of My grace and mercy: and it is they whom grievous suffering awaits [in the life to come]. (29:21–23) He alone grants life and deals death, and unto Him you all must return. (10:56)

Destined to Meet Their Sustainer in a Lonely State

Not one of all [the beings] that are in the heavens or on earth appears before the Most Gracious other than as a servant. Indeed, He has full cognizance of them, and has numbered them with [unfailing] numbering; and every one of them will appear before Him on resurrection Day in a lonely state. (19:93–95) For [on that Day] We will [resurrect the dead and] gather them all together, leaving out none of them. And they will be lined up before thy Sustainer, [and He will say:] [to those who in their lifetime denied the truth of resurrection] “Now, indeed, you have come to Us [in a lonely state], even as We created you in the first instance—although you were wont to assert that We would never appoint for you a meeting [with Us]! (18:47–48) [And God shall say:] “And now, indeed, you have come unto Us in a lonely state, even as We created you in the first instance.” (6:94)

The lonely state stresses the individual, nontransferable responsibility of every human being. Those who deny God deprive themselves of God’s grace and mercy. In other words, belief in God or one’s readiness to believe in Him is already an outcome of His grace and mercy,

just as suffering in the hereafter is an outcome of one's being "bent on denying the truth." They who deny the resurrection by implication deny His existence. They deceive themselves by asserting that they believe in God and at the same time reject the idea of life after death.

None Will Speak without God's Leave

On that Day, all will follow the summoning Voice from which there will be no escape; and all sounds will be hushed before the Most Gracious, and you will hear nothing but a faint sigh in the air. (20:108) [And] none shall have it in their power to raise their voices unto Him on the Day when all [human] souls and all the angels will stand up in ranks: none will speak but he to whom the Most Gracious will have given leave; and [everyone] will say [only] what is right. That will be the Day of Ultimate Truth. (78:37–39)

The statement that he whom God will allow to speak "will say only what is right" implies the impossibility of anyone being untruthful on Judgment Day. The ultimate truth will be the moment when the ultimate reality of human life and its purpose will become fully accessible to man's understanding.

Faces Overcast with Despair

When that Day comes, not a soul will speak, unless it be by His leave; and of those [that are gathered together], some will be wretched and some, happy. (11:105) And some faces will on that Day with dust be covered, with darkness overspread: these, these will be the ones who denied the truth and were immersed in iniquity! (80:40–42) Before Us

will all of them be arraigned [and be told]: "Today, then, no human being shall be wronged in the least, nor shall you be requited for aught but what you were doing [on earth]." (36:53–54)

Brief Stay on Earth

And He [God] will ask [the doomed]: "What number of years have you spent on earth?" They will answer: "We have spent there a day, or part of a day; but ask those who [are able to] count [time]..." [Whereupon] He will say: "You have spent there but a short while: had you but known [how short it was to be]! Did you, then, think that We created you in mere idle play, and that you would not have to return to Us (for judgment)?" (23:112–115)

This part of the dialogue between God and the doomed sinners touches upon the illusory, problematical character of time, as conceived by man, and the comparative shortness of the life of this world within the context of the ultimate timeless reality known only to God. The disappearance, upon resurrection, of man's earthbound concept of time is indicated by the helpless answer, "Ask those who can count time."

Placing Dispute before God for Judgment

Yet, verily, you are bound to die, [O Muhammad,] and, verily, they, too, are bound to die: and then, on the Day of Resurrection, you all shall place your dispute before your Sustainer... It is Thou who wilt judge between Thy servants [on Resurrection Day] with regard to all on which they were wont to differ!" (39:30–31, 46)

Testimonies of Prophets and Satan

Prophet Muhammad as a Witness

How, then, [will the sinners fare on Judgment Day,] when We shall bring forward witnesses from within every community, and bring thee [O Prophet] as witness against them? Those who were bent on denying the truth and paid no heed to the Apostle will on that Day wish that the earth would swallow them: but they shall not [be able to] conceal from God anything that has happened. (4:41–42)

On the Day of Judgment, the prophets that God has called forth within every community will symbolically bear witness to the fact that they had delivered God's message to their people and explained to them the meaning of right and wrong.

And when all the apostles are called together at a time appointed... (77:11) Thus, [on Judgment Day] We shall most certainly call to account all those unto whom a [divine] message was sent, and We shall most certainly call to account the message-bearers [themselves]; and thereupon We shall most certainly reveal unto them Our knowledge [of their doings]: for never have We been absent [from them]. (7:6–7) But one Day We shall raise up a witness out of every community, whereupon they who were bent on denying the truth will not be allowed to plead [ignorance], and neither will they be allowed to make amends. (16:84)

The term "the apostle" is used here in its generic sense and refers to all the apostles who preached God's message at one time or another. "Witnesses from within every community" refers to the

earlier apostles of whom every community or civilization has had a share. The prophets will bear witness for or against those to whom they conveyed God's message. The sinners will be refused permission to plead ignorance, depriving them of any subsequent excuse.

And the record [of everyone's deeds] will be laid bare, and all the prophets will be brought forward, and all [other] witnesses; and judgment will be passed on them all in justice. And they will not be wronged, for every human being will be repaid in full for whatever [good or evil] he has done: and He is fully aware of all that they do. (39:69–70)

The phrase "all the prophets as witnesses" means for or against those to whom they conveyed God's message.

Asking Sinners Their Response to Message-Bearers

"Are [the unbelievers] but waiting for the final meaning of that [Day of Judgment] to unfold?" [But] on the Day when its final meaning is unfolded, those who aforesaid had been oblivious thereof will say: "Our Sustainer's apostles have indeed told us the truth? Have we, then, any intercessors who could intercede on our behalf? Or could we be brought back [to life] so we might act otherwise than we were wont to act?" (7:53)

The Day of Judgment will be the fulfillment of the warnings contained in the Quran, and in this sense, it connotes the "unfolding of its final meaning."

And on that Day He will call unto them [Those who rejected the message-bearers] and will ask: "How did you respond to My message-bearers?"—but all arguments

and excuses will by then have been erased from their minds, and they will not [be able to] obtain any [helpful] answer from one another. (28:65–66) And in this manner do We cause evildoers to seduce one another by means of their [evil] doings. [And thus will God continue:] “O you who have lived in close communion with [evil] invisible beings and [like-minded] humans! Have there not come unto you apostles from among yourselves, who conveyed unto you My messages and warned you of the coming of this your Day [of Judgment]?” They will answer: “We do bear witness against ourselves!”—for the life of this world had beguiled them: and so they will bear witness against themselves that they had been denying the truth. (6:129–130)

Man’s newly awakened consciousness will compel him to bear witness against himself on Judgment Day. The expression “in this manner,” which introduces the above sentence, is an allusion to the manner in which the evil ones “whisper unto one another glittering half-truths meant to delude the mind” (6:112).

Testimony of Satan: I Deceived You

And when everything will have been decided, Satan will say: “Behold, God promised you something that was bound to come true! I too, held out [all manner of] promises to you—but I deceived you. Yet I had no power at all over you: I but called you—and you responded to me. Hence, blame not me, but blame yourselves. It is not for me to respond to your cries, nor for you to respond to mine: for, behold, I have [always] refused to admit that there was any truth in your erstwhile belief that I had a share in God’s divinity. (14:22) Satan has made all their own doings

seem goodly to them: and he is [as] close to them today [as he was to the sinners of yore]; hence, grievous suffering awaits them. (16:63)

Satan makes it clear above that it was only by insinuations that he was able to reach the sinner's soul, and had it not been for an already existing evil disposition due to lusts, anger, superstition, or fanciful ideas, these satanic insinuations would have had no effect whatsoever. Satan will reply that he cannot respond to your call for help, just as you should not have, in your lifetime, responded to his call. Satan, while endeavoring to lead men astray, never claims to be God's equal (see 7:20, where he speaks of God, to Adam and Eve, as "your Sustainer"). Satan tries to make men's sinful actions "seem goodly to them"; he persuades them that it is morally justifiable to follow one's fancies and selfish desires without any restraint. The sinner who submits to Satan's blandishments attributes to him a share in God's divinity.

When divine justice on the Day of Judgment prevails, retribution will correspond in direct proportion to the degree of one's guilt. There will be commensurate suffering for unatoned sins in the hereafter. Hell is a continuation of one's earthly life and not an arbitrary punishment.

14

Perfect Divine Justice and the Myth of Intercession

Record of Good and Bad Deeds

Say [unto them, O Prophet]: "Act! And God will behold your deeds, and [so will] His Apostle, and the believers. [In the end] you will be brought before Him and then He will make you understand what you have been doing." (9:105) Verily, We shall indeed bring the dead back to life; and We shall record whatever [deeds] they have sent ahead, and the traces [of good and evil] which they have left behind: for of all things We do take account in a record clear. (36:12)

Atom Weight of Good and Evil

On that Day all men will come forward, cut off from one another, to be shown their [past] deeds. And so, he who shall have done an atom's weight of good, shall behold it; and he who shall have done an atom's weight of evil shall behold it. (99:6–8) On the Day when every human being will find himself faced with all the good that he has done,

and with all the evil that he has done. (3:30) Man will be appraised, on that Day, of what he has done and what he has left undone. (75:13)

Balance-Scale

But We shall set up just balance-scales on Resurrection Day, and no human being shall be wronged in the least: for though there be [in him but] the weight of a mustard-seed [of good or evil], We shall bring it forth; and none can take count as We do! (21:47) And true will be the weighing on that Day. (7:8–9)

Weight Light in the Balance Destined to Abide in Hell

Whereas they whose weight is light in the balance—it is they who will have squandered their own selves, [destined] to abide in hell (23:103)... engulfed by an abyss. And what could make thee conceive what that [abyss] will be? A fire hotly burning! (101:9–11) And there shall be such as will have lost themselves in evil: oh, how [unhappy] will be they who have lost themselves in evil! (56:9) And thus shall thy Sustainer's word come true against all who are bent on denying the truth: they shall find themselves in the fire [of hell]. (40:6)

Whose weight is light in the balance because his sins exceed good deeds, his goal will be an abyss of suffering and despair.

God the Most Just of Judges

And [as for thyself, O Muhammad,] follow but what is being revealed unto thee, and be patient in adversity, until

God shall give His judgment: for He is the best of all judges. (10:109) He [God] cannot be called to account for whatever He does, whereas they will be called to account: and yet, they choose to worship [imaginary] deities instead of Him! (21:23–24) And with Him rests all judgment: and unto Him shall you all be brought back. (28:70) What, then, [O man,] could henceforth cause thee to give the lie to this moral law? Is not God the most just of judges? (95:7–8)

The above rhetorical question has this implication: Since the moral law referred to here is stressed in the teachings of all monotheistic religions, its truth ought to be self-evident to any unprejudiced person. The rejection of the moral law amounts to a negation of all freedom of moral choice on man's part and of justice on the part of God, who is the most just of judges.

God's Omniscience Precludes Intercession

Say: "Do you [think that you could] inform God of anything in the heavens or on earth that He does not know?" (10:18) You have none to protect you from God, and none to intercede for you [on Judgment Day]: will you not, then, bethink yourselves? (32:4) Hence, warn them of that Day which draws ever nearer, when the hearts will chokingly come up to the throats: no loving friend will the evildoers have, nor any intercessor who would be heeded: [for] He is aware of the [most] stealthy glance, and of all that the hearts would conceal. (40:18–19) Who is there that could intercede with Him, unless it is by His leave? (2:255) There is none that could intercede with Him unless He grants leave therefor (10:3) [On that Day] none will have [the benefit of] intercession unless he has [in his lifetime] entered into a bond with the Most Gracious. (19:87) On that Day,

intercession shall be of no avail [to any] save him in whose case the Most Gracious will have granted leave therefor, and whose word [of faith] He will have accepted: [for] He knows all that lies open before men and all that is hidden from them, whereas they cannot encompass Him with their knowledge. (20:109–110)

God's omniscience is the reason why there can be no intercession with Him since He knows the secrets of the heart and even the stealthiest glances. The belief in the efficacy of anyone's unqualified intercession with God, or mediation between man and Him, is equated with a denial of God's omniscience (all-knowing), which takes all the circumstances of the sinner and his sinning into consideration. Thus, the Quran rejects the popular but false belief among Muslims in unqualified "intercession" by living or dead saints or prophets. God will grant to His prophets on Judgment Day the permission to symbolically intercede for sinners who have already achieved His redemptive acceptance by their repentance or basic goodness. In other words, the right of intercession granted to the prophets will be an expression of God's approval of them. Furthermore, denying the possibility of unqualified intercession indirectly stresses not only that God is omniscient (all-knowing)—requiring no mediator—but also that His will is immutable (never-changing).

The "bond with God" denotes the realization of His oneness and uniqueness. Even great sinners may hope for God's forgiveness—symbolically expressed by the right of "intercession," which will be granted to the prophets on Judgment Day provided that during their life on earth, they were aware of God's existence and oneness.

On that Day, all dominion shall [visibly] belong to God. He shall judge [all men and make a distinction] between them:... for those who were bent on denying the truth and gave the lie to Our messages, there shall be shameful

suffering in store. (22:56–57) And there shall be such as will have lost themselves in evil: oh, how [unhappy] will be they who have lost themselves in evil! (56:9) And they [who have died] are thereupon brought before God, their true Lord Supreme. Oh, verily, His alone is all judgment: and He is the swiftest of all reckoners! (6:62)

There will be no hope on the Day of Judgment for those who failed to realize the existence of God or to submit to His guidance. Strong emphasis on God's mercy should not conjure up a permissive deity. God's perfect justice is based on the belief that He knows and sees all.

15

Torments of Hell

HELL'S PORTRAYAL IS at times very graphic with its account of molten metal, boiling liquids, and the fire that splits everything to pieces. Imagine the greatest suffering, bodily as well as spiritually, that a man may experience: burning with fire, utter loneliness, and bitter desolation, the torment of unceasing frustration, a condition of neither living nor dying. Imagine this pain, this darkness, and this despair, intensified beyond anything imaginable in this world—and at the same time entirely different from anything imaginable, and you will know, however vaguely, what is meant by hell.

On that Day hell will be brought [within sight]; on that Day man will remember [all that he did and failed to do]: but what will that remembrance avail him? He will say, "Oh, would that I had provided beforehand for my life [to come]!" For, none can make suffer as He will make suffer [the sinners] on that Day. (89:23–25)

Sinners Grouped according to Gravity of Sins

And on that Day, We shall gather from within every community a host of those who gave the lie to Our messages;

and they will be grouped [according to the gravity of their sins] until such a time as they shall come [to be judged. And] He will say: "Did you give the lie to My messages even though you failed to encompass them with [your] knowledge? (Or without having understood them or made any attempt to understand them) Or what was it that [you thought] you were doing?" And the word [of truth] will stand revealed against them in the face of all the wrong which they had committed, and they will not [be able to] utter a single word [of excuse]." (27:83–85)

The phrase "the word [of truth] will stand revealed against them" refers to the truth becoming obvious to them against all their expectations and that will confound them utterly at the approach of the Last Hour, Resurrection, and God's Judgment—all of which they regarded as "fables of ancient times." Alternatively, the phrase may be understood as when the sentence of doom is passed on them—at the approach of the Last Hour, when it will be too late for repentance.

Sinners Gathered on Their Knees around Hell

And when all human beings are coupled [with their deeds]... and when the scrolls [of men's deeds] are unfolded, and when heaven is laid bare, and when the blazing fire [of hell] is kindled bright. (81:7, 10–12) And so, by thy Sustainer, [on Judgment Day] We shall most certainly bring them forth together with the satanic forces [which impelled them in life] and then We shall most certainly gather them, on their knees, around hell; (19:68)

When men are coupled with their deeds, none will be able to divest themselves of responsibility for their past deeds. The sinners will be symbolically linked on Judgment Day with the satanic forces that impelled them in life.

Fate of the Most Determined and Hardened Sinners

We shall, indeed, draw forth from every group [of sinners] the ones that had been most determined in their disdainful rebellion against the Most Gracious: for, indeed, We know best as to which of them is most deserving of the fires of hell. (19:69–70) On the day when We shall...drive those who were lost in sin unto hell as a thirsty herd is driven to a well. (19:85–86)

Only those hardened and most determined sinners who have consciously and deliberately rejected the idea of man's responsibility before God and have thus led their weaker, less-conscious fellow men astray will be consigned to the deepest suffering in the hereafter. They will be utterly humbled and crushed by their belated realization of God's judgment and of the ethical truths that they had arrogantly neglected in life.

And every one of you [who refuses to believe in resurrection] will come within sight of it: this is, with thy Sustainer, a decree that must be fulfilled. And once again: We shall save [from hell] those who have been conscious of Us; but We shall leave the evildoers, on their knees. (19:71–72)

As the last sentence above indicates, not every sinner will be irrevocably consigned to the suffering described in the Quran as hell. God's mercy will prevail over His wrath for those sinners who were vaguely conscious of Him. In the end, only the most hardened sinners will enter hell.

Fire of Hell for the Enemies of God

Hence, [warn all men of] the Day when the enemies of God shall be gathered together before the fire, and then

shall be driven onward, till, when they come close to it... But you thought that God did not know much of what you were doing and this very thought about your Sustainer has brought you to perdition, and so now you find yourselves among the lost!" And then, [even] if they endure [their lot] in patience, the fire will still be their abode [unless God wills to reprieve them]; and if they pray to be allowed to make amends, they will not be allowed to do so. (41:19–20, 22–24)

Four Symbols of Torment of Hell

And leave Me alone [to deal] with those who give the lie to the truth—those who enjoy the blessings of life [without any thought of God]... for, behold, heavy fetters [await them] with Us, and a blazing fire, and food that chokes, and grievous suffering. (73:11–13)

These four conditions are symbolic of torment in the hereafter, denoting the spiritual consequences of one's actions in life. All descriptions of otherworldly suffering or hell will be utterly dissimilar from all earthly experiences, including its immeasurable intensity. Similarly, all Quranic descriptions of the sinner's suffering in the hereafter are metaphors or allegories relating to situations and conditions, which can be understood only using comparisons with physical phenomena lying within the range of human experience.

Heavy Fetters: The First Symbol of Torment

On that Day, you will see all who were lost in sin linked together in fetters. It is a metaphor of their own evil deeds and inclinations and of the utter despair that will be common to all of them in the hereafter. It may also be an allusion to the chain reaction, that every evil deed is bound to set in motion on earth, one evil unavoidably begetting another.

[Thereupon the command will go forth:] "Lay hold of him, and shackle him, and then let him enter hell, and then thrust him into a chain [of other sinners like him—a chain] the length whereof is seventy cubits: for, behold, he did not believe in God, the Tremendous, and did not feel any urge to feed the needy: and so, no friend has he here today, nor any food save the filth which none but the sinners eat!" (69:30–37) For on that Day thou wilt see all who were lost in sin linked together in fetters, clothed in garments of black pitch, with fire veiling their faces. [And all shall be judged on that Day,] so that God may requite every human being for all that he has earned [in life]: verily, God is swift in reckoning! This is a message unto all mankind. Hence, let them be warned thereby, and let them know that He is the One and Only God; and let those who are endowed with insight take this to heart! (14:49–52)

The chain is exceedingly long. The number seventy is often used in classical Arabic in the sense of "very many," whose length only God knows. One cubit is equal to 1.5 feet. The term "filth" contains an allusion to the devouring of all that is abominable in the spiritual sense and that only sinners metaphorically eat—in this world and in the hereafter as well. The "garments of black pitch" and the "fire veiling their faces" are metaphors of the inexpressible suffering and loathsome horror that will enwrap the sinners' souls on the Day of Judgment (see also 73:13).

Shackles and Chains around Their Neck

Are thou not aware of how far they who call God's messages in question have lost sight of the truth?—they who give the lie to this divine writ and [thus] to all [the messages] with which We sent forth Our apostles [of old]? But in time they will come to know [how blind they have

been: they will know it on Judgment Day], when they shall have to carry the shackles and chains [of their own making] around their necks: and are dragged into burning despair, and in the end become fuel for the fire [of hell]. And then they will be asked: "Where now are those [powers] to which you were wont to ascribe divinity side by side with God?" They will answer: "They have forsaken us—or, rather, what we were wont to invoke aforetime did not exist at all!" [And they will be told:] "It is thus that God lets the deniers of the truth go astray: this is an outcome of your having arrogantly exulted on earth without any [concern for what is] right, and of your having been so full of self-conceit! Enter [now] the gates of hell, therein to abide: and how vile an abode for all who are given to false pride!" Hence, remain thou patient in adversity—for, verily, God's promise always comes true. And whether We show thee [in this world] something of what We hold in store for those [deniers of the truth], or whether We cause thee to die [ere that retribution takes place—know that, in the end, it is unto Us that they will be brought back. (40:69–77)

Since, as the Quran so often points out, the fundamental truths outlined in all divine revelations are the same, a rejection of the last of them amounts to a rejection of all the preceding ones. The metaphor of "the shackles and chains" represents man's willful self-abandonment to false values and evil ways and of a resulting enslavement of the spirit. "What we invoked aforetime did not exist at all" reflects realizing, belatedly, the intrinsic nothingness of all those imaginary powers and values—including the belief in man's alleged self-sufficiency and greatness—to which they paid homage in life. They allowed themselves to pursue the illusions and foolish fancies in consequence of their unwillingness to acknowledge the

self-evident truth of God's existence and uniqueness and of man's utter dependence on Him.

Shackles of Their Own Making

But if thou art amazed [at the marvels of God's Creation], amazing, too, is their saying, "What! After we have become dust, shall we indeed be [restored to life] in a new act of creation?" It is they who [thus show that they] are bent on denying their Sustainer; and it is they who carry the shackles [of their own making] around their necks; and it is they who are destined for the fire, therein to abide. (13:5)

It is amazing that one can refuse to believe in God despite all the evidence, accessible to human observation, of the existence of a definite purpose in all life phenomena and thus of the existence of a conscious creative power. It is no less amazing to see people who vaguely believe in God yet refuse to believe in the individual resurrection. If God has created the universe and the phenomenon of life, He obviously has the power to recreate life—and its requisite physical vehicle—in a new act of creation. By denying the possibility of resurrection, people implicitly deny God's almightiness and thus His reality.

Sinners Dragged by Their Forelocks

All who were lost in sin shall by their marks be known and shall by their forelocks and their feet be seized! This will be the hell, which those who are lost in sin [now] call a lie: between it and [their own] burning-hot despair they will wander to and fro! (55:41, 43–44)

"Dragged by their forelocks" is an allusion to their utter humiliation and disgrace. When the ancient Arabs wanted to stress someone's

subjection to another person, they would say, “His forelock is in the hand of so-and-so.” The allegorical nature of all Quranic descriptions of rewards and punishments in the hereafter is hinted at in the phrasing of the above verse, which speaks of the sinners “wandering to and fro” between hell and burning despair—tossed between factual suffering and the despair of vain regrets.

The Fire of Hell: The Second Symbol of Torment

A blazing fire is one of the symbols of the torment of hell. The fire is a means of purification of the soul. The concept of the fire of hell is referred to in the Quran under different names, namely *nar* (fire), *jahim* (blazing fire), *sair* (blazing flame), *saqar* (hellfire), *laza* (raging flame), and *hutamah* (crushing torment).

Hell, the Outcome of Your Actions

We shall make him taste suffering through fire; [and he shall be told:] “This is an outcome of what your own hands have wrought—for, never does God do the least wrong to His creatures!” (22:9–10) [But,] behold, they who are lost in sin shall abide in the suffering of hell: it will not be lightened for them; and therein they will be lost in hopeless despair. And it is not We who will be doing wrong unto them, but it is they who will have wronged themselves. (43:74–76)

The expression “they shall abide in the suffering of hell” indicates only a limited period but does not convey the meaning of perpetuity.

Oblivious of God

[And He will say unto the sinners:] “Taste, then, [the recompense] for your having been oblivious of the coming of this your Day [of Judgment]—for, verily, We are [now]

ignore you: taste, then, [this] abiding suffering for all [the evil] that you were wont to do!" (32:14) And on that Day, We shall place hell, for all to see, before those who denied the truth—those whose eyes had been veiled against any remembrance of Me because they could not bear to listen [to the voice of truth]! Do they who are bent on denying the truth think, perchance, that they could take [any of] My creatures for protectors against Me? We have readied hell to welcome all who [thus] deny the truth! (18:100–102) Whereas, behold, the wicked will indeed be in a blazing fire [a fire] which they shall enter on Judgment Day, and which they shall not [be able to] evade. (82:11–16)

Worship Other than God

Whereas the blazing fire will be laid open before those who had been lost in grievous error; and they will be asked: "Where now is all that you were wont to worship instead of God? Can these [things and beings] be of any help to you or to themselves?" (26:90–93) And so, on the Day when those who were bent on denying the truth will be brought within sight of the fire [and will be asked], "Is not this the truth?"—they will answer, "Yea, by Our Sustainer!" [And] He will say: "Taste, then, this suffering as an outcome of your denial of the truth!" (46:34)

Followers of Satan Destined for the Blazing Flame

Behold, Satan is a foe unto you: so treat him as a foe. He but calls on his followers to the end that they might find themselves among such as are destined for the blazing flame—[seeing that] for those who are bent on denying the truth, there is severe suffering in store. (35:6–7)

Hellfire

The term “hellfire” is one of the seven names of fire given in the Quran to the concept of the suffering in the hereafter, which man brings upon himself by sinning.

And so, when the great overwhelming event [of resurrection] comes to pass on that Day man will [clearly] remember all that he has ever wrought; and the blazing fire [of hell] will be laid open before all who [are destined to] see it. For, unto him who shall have transgressed the bounds of what is right and preferred the life of this world [to the good of his soul], that blazing fire will truly be the goal! (79:34–39) [Hence,] I shall cause him to endure hell-fire [in the life to come]! And what could make thee conceive what hell-fire is? It does not allow to live, and neither leaves [to die], making [all truth] visible to mortal man. (74:26–29)

“Making [all truth] visible to mortal man” relates to the sinner’s belated cognition of the truth as well as to his distressing insight into his personal nature, his past failings, and deliberate wrongdoings. He now realizes his responsibility for the suffering that is in store for him, a state of neither life nor death.

Nay, but consider the moon! Consider the night when it departs, and the morn when it dawns! Verily, that [hell-fire] is indeed one of the great [forewarnings] a warning to mortal man to every one of you, whether he chooses to come forward or to hang back! [On the Day of Judgment,] every human being will be held in a pledge for whatever [evil] he has wrought. (74:32–38)

Just as the changing phases of the moon and the alternation of night and day are the outcomes of God-given natural laws, so too a sinner’s

suffering in the hereafter is a natural consequence of his deliberate wrongdoing in this world. Hellfire is an awesome forewarning irrespective of whether one has chosen to come forward and follow or to disregard and hang back from the divine call, implying that even true believers may stumble into sinning and need to be warned.

If they but knew—they who are bent on denying the truth—[that there will come] a time when they will not be able to ward off the fire from their faces, nor from their backs, and will not find any succor! (21: 39) On the Day when they shall be thrust into the fire with [an irresistible] thrust, [and will be told:] “This is the fire which you were wont to call a lie! Was it, then, a delusion—or is it that you failed to see [its truth]? Endure it [now]! But [whether you] bear yourselves with patience or without patience, it will be the same to you: you are but being requited for what you were wont to do.” (52:13–16) When they are cast into that [hell], they will hear its breath indrawing as it boils up, well-nigh bursting with fury; [and] every time a host [of such sinners] is flung into it, its keepers will ask them, “Has no warner ever come to you?” They will reply: “Yea, a warner did indeed come to us, but we gave him the lie and said, ‘Never has God sent down anything [by way of revelation]! You [self-styled warners] are but lost in a great delusion!’” And they will add: “Had we but listened [to those warnings], or [at least] used our own reason, we would not [now] be among those who are destined for the blazing flame!” Thus will they come to realize their sins: but [by that time,] remote will have become all good from those who are destined for the blazing flame. (67:7–11)

Reason, properly used, must lead man to a cognition of God's existence and of the fact that a definite plan underlies all His creation. A logical concomitant of that cognition is the realization that certain

aspects of the divine plan touching upon human life—in particular, the distinction between right and wrong—are being continuously disclosed to man through revelation, which God bestows on His chosen message-bearers, the prophets. This innate “bond with God” (referred to in 2:27) may be broken only at the expense of man’s spiritual future, with suffering in the life to come as the inevitable alternative.

Spiritual Disgrace

Limitless art Thou in Thy glory! Keep us safe, then, from suffering through fire! “O our Sustainer! Whomsoever Thou shalt commit to the fire, him, verily, wilt Thou have brought to disgrace [in this world], and such evildoers will have none to succor them. (3:191–192)

Unrepentant Sinners in the Fire

On the other hand, could one on whom [God’s] sentence of suffering has been passed [be rescued by man]? Couldst thou, perchance, save one who is [already, as it were,] in the fire? (39:19)

God always accepts a sinner’s sincere repentance, provided it is proffered before the hour of death. The “sentence of suffering” relates to those who die without repentance. After death, they become aware of the coming punishment and find themselves “already in the fire.”

Sparks from Giant Burning Logs

Woe on that Day unto those who give the lie to the truth! Go on towards that [resurrection] which you were wont to

call a lie! Go on towards the threefold shadow that will offer no [cooling] shade and will be of no avail against the flame which behold!—will throw up sparks like [burning] logs, like giant fiery ropes! (77:28–33) However, for such as give the lie to [the announcement of] the Last Hour We have readied a blazing flame: when it shall face them from afar, they will hear its angry roar and its hiss; and when they are flung, linked [all] together, into a tight space within, they will pray for extinction there and then! [But they will be told:] “Pray not today for one single extinction but pray for many extinctions!” (25:11–14)

The “tight space” into which they will be flung refers to distress accompanied by a feeling of constriction. Although the concept of extinction implies finality and is unrepeatable, the sinners’ praying for “many extinctions” is used here as a metonym for their indescribable suffering and a desire for a final escape.

Thrown Back into Fire

But as for those who are lost in iniquity—their goal is the fire: as oft as they will try to come out of it, they will be thrown back into it; and they will be told, “Taste [now] this suffering through the fire which you were wont to call a lie!” (32:20) A flash of fire will be let loose upon you, and smoke, and you will be left without succor! (55:35)

Neither Alive nor Dead

Remind, then, [others of the truth, regardless of] whether this reminding [would seem to] be of use [or not]: in mind will keep it he who stands in awe [of God], but aloof from it will remain that most hapless wretch—he who [in the

life to come] shall have to endure the great fire wherein he will neither die nor remain alive [in consequence of having remained aloof from the divine reminder]. (87:9–13)

Burning Despair

But if one happens to be of those who call the truth a lie, and [thus] go astray, a welcome of burning despair [awaits him in the life to come,] and the heat of a blazing fire! This is indeed the truth of truth [or truth most certain]. (56:92–96) ***Art thou not aware of those who have preferred a denial of the truth to God’s blessings and [thereby] invited their people to alight in that abode of utter desolation—hell—which they [themselves] will have to endure? And how vile a state to settle in! For, they claimed that there are powers that could rival God, and so they strayed from His path. Say: “Enjoy yourselves [in this world], but, verily, the fire will be your journey’s end!”*** (14:28–30)

“Those who have preferred a denial of the truth” is an allusion to the relationship between the arrogant leaders of thought and their weak followers, who have exchanged God’s blessings for a denial of the truth.

Faces Tossed around in Blazing Fire

Verily, God has rejected the deniers of the truth, and has readied for them a blazing fire, therein to abide beyond the count of time: no protectors will they find, and none to bring them succor. On the Day when their faces shall be tossed about in the fire, they will exclaim, “Oh, would that we had paid heed unto God, and paid heed unto the

Apostle!" (33:64–66) But they who shall come with evil deeds—their faces will be thrust into the fire, [and they will be asked:] "Is this aught but a just requital for what you were doing [in life]?" (27:90)

Those who did only evil or whose evil deeds outweigh their good deeds—their faces being “tossed about in the fire”—is symbolic of the annihilation of sinners and their reduction to utter passivity.

Prone on Their Faces, Blind, Deaf, and Dumb

And we shall gather them together on the Day of Resurrection, [they will lie] prone upon their faces, blind and dumb and deaf, with hell as their goal; [and] every time [the fire] abates, We shall increase for them [its] blazing flame. Such will be their requital for having rejected Our messages and having said, "After we will have become bones and dust, shall we, forsooth, be raised from the dead in a new act of creation?" (17:97–98)

The denial of God’s power to resurrect the dead is equivalent to a denial of His almightiness and of His Being—all of which is characterized by the words “blind and deaf and dumb” in the preceding verse. God has the power to resurrect them individually, each of them having the same identity (or “likeness”) that he or she had before death.

Garments of Fire

But [thus it is:] as for those who are bent on denying the truth—garments of fire shall be cut out for them [in the life to come]; burning despair will be poured over their heads, causing all that is within their bodies, as well as the skins, to melt away. And they shall be held [in this state as

if] by iron grips; and every time they try in their anguish to come out of it, they shall be returned thereto and [be told]: “Taste suffering through fire [to the full]!” (22:19–22)

The allegorical descriptions of the suffering that will befall the sinners in the hereafter cause their inner and outer personalities to disintegrate. “They shall be held in iron grip” denotes the inescapability of the suffering in the hereafter to which “they who are bent on denying the truth” condemn themselves.

Burnt Skin Replaced Over and Over Again

And nothing could be as burning as [the fire of] hell: for, verily, those who are bent on denying the truth of Our messages We shall, in time, cause to endure fire: [and] every time their skins are burnt off, We shall replace them with new skins, so that they may taste suffering [in full]. Verily, God is almighty, wise. (4:55–56) And [on that Day,] the evil of their doings will become obvious to them, and they will be overwhelmed by the very thing which they were wont to deride. And [the word] will be spoken: “Today We shall be oblivious to you as you were oblivious of the coming of this your Day [of Judgment], and so your goal is the fire, and you shall have none to succor you: this, because you made God’s messages the target of your mockery, having allowed the life of this world to beguile you!” On that Day, therefore, they will not be brought out of the fire, nor will they be allowed to make amends. (45:33–35)

Sinners’ Fuel of the Fire

“O our Sustainer! Verily, Thou wilt gather humanity together to witness the Day about [the coming of] which

there is no doubt: verily, God never fails to fulfil His promise. Behold, as for those who are bent on denying the truth—neither their worldly possessions nor their offspring will in the least avail them against God; and it is they, they who shall be the fuel of the fire! (3:9–10)

Blind Imitation of Erring Predecessors

And once again: Verily, the blazing fire is their ultimate goal—for, behold, they found their forebears on a wrong way, and [now] they make haste to follow in their footsteps. Thus, indeed, most of the people of old went astray before them, although, verily, We had sent warners unto them: and behold what happened in the end to those that had been warned [to no avail]! Except for God’s true servants, [most people are apt to go astray.] (37:68–74)

“Follow in their footstep,” or blind imitation of the absurd beliefs, valuations, and customs of one’s erring predecessors and disregard of all evidence of the truth supplied by both reason and divine revelation, is here shown to be the principal cause of suffering.

Grouped Together with Sinners of Olden Times

Woe on that Day unto those who give the lie to the truth that Day on which they will not [be able to] utter a word, nor be allowed to proffer excuses! Woe on that Day unto those who give the lie to the truth—that Day of Distinction [between the true and the false, when they will be told]: “We have brought you together with those [sinners] of olden times; and if you [think that you] have a subterfuge left, try to outwit Me!” (77:34–39)

Icy-Cold Darkness

But, verily, the most evil of all goals awaits those who are wont to transgress the bounds of what is right: hell will they have to endure—and how vile a resting-place! This, [then, for them] so let them taste it: burning despair and ice-cold darkness and, coupled with it, further [suffering] of a similar nature. (38:55–58) [On that Day,] hell will lie in wait [for those who deny the truth] a goal for all who are wont to transgress the bounds of what is right! In it shall they remain for a long time. Neither coolness shall they taste therein nor any [thirst-quenching] drink only burning despair and ice-cold darkness: a meet requital [for their sins]! (78:21–26)

The “ice-cold darkness” of the spirit together with “burning despair” will characterize the suffering of inveterate sinners in the life to come. “A long time” signifies a limited period and not eternity, and this is in tune with many indications in the Quran to the effect that the suffering described as hell is not eternal, as well as with several authentic sayings of the Prophet.

Disowned by Falsely Adored Personalities

[On that Day] it will come to pass that those who had been [falsely] adored [saints or alleged divine personalities] shall disown their followers, and the latter shall see the suffering [that awaits them], with all their hopes [of salvation] cut to pieces! And then those followers shall say: “Would that we had a second chance [in life], so that we could disown them as they have disowned us!” Thus will God show them their works [in a manner that will cause them] bitter regrets; but they will not come out of the fire. (2:166–167)

Suffering according to the Worst Deeds

But We shall most certainly give those who are [thus] bent on denying the truth a taste of suffering severe, and We shall most certainly requite them according to the worst of their deeds! That requital of God's enemies will be the fire [of the hereafter]: in it will they have an abode of immeasurable duration as an outcome of their having knowingly rejected Our messages. And they who [in their life on earth] were bent on denying the truth will [thereupon] exclaim: "O our Sustainer! Show us those of the invisible beings and humans that have led us astray: we shall trample them underfoot, so that they shall be the lowest of all!" (41:27-29)

See *Surah* 6:112—"against every prophet We have set up as enemies the evil forces [*shayatin*] from among humans as well as from among invisible beings."

Punishment for Denying Resurrection

The while the true promise [of resurrection] draws close [to its fulfillment]. But then, lo! the eyes of those who [in their lifetime] were bent on denying the truth will stare in horror, [and they will exclaim:] "Oh, woe unto us! We were indeed heedless of this [promise of resurrection]!—Nay, we were [bent on] doing evil!" [Then they will be told:] "Verily, you and all that you [were wont to] worship instead of God are but the fuel of hell: that is what you are destined for. If those [false objects of your worship] had truly been divine, they would not have been destined for it: but [as it is, you] all shall abide therein!" Moaning will be their lot therein, and nothing [else] will they hear therein. (21:97-100) But they answer: "When

will that final decision take place, if what you [believers] say is true?" Say: "On the Day of the Final Decision, their [newly-found] faith will be of no use to those who [in their lifetime] were bent on denying the truth, nor will they be granted respite!"—and then leave them alone, and wait [for the truth to unfold as] they, behold, are waiting... (32:28–30) They who blunder along, in ignorance lost they who [mockingly] ask: "When is that Day of Judgment to be?" [It will be] a Day when they will be sorely tried by the fire, [and will be told:] "Taste this is your trial! It is this that you were so hastily asking for!" (51:11–14)

This "trial by the fire" is the Quranic allusions described as hell.

Good Deeds Outweighed by the Sin of Denying Resurrection

"As for those who care for [no more than] the life of this world and its bounties—We shall repay them in full for all that they did in this [life], and they shall not be deprived of their just due therein: [yet] it is they who, in the life to come, shall have nothing but the fire—for in vain shall be all that they wrought in this [world], and worthless all that they ever did!" Can, then, [he who cares for no more than the life of this world be compared with] one who takes his stand on a clear evidence from his Sustainer, conveyed through [this] testimony from Him, as was the revelation vouchsafed to Moses aforetime—[a divine writ ordained by Him] to be a guidance and grace [unto man]? They [who understand this message—it is they alone who truly] believe in it... Oh, verily, God's rejection is the due of all evildoers who turn others away from the path of God and try to make it appear crooked—since it is they, they who refuse to acknowledge the truth of the life to come! (11:15–19)

Although their good deeds will be taken fully into account on Judgment Day, they will be outweighed by the sinner's refusal to believe in the resurrection and the life to come. Their refusal to believe in life after death is the ultimate cause of their wrongdoing. In other words, belief in the resurrection, God's judgment, and life in the hereafter is here postulated as the only valid and lasting source of human morality.

But what about a person who leads a comfortable, even rich life but also one of virtue and generosity, and who hopes the promise of the afterlife is true, but who just can't believe in it? Is this person still condemned to fire of hell? See Chapter 25, "Accounting of the Righteous among Nonbelievers and Those in Limbo."

The Third Symbol of Torment

Food that chokes is the third symbol of the torment of hell. The sinner tries to swallow the choking agony of deprivation and the pain of separation from the objects of his desire.

Prophet's Vision of Hell and Tree of Deadly Fruits

And lo! We said unto thee, [O Prophet:], "Behold, thy Sustainer encompasses all mankind [within His knowledge and might]: and so We have ordained that the vision which We have shown thee—as also the tree [of hell,] cursed in this Qur'an—shall be but a trial for men]. Now [by Our mentioning hell] We convey a warning to them: but [if they are bent on denying the truth,] this [warning] only increases their gross, overweening arrogance. (17:60)

The vision mentioned here is the Prophet's experience of the Ascension, preceded by the Night Journey (see under "Heaven" for complete details).

The Tree of Deadly Fruits

The lote-tree at the boundary of paradise (see next chapter) is paralleled by the tree of *zaqqum* at the pit of hell, with its bitter smell and flowers like the heads of the demons. All Quranic references to hell and paradise are allegorical and therefore liable to be grossly misunderstood if one takes them in their literal sense and arbitrarily interprets them. And so, the “tree of deadly fruit”—one of the metonymies for the suffering of the sinners in the hereafter—has become “a trial for evildoers.”

As this experience was and is open to conflicting interpretations and hence may give rise to doubts regarding its objective reality, it becomes—as stated in the sequence—“a trial for men.” The weak of faith and the superficial are shaken in their belief in the Prophet Muhammad’s veracity and thus in his prophethood. Those who firmly believe in God see in it an extraordinary evidence of the spiritual grace that He bestows on His chosen ones, who are therefore strengthened in their faith in the message of the Quran. With regard to “the tree cursed in this Quran,” it is the tree of deadly fruit spoken of in 37:62 and 44:43 as one of the manifestations of hell (the latter of which explains why this “tree” has become “a trial for men”). In the above context, it is described as “cursed” because it symbolizes hell itself. The reason why only hell is specifically mentioned here is to convey a warning.

The Tree of Deadly Fruit *“The [hellish] tree of deadly fruit?” Verily, We have caused it to be a trial for evildoers: for, behold, it is a tree that grows in the very heart of the blazing fire [of hell], its fruit [as repulsive] as satans’ heads; and they [who are lost in evil] are indeed bound to eat thereof and to fill their bellies therewith. And, behold, above all this, they will be confounded with burning despair. (37:62–67)*

The “deadly food,” a symbol of hell, may be appropriately rendered as “the tree of deadly fruit” (identical with “the tree cursed in this Quran,” mentioned in 17:60 above). It symbolizes the fact that the otherworldly sufferings that the Quran describes as hell are but the fruit or consequence of one’s evil deeds on earth. “Fruit as repulsive as Satan’s head” is a metaphor meant to express the ultimate in repulsiveness and ugliness, as Satan is considered to be the epitome of all that is evil. And upon it, they will have an admixture or confusion of burning despair (see 6:70).

Eating from the Tree of Deadly Fruits

Verily, [in the life to come] the tree of deadly fruit will be the food of the sinful: like molten lead, it will boil in the belly, like the boiling of burning despair. [And the word will be spoken:] “Seize him, [O you forces of hell,] and drag him into the midst of the blazing fire: then pour over his head the anguish of burning despair! Taste it—thou who [on earth] hast considered yourself so mighty, so noble! This is the very thing which you [deniers of the truth] were wont to call in question!” (44:43–50)

Insatiable Thirst and Hunger

But as for those who have persevered in evil—what of those who have persevered in evil? [They will find themselves] in the midst of scorching winds, and burning despair, and the shadows of black smoke—[shadows] neither cooling nor soothing. For, behold, in times gone by they were wont to abandon themselves wholly to the pursuit of pleasures, and would persist in heinous sinning, and would say, “What! After we have died

and become mere dust and bones, shall we, forsooth, be raised from the dead?—and perhaps, too, our forebears of old?” Say: “Verily, those of olden times and those of later times will indeed be gathered together at an appointed time on a Day known [only to God]: and then, verily, O you who have gone astray and called the truth a lie, you will indeed have to taste of the tree of deadly fruit, and will have to fill your bellies therewith, and will thereupon have to drink [many a draught] of burning despair—drink it as the most insatiably thirsty camels drink!” Such will be their welcome on Judgment Day! (56:41–56)

Drinking Waters of Bitter Distress

And [thus it is:] every arrogant enemy of the truth shall be undone [in the life to come], with hell awaiting him; and he shall be made to drink the water of most bitter distress, gulping it [unceasingly,] little by little, and yet hardly able to swallow it. And death will beset him from every quarter—but he shall not die: for [yet more] severe suffering lies ahead of him. (14:15–17)

The word *sadid* signifies anything that is repulsive; it is also used to describe the pus that flows from wounds or the viscous liquid that oozes from corpses. The expression *ma sadid* is used here as purely metaphorical and should be understood as “waters of most bitter distress”—a metaphor of the boundless suffering and bitter frustration which, in the life to come, awaits those who were bent on denying all spiritual truths.

Can this [parable of paradise] be likened unto [the parable of the recompense of] such as are to abide in the fire

and be given waters of burning despair to drink, so that it will tear their bowels asunder? (47:15)

This refers to exceedingly hot or boiling water; for an explanation of this metaphor, see 6:70.

Boiling Springs and Bitter Dry Thorns

Has there come unto thee the tiding of the Overshadowing Event [on the Day of resurrection]? Some faces will on that Day be downcast, toiling [under burdens of sin], worn out [by fear], about to enter a glowing fire, given to drink from a boiling spring. No food for them, save the bitterness of dry thorns, which gives no strength and neither stills hunger. (88:1–7)

The noun *dari* is said to denote a bitter, thorny plant in its dried state, which signifies “he became abject” or “abased”—hence the rendering of this metaphorical expression as “the bitterness of dry thorns.” A similarly metaphorical meaning is attached to the expression “a boiling spring.”

Water Hot Like Molten Lead

Verily, for all who sin against themselves [by rejecting Our truth] We have readied a fire whose billowing folds will encompass them from all sides; and if they beg for water, they will be given water [hot] like molten lead, which will scald their faces: how dreadful a drink, and how evil a place to rest! (18:29)

The expression “billowing folds” denotes an awning or the outer covering of a tent and alludes here to the billowing “walls of smoke”

that will surround the sinners, a symbolism meant to stress the incapability of their suffering in the hereafter.

Grievous Suffering: The Fourth Symbol of Torment

Apostasy

Verily, they who have bought a denial of the truth at the price of faith can in no wise harm God... and tremendous suffering awaits them. (3:177) But remind [them] here-with that [in the life to come] every human being shall be held in pledge for whatever wrong he has done, and shall have none to protect him from God, and none to intercede for him. Though he offers any conceivable ransom, it shall not be accepted from him. It is [people such as] these that shall be held in pledge for the wrong they have done; for them there is [in the life to come] a draught of burning despair; and grievous suffering awaits them because of their persistent refusal to acknowledge the truth. (6:70)

In the eschatology of the Quran, "burning despair" invariably refers to intense heat as well as of painful cold, the allegorical suffering of the sinners in the life to come.

16

Dialogue between the Blessed and the Damned

What Has Brought You into the Hellfire?

Save those who shall have attained to righteousness: [dwelling] in gardens [of paradise], they will inquire of those who were lost in sin: "What has brought you into hell-fire?" They will answer: "We were not among those who prayed; and neither did we feed the needy; and we were wont to indulge in sinning together with all [the others] who indulged in it; and the Day of Judgment we were wont to call a lie until certainty came upon us [in death]." And so, of no benefit to them could be the intercession of any that would intercede for them. (74:39–48)

"We were not among those who prayed"—the canonical prayer had not yet been made obligatory on the followers of the Quran given at the time of the revelation of this very early *Surah*. It is reasonable to assume that in the above context, this term is used in its widest sense, namely, conscious belief in God. There would be none to intercede for them with God unless He grants His leave there for.

Give Us Some of the Sustenance of Paradise

And the inmates of the fire will call out to the inmates of paradise: "Pour some water upon us, or some of the sustenance [of paradise] which God has provided for you!" [The inmates of paradise] will reply: "Verily, God has denied both to those who have denied the truth—those who, beguiled by the life of this world, have made play and passing delights their religion!" (7:50–51)

Good Fortune of the Blessed versus Their Mockers

Behold, those who have abandoned themselves to sin are wont to laugh at such as have attained to faith and whenever they pass by them, they wink at one another [derisively]: and whenever they return to people of their own kind, they return full of jests; and whenever they see those [who believe,] they say, "Behold, these [people] have indeed gone astray!" And, withal, they have no call to watch over [the beliefs of] others... But on the Day [of Judgment], they who had attained to faith will [be able to] laugh at the [erstwhile] deniers of the truth: [for, resting in paradise] on couches, they will look on [and say to themselves]: "Are these deniers of the truth being [thus] requited for what they were wont to do?" (83:29–36)

Those who are devoid of faith have no right to criticize or watch over the faith of any of his fellow men. Speaking of the righteous, the Quran repeatedly stresses that on the Day of Judgment, God shall have removed whatever unworthy thoughts or feelings may have been lingering in their bosoms (see 7:42–43). See Chapter 26, "Reuniting with Family and Spouses in the State of Perfect Happiness." Since an expression of vengeful joy on the part of the

blessed at the calamity that in the hereafter will befall the sinners would certainly fall into the category of unworthy feelings, their “laughing” can only have a realization of their own good fortune.

The Sustainer’s Promise Has Come True

And the inmates of paradise will call out to the inmates of the fire: “Now we have found that what our Sustainer promised us has come true; have you too found that what your Sustainer promised you has come true?” [The others] will answer, “Yes!”—Whereupon from their midst a voice will loudly proclaim: “God’s rejection is the due of the evil-doers who turn others away from God’s path and try to make it appear crooked, and who refuse to acknowledge the truth of the life to come!” And between the two there will be a barrier. (7:44–46)

There will be a barrier between the fire of hell and the Gardens of paradise, which is symbolic of the division of humanity on the basis of the recompense meted out as a result of actions in this world. The word *hijab* denotes anything that intervenes as an obstacle between things or conceals one thing from another; it is used in both an abstract and a concrete sense. However, the inhabitants of both paradise and hell still can communicate, as shown in the verses above.

Mutual Reproaches of Sinner

Nay, but on that Day they would willingly surrender [to God]; but [since it will be too late,] they will turn upon one another, demanding of each other [to relieve them of the burden of their past sins]. Some [of them] will say: “Behold, you were wont to approach us [deceptively] from the right!” [To which] the others will reply: “Nay,

you yourselves were bereft of all faith! Moreover, we had no power at all over you: nay, you were people filled with overweening arrogance! But now our Sustainer's word has come true against us [as well]: verily, we are bound to taste [the fruit of our sins]. So then, [if it be true that] we have caused you to err grievously—behold, we ourselves had been lost in grievous error!" And, verily, on that Day they all will share in their common suffering. Verily, thus shall We deal with all who were lost in sin. (37:26–34)

The idiomatic phrase “approaching one from the right” is more or less synonymous with pretending to give morally good advice, as well as approaching another person from a position of power and influence.

Relieve Us from This Fire

And lo! They [who in life were wont to deny the truth] will contend with one another in the fire [of the hereafter]; and then the weak will say unto those who had gloried in their arrogance, “Behold, we were but your followers: can you, then, relieve us of some [of our] share of this fire?”—[to which] they who had [once] been arrogant will reply, “Behold, we are all in it [together]! God has judged between His creatures!” (40:47–48)

Mutual Wrangling of the People of the Fire

[And they will say to one another: “Do you see] this crowd of people who rushed headlong [into sin] with you? No welcome to them! Verily, they [too] shall have to endure the fire!” [And] they [who had been seduced] will exclaim: “No, but it is you! No welcome to you! It is you who have

prepared this for us: and how vile a state to abide in!" [And] they will pray: "O our Sustainer! Whoever has prepared this for us, double Thou his suffering in the fire!" And they will add: "How is it that we do not see [here any of the] men whom we were wont to count among the wicked, [and] whom we made the target of our derision? Or is it that [they are here, and] our eyes have missed them?" Such will in truth be the [confusion and] mutual wrangling of the people of the fire! (38:59–64)

The responsibility of the leader who seduced his devotees would be doubled, and they followed him blindly. The phrase "no welcome to them" is equivalent to a curse; carried on into the next verse, it expresses a mutual disavowal of the seducers and the seduced. The target of their derision were the prophets and the righteous, who—as the Quran points out in many places—have always been derided by people enamored of the life of this world and, therefore, who are averse to all moral exhortation.

Condemning Their Leaders and Fellow-Host

And they will say: "O our Sustainer! Behold, we paid heed to our leaders and our great men, and it is they who have led us astray from the right path! O our Sustainer! Give them double suffering and banish them utterly from Thy grace!" (33:67–68)

[And God] will say: "Join those hosts of invisible beings and humans who have gone before you into the fire!" [And] every time a host enters [the fire], it will curse its fellow-host—so much so that, when they all shall have passed into it, one after another, the last of them will speak [thus] of the first of them: "O our Sustainer! It is

they who have led us astray: give, them, therefore, the double suffering through fire!” He will reply: “Every one of you deserves double suffering—but you know it not.” And the first of them will say unto the last of them: “So you were in no wise superior to us! Taste, then, this suffering for all [the evil] that you were wont to do!” (7:38–39)

“The last of them will speak [thus] of the first of them,” the first and last refer here either to a sequence in time, those who came earlier and those who came later, or in status, leaders and followers. In both cases they relate, as the next sentence indicates, to the evil influence that the former exerted on the latter during their lifetime—either directly, as leaders of thought and persons of distinction, or indirectly, as forerunners in time, whose example was followed by later generations. There will be double suffering for having gone astray and for having, by his example, led others astray. See 16:25; on Resurrection Day, they shall bear the full weight of their own burdens as well as some of the burdens of those ignorant ones whom they have led astray. And the first of them will say that you are not superior to us because you went the wrong way, as we did, out of your own free will, and you bear the same responsibility that we do.

O our Sustainer! Cause us to come out of this [suffering]—and then, if We ever revert [to sinning], may we truly be [deemed] evildoers!” [But] He will say: “Away with you into this [ignominy]! And speak no more unto Me!” (23:107–108)

Would that we had a second chance [in life], so that we could be among the believers!” In all this, behold, there is a message [unto men], even though most of them will not believe [in it]. But, verily, thy Sustainer—He alone—is almighty, a dispenser of grace! (26:102–104)

Errors of Our Ways in the Past Life

And on the day when He shall gather them [all] together, [He will say:] “O you who have lived in close communion with [evil] invisible beings! A great many [other] human beings have you ensnared!” And those of the humans who were close to them will say: “O our Sustainer! We did enjoy one another’s fellowship [in life] [being close to the evil invisible beings], but [now that] we have reached the end of our term—the term which Thou hast laid down for us— [we see the error of our ways]!” (6:128)

Excuse of Bad Luck

The fire will scorch their faces, and they will abide therein with their lips distorted in pain. [And God will say:] “Were not My messages conveyed unto you, and were you [not] wont to give them the lie?” They will exclaim: “O our Sustainer! Our bad luck has overwhelmed us, and so we went astray! (23:104–106)

This dialogue is meant to bring out the futile excuse characteristic of so many sinners who attribute their failings to abstract bad luck. It stresses the element of free will—and, therefore, of responsibility—in man’s actions and behavior.

We Did Not Mean to Do Evil

Then will they [who are thus arraigned] proffer their submission, [saying:] “We did not [mean to] do any evil!” [But they will be answered:] “Yea, verily, God has full knowledge of all that you were doing! Hence, enter the gates of hell, therein to abide!” And evil, indeed, shall be the state of all who are given to false pride! (16:28–29)

“God has full knowledge,” and He will judge you on the basis of your motivation. Their plea of ignorance is rejected in view of the fact that they were offered God’s guidance through His revealed messages, which they deliberately scorned in their false pride and dismissed out of hand as “fables of ancient times” (46:17).

We Shall Be Unmindful of Them as They Were Oblivious of Us

[And God will say:], “And so We shall ignore them today as they were oblivious of the coming of this their Day [of Judgment], and as Our messages they did deny: For, indeed, We did convey unto them a divine writ which We clearly, and wisely, spelled out—a guidance and a grace unto people who will believe. (7:51–52)

Begging for Mercy

But as for those who are bent on denying the truth—the fire of hell awaits them: no end shall be put to their lives so that they could die, nor shall aught of the suffering caused by that [fire] be lightened for them: thus shall We requite all who are bereft of gratitude. And in that [hell] they will cry aloud: “O our Sustainer! Cause us to come out [of this suffering]! We shall [henceforth] do good deeds, not such as we were wont to do [aforetime]!” [But We shall answer:] “Did We not grant you a life-long enough so that whoever was willing to take thought could bethink himself? And [withal,] a warner had come unto you! Taste, then, [the fruit of your evil deeds]: for evildoers shall have none to succor them!” God knows the hidden reality of the heavens and the earth: [and,] He has full knowledge of what is in the hearts [of men]. He it is who has made you inherit the earth. (35:36–39)

17

Nineteen Angelic Powers over Hell and Salvation of Pardoned Sinners

And what could make thee conceive what hell-fire is? It does not allow living, and neither leaves [to die], making [all truth] visible to mortal man. Over it are nineteen [powers]. For We have caused none but angelic powers to lord over the fire [of hell]; and We have not caused their number to be aught but a trial for those who are bent on denying the truth. (74:27–31)

The allegorical number nineteen represents the angels who act as keepers or guardians of hell. The allegorical character of this and all other Quranic descriptions of man's condition and destiny in the hereafter is clearly alluded to in the subsequent verses.

Awesome Angelic Powers over Hell

O you who have attained to faith! Ward off from yourselves and those who are close to you that fire [of the hereafter] whose fuel is human beings and stones: [lord-ing] over it are angelic powers awesome [and] severe,

who do not disobey God in whatever He has commanded them, but [always] do what they are bidden to do. [Hence,] O you who are bent on denying the truth, make no [empty] excuses today: [in the life to come] you shall be but recompensed for what you were doing [in this world]. (66:6–7)

Gatekeepers of Hell

And those who were bent on denying the truth will be urged on in throngs towards hell till, when they reach it, its gates will be opened, and its keepers will ask them, “Have there not come to you apostles from among yourselves, who conveyed to you your Sustainer’s messages and warned you of the coming of this your Day [of Judgment]?” They will answer: “Yea, indeed!” But the sentence of suffering will [already] have fallen due upon the deniers of the truth; [and] they will be told, “Enter the gates of hell, therein to abide!” And how vile an abode for those who were given to false pride! (39:71–72)

The sentence of suffering has fallen upon them due to an ineluctable consequence of their unrepented sinning. Due to false pride, they refused to submit to the guidance offered them by God’s apostles (see 96:6–7—“man becomes grossly overweening whenever he believes himself to be self-sufficient”).

Seven Gates of Hell

And for all such [those lost in grievous error], behold, hell is the promised goal, with seven gates leading into it, each gate receiving its allotted share of sinners. (15:43–44) On that Day We will ask hell, “Art thou filled?”—and it will answer, “[Nay,] is there yet more [for me]?” (50:30)

This probably means seven degrees of hell, of the suffering that in the life to come awaits the followers of Satan in accordance with the gravity of their sins. We may assume that the “seven gates of hell” signify seven approaches or ways to hell. In classical Arabic, the number seven is often used in the sense of “several” or “various,” and so the above Quranic phrase may well have the meaning of “various ways leading to hell”—in other words, many modes of sinning.

Intercede with God to Lighten Suffering or Cause Us to Die

And they who are in the Fire will say to the keepers of hell, “Pray unto your Sustainer that He lighten, [though it is] for one day [only], this suffering of ours!” [But the keepers of hell] will ask, “Is it not [true] that your apostles came unto you with all evidence of the truth?” Those [in the fire] will reply, “Yea, indeed.” [And the keepers of hell] will say, “Pray, then!”—for the prayer of those who deny the truth cannot lead to aught but delusion. (40:49–50) And they will cry: “O you [angel] who rule [over hell]! Let thy Sustainer put an end to us!”—[whereupon] he will reply: “You must live on [in this state]...” (43:77)

The answer that the prayers of those who deny the truth lead to delusion implies a refusal on the part of the “keepers of hell” to intercede for the doomed sinners. The alternate explanation may be this: Pray now to those imaginary powers to which you were wont to ascribe a share in God’s divinity and see whether they can help you.

Eventual Pardoning of All Sinners

Sins Atoned by Commensurate Suffering

But as for those who have done evil deeds—the recompense of an evil deed shall be the like thereof;—and—since

they will have none to defend them against God—ignominy will overshadow them as though their faces were veiled by the night's own darkness: it is they who are destined for the fire, therein to abide. (10:27)

Suffering Limited by God's Mercy

Now as for those who [by their deeds] will have brought wretchedness upon themselves, [they shall live] in the fire, where they will have [nothing but] moans and sobs [to relieve their pain], therein to abide as long as the heavens and the earth endure—unless thy Sustainer wills it otherwise: for, verily, thy Sustainer is a sovereign doer of whatever He wills. (11:106–107) [But] He [God] will say: "The fire shall be your abode, therein to abide—unless God wills it otherwise." Verily, thy Sustainer is wise, all-knowing. (6:128)

In ancient Arabic, the expressions "as long as the heavens and the earth endure," "as long as night and day alternate," and the like, were used metonymically in the sense of "time beyond count." The fire of hell will be their abode unless God wills to relieve them and graces them His mercy. From the above and the similar phrase occurring in 11:107, and several well-authenticated sayings of the Prophet, some of the great Muslim theologians conclude a limited suffering for sinners.

The following is an extremely well-authenticated, parabolic saying of the Prophet:

"On the Day of Judgment, those who deserve Paradise will enter Paradise, and those who deserve the fire, the fire. Thereupon God, the Sublimely Exalted, will say, 'Take out of the fire everyone in whose heart there was as much of faith [or, in some versions, "as much of good"] as a grain of mustard seed!' And so they will be taken

out of it, already blackened, and will be thrown into the River of Life. Then they will come to life [literally, “sprout”] as a herb sprouts by the side of a stream: and did you not see how it turn, yellow and budding?”

The characterization as “yellow and budding”—tender and of light color—indicates the freshness of new life in the pardoned sinner. The fury of the fire of hell will subside after a given duration. In the end, forgiven sinners will enter paradise and live in the presence of God

Limited Suffering in Hell, Eternal Happiness in Paradise

For, whenever Our messages are conveyed to such a one, he turns away in his arrogance as though he had not heard them—as though there was deafness in his ears: give him, then, the tidings of grievous suffering [in the life to come]. [As against this,] verily, those who attain to faith and do righteous deeds shall have gardens of bliss, to abide therein in accordance with God’s true promise: for He alone is almighty, truly wise. (31:7–9)

The deliberate contrast between the plural in the promise of “Gardens (*jannat*) of bliss” and the singular in that of “suffering” (*adhab*) is meant to show that God’s grace surpasses His wrath (see 6:12). The use of the expression “to abide therein” in connection with the mention of paradise only, and not with that of otherworldly suffering (or hell), is an indication that whereas the enjoyment of the former will be unlimited in duration, suffering in what is described as hell will be limited.

Part 4: Accounting of
Righteous Who Were
Sinners Before

18

Repentance and Atonement of Sin

Death of a Righteous Believer

Good fortune awaits, in this world, all who persevere in doing good; but their ultimate state will be far better still: for, how excellent indeed will be the state of the God-conscious [in the life to come]! ... Thus will God reward those who are conscious of Him—those whom the angels gather in death while they are in a state of inner purity, greeting them thus: "Peace be upon you!" (16:30–32) But as for those who have attained to faith and have done righteous deeds, We shall most certainly cause them to join the righteous [in the hereafter as well]. (29:9)

This "good fortune" does not necessarily signify material benefits but refer, rather, to the spiritual satisfaction and the feeling of inner security resulting from genuine God-consciousness.

The group of human beings who after erring and sinning have gradually achieved righteousness through sincere repentance; they will also be exempt from the supreme awesomeness of the Day of Resurrection, but they will undergo light accounting before entering paradise.

Good deeds, repentance, and atonement of sins are an essential part of man's quest for salvation. There are no easy ways or shortcuts to salvation in Islam. Salvation has to be earned to some extent by the avoidance of evils and doing good work. Leading a righteous life exemplifies a good faith effort on the part of the believer. In Islam, sins are broadly classified into two categories from the perspective of repentance and forgiveness.

(1) Sins against God

Performing rituals, dogmas, practices, and beliefs usually fall under God's rights (*Huquq Ullah*). For example, the five articles of faith and the five pillars of Islam are duties every Muslim owes to God. Omitting any of these duties constitutes a sin of omission. God, an almighty and independent entity, needs no defenders or human worship. The fulfillment of God's rights is a private matter between the individual human and God. There is no punishment ordained in the Quran for not fulfilling the duties we owe to God. If a Muslim will repent and ask God's forgiveness during his lifetime, God, being merciful and loving, can forgive any indiscretion since the man is created weak. God may forgive even the most hardened sinners if they truly repent and mend their ways.

Say: "[Thus speaks God:] O you servants of Mine who have transgressed against your own selves! Despair not of God's mercy: God forgives all sins—for He alone is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace!" Hence, turn towards your Sustainer [alone] and surrender yourselves unto Him before the suffering [of death and resurrection] comes upon you, for then you will not be succored. (39:53–54)

(2) Sins against Fellow Man

These are willful acts that violate the rights of others. Human beings are dependent upon the fulfillment of certain natural rights to live

a dignified life. The rights of one's fellow man (*Huququl Ibad*) are more important to fulfil than God's rights. People's rights are considered universal and should be stringently observed without exception. Many modern-day Muslims' attitude is, as long as they fasted, prayed, paid *Zakat*, and went to *Hajj* (*Huquq ullah*, God's rights), it did not matter how they treated people (*Huququl Ibad*). Nothing could be farther from the truth.

The Prophet said:

"In my community, the poor is he who appeared before God on the Day of Resurrection with his acts of the prayer, fast and charity; the while he had abused someone, usurped the property, shed blood or hit still another. Then his virtuous deeds were given over to each of his victims. When nothing was left of his good deeds to pay compensation, some of the sins of each wronged one were transferred to him, and he shall be cast into Hell."

Forgiveness Begets Forgiveness

We ordained for them in that [Torah]: A life for a life, and an eye for an eye, and a nose for a nose, and an ear for an ear, and a tooth for a tooth, and a [similar] retribution for wounds; but he who shall forgo it out of charity will atone thereby for some of his past sins. (5:45)

When human beings' rights are violated, it is no longer a private matter between the sinner and God. Now, it is up to the person whose rights were violated whether to forgive his abuser. If the victim chooses to forgive out of charity, then God will atone some of his past sins.

When Ali ibn Talib was asked what true repentance is, he replied, "You should feel penitent for the wrong you have done. Carry out the duties that you have ignored, restore the rights that you have usurped, ask forgiveness of him whom you have wronged, resolve not to repeat the sin, and dedicate yourself in obedience to God." In

the case of sins against God, sincere repentance is all that is needed for God's forgiveness. For the repentance of sins against a fellow man, one has to restore the usurped rights and ask forgiveness of him and God.

It is widely believed that all sins are forgiven after performing *Hajj*, supposedly attributed to the Prophet's saying. The Quran does not mention blanket forgiveness of all sins after performing *Hajj*. Many Muslims popularly believe such simplistic anecdotes concerning salvation. Yes, God can forgive any sin because He is merciful and Almighty. However, God's mercy exists in dialectical tension with His justice. God will also render perfect justice on the Day of Judgment. If a person who took bribes, committed murders, and robbed orphans and widows, if such a person now performs *Hajj*, are all his evil acts suddenly forgiven? It is a mockery of justice, let alone the perfect justice promised by the Almighty on the Day of Judgment. Entering paradise will not be that easy, according to the following verse:

[But] do you think that you could enter paradise without having suffered like those [believers] who passed away before you? Misfortune and hardship befell them, and so shaken were they that the apostle, and the believers with him, would exclaim, "When will God's succor come?" Oh, verily, God's succor is [always] near! (2:214)

The intellectual cognition of the truth cannot by itself be a means of attaining ultimate bliss. It must be complemented by a readiness to sacrifice and spiritual purification.

Atonement of Sins

Mitigation of Sinful Deeds

As a religious act, atonement is an effort to make up for wrongdoings. An apology is an act of atonement. Many religions have rituals

of atonement, such as Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, when Jews repent for their sins. The following elements have a direct influence on the possible mitigation of the effects of sinful actions: (1) charity; (2) striving in God's cause; (3) pain and sorrow; (4) avoiding further heinous and grave sins; (5) effacing bad deeds through good deeds; and (6) sincere repentance.

Charity and Forgiveness of Sins

If you do deeds of charity openly, it is well; but if you bestow it upon the needy in secret, it will be even better for you, and it will atone for some of your bad deeds. And God is aware of all that you do. (2:271) What would they have to fears if they would but believe in God and the Last Day, and spend [in His way] out of what God has granted them as sustenance—since God has indeed full knowledge of them? (4:39) And who respond to [the call of] their Sustainer and are constant in prayer; and who spend on others out of what We provide for them as sustenance. (42:38)

Those Who Strive in God's Cause

Thy Sustainer [grants His forgiveness] unto those who forsake the domain of evil after having succumbed to its temptation, and who thenceforth strive hard [in God's cause] and are patient in adversity: behold, after such [repentance] thy Sustainer is indeed much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace! (16:110)

Pain and Sorrow

In the sight of God, the unhappiness caused by unjust persecution confers—as does every undeserved and patiently borne suffering—a

spiritual merit on the person thus afflicted. The Prophet said, “Whenever a believer is stricken with any hardship, or pain, or anxiety, or sorrow, or harm, or distress—even if it be a thorn that has hurt him—God redeems thereby some of his failings.”

According to another well-authenticated *hadith*, if a person dies a violent death not caused, directly or indirectly, by his sinful actions, and since he had no time to repent his previous sins, he will be forgiven. In cases of unprovoked murder, the murderer is burdened—in addition to the sin of murder—with the sins his innocent victim committed but is now absolved of.

Righteous Living and Forgiveness of Sins

For all men and women who have surrendered themselves unto God and all truly devout men and women who are true to their word, who are patient in adversity, and who humble themselves [before God], and who give in charity. All self-denying men and women, who are mindful of their chastity, and who remember God unceasingly: for [all of] them God has readied forgiveness of sins and a mighty reward. (33:35)

Faith, Good Works, and Effacing of Sins

Those who have attained to Faith and do righteous deeds and have come to believe in what has been bestowed from on high on Muhammad—for it is the truth from their Sustainer—[shall attain to God’s grace]. He will efface their [past] bad deeds and will set their hearts at rest. (47:2–3)

Avoidance of Heinous Sins

If you avoid the great sins, which you have been enjoined to shun, We shall efface your [minor] bad deeds, and shall

cause you to enter an abode of glory. (4:31) As for those who avoid the [truly] grave sins and shameful deeds—even though they may sometimes stumble—behold, thy Sustainer is abounding in forgiveness. (53:32)

Whoever shall come [before God] with a good deed will gain ten times the like thereof; but whoever shall come with an evil deed will be requited with no more than the like thereof; and none shall be wronged. (6:160)

Whereas good deeds will be rewarded with far more than their merits may warrant, evil will be recompensed with no more than its equivalent.

Sincere Repentance

O you who have attained to faith! Turn unto God in sincere repentance: it may well be that your Sustainer will efface from you your bad deeds and will admit you into gardens through which running waters flow, on a Day on which God will not shame the Prophet and those who share his faith: their light will spread rapidly before them, and on their right; [and] they will pray: "O our Sustainer! Cause this our light to shine for us forever, and forgive us our sins: for, verily, Thou hast the power to will anything!" (66:8)

The implication is that He will not only not shame the Prophet and his followers but will, on the contrary, exalt them. The soul is relieved from the burden of the sins for God will efface all bad deeds of righteous and the light will emanate from the purified soul about to enter paradise.

19

Good Deeds and Salvation

Ten Times Reward of Good Deeds

All who did what is right and just will have made goodly provision for themselves, so that He might reward, out of His bounty, those who have attained to faith and done righteous deeds. (30:44–45) Whoever shall come [before God] with a good deed will gain ten times the like thereof; but whoever shall come with an evil deed will be requited with no more than the like thereof; and none shall be wronged. (6:160) Whereas anyone who will have done [whatever he could] of righteous deeds, and was a believer withal, need have no fear of being wronged or deprived [of aught of his merit]. (20:112) Whoever shall come [before Him] with a good deed will gain [further] good therefrom; and they will be secure from the terror of that Day. (27:89)

Repentance and Forgiveness of Sins

God has promised unto those who attain to faith and do good works [that] theirs shall be forgiveness of sins, and a mighty reward. (5:9) We shall most certainly efface

their [previous] bad deeds and shall most certainly reward them in accordance with the best that they ever did. (29:7) O you who have attained to faith! Remain conscious of God; and let every human being look to what he sends ahead for the morrow! And [once again]: Remain conscious of God, for God is fully aware of all that you do... Those who are destined for paradise—it is they, they [alone] who shall triumph [on Judgment Day]! (59:18, 20) Anyone who repents and attains to faith and does righteous deeds may well [hope to] find himself among those who achieve a happy state [in the life to come]. (28:67) For it is they who will enter Paradise and will not be wronged in any way: [theirs will be the] gardens of perpetual bliss which the Most Gracious has promised unto His servants, in a realm which is beyond the reach of human perception: [and,] verily, His promise is ever sure of fulfilment! (19:60–63)

Is Faith Alone Enough?

The five articles of faith and the five pillars of Islam are good deeds meant to instill spiritual discipline and God-consciousness. There is a common misperception among some Muslims that by reciting *shahadah* (the two dogmas of God's oneness and the Prophet Muhammad messengership constitute the confession of faith or *shahadah*) at the time of death, one can be forgiven by God and can make it to paradise. It is somewhat akin to Evangelical Christians' claim that salvation is free; this movement within Protestant Christianity believes in salvation by grace alone, solely through faith. The verses below clearly contradict this false notion. The stress on action as an integral part of faith is of fundamental importance in the ethics of the Quran. There is frequent juxtaposition of the concepts of "believing" and "doing good works," and the condemnation of all "who, while believing, wrought no good works."

Faith without Good Works Is No Faith at All

On the Day when thy Sustainer's [final] portents do appear, believing will be of no avail to any human being who did not believe before, or who, while believing, did no good works. Say: "Wait, [then, for the Last Day, O unbelievers:] we [believers] are waiting, too!" (6:158)

Good Works without Faith

As for him who rejects the belief [in God]—in vain will be all his works: for in the life to come he shall be among the lost. (5:5) Those who are bent on denying the truth, their [good] deeds are like a mirage in the desert, which the thirsty supposes to be water until, when he approaches it, he finds that it was nothing. Instead, he finds [that] God [has always been present] with him, and [that] He will pay him his account in full—for God is swift in reckoning! Or [else, their deeds are] like the depths of darkness upon an abysmal sea, made yet darker by wave billowing over the wave, with [black] clouds above it all: depths of darkness, layer upon layer, [so that] when one holds up his hand, he can hardly see it: for he to whom God gives no light, no light, whatever he has! (24:39–40)

The bad deeds of the faithless, as contrasted with their good deeds, which in the above verse have been likened to a mirage, will far outweigh his good deeds.

Good Works like Ashes

[This, then, is] the parable of those who are bent on denying their Sustainer: all their works [even the good ones]

are as ashes which the wind blows about fiercely on a stormy day: [in the life to come,] they cannot achieve any benefit whatever from all [the good] that they may have wrought: for this [denial of God] is indeed the farthest one can go astray. (14:18)

Illusion of Good Deeds

Say: "Shall we tell you who are the greatest losers in whatever they may do? (18:104) "[It is] they whose labor has gone astray in [the pursuit of no more than] this world's life, and who none the less think that they are doing good works: it is they who have chosen to deny their Sustainer's messages and the truth that they are destined to meet Him." Hence, all their [good] deeds come to nought, and no weight shall We assign to them on Resurrection Day. That will be their recompense—[their] hell—for having denied the truth and made My messages and My apostles a target of their mockery. (18:103–106) [But,] verily, as for those who attain to faith and do righteous deeds—the gardens of paradise will be there to welcome them; (18:108) therein will they abide, [and] never will they desire any change therefrom. (18:107–108)

Faith with Good Works

[Only], they who stand in reverent awe of their Sustainer, and who believe in their Sustainer's messages, and those who give whatever they [have to] give with their hearts trembling at the thought that unto their Sustainer, they must return. It is they who vie with one another in doing good works, and it is they who outrun [all others] in attaining to them! (23:57–61)

Righteous Way of Life

This Divine Writ—let there be no doubt about it is [meant to be] a guidance for all the God-conscious who believe in (1) [the existence of] that which is beyond the reach of human perception, (al-ghayb) and are (2) constant in prayer and (3) spend on others out of what we provide for them as sustenance; (4) and who believe in that which has been bestowed from on high upon you, [O Prophet,] (5) as well as in that which was bestowed before your time: for it is they who in their innermost are certain of the life to come! It is they who follow the guidance [which comes] from their Sustainer; and it is they, they who shall attain to a happy state! (2:2–5)

“Spend on others” is mentioned here in one breath with God-consciousness and prayer because it is precisely in such selfless acts that true piety comes to its full fruition. The bedrock principle of the Islamic way of life is God-consciousness or *taqwa*. A *muttaqui* is someone who has become conscious of God and His all-presence. God-consciousness is a disposition that follows from belief in an all-powerful, omnipresent God who has commanded obedience and that the Muslim is morally responsible and accountable to Him.

Gift of Love through Faith and Righteous Deeds

Those who attain Faith and do righteous deeds will the Most Gracious endow with love. Only to this end, We have made this [divine writ] easy to understand, in your tongue, [O Prophet,] so that you might convey thereby a glad tid-ing to the God-conscious and warn those who are given to [futile] contention. (19:96–97)

On those who attain Faith, God bestows His love and endows them with the capability to love His creation and cause them to be loved by their fellow men.

Personal Morality

A Muslim desires to mold his existence around this awareness and guards himself against evil. Such a believer lives his life ever mindful of eternal consequences that await on Judgment Day. The feeling of indebtedness for his very existence fosters a sense of compassion and humility.

Compassion

Those who have attained Faith, and enjoy upon one another patience in adversity, and compassion such are they who attained to righteousness. (90:17–18)

The basis of true moral behavior is empathy and compassion.

Humility

For, [true] servants of the Most Gracious are [only] they, who walk gently on the earth, and who, whenever the foolish address them, reply with [words of] peace. (25:63) And [who], whenever they pass by [people engaged in] frivolity, pass on with dignity. (25:72)

Keep Promises and Speak Only the Truth

Be true to every promise—for [on Judgment Day], you will be called to account for every promise you have made! (17:34) O you who have attained Faith! Remain conscious

of God, and [always] speak with a will to bring out [only] what is just and true—[whereupon] He will cause your deeds to be virtuous and will forgive you your sins. (33:70–71)

Counter Evil with Good

[But whatever they may say or do,] repel the evil [which they commit] with something that is better: We are fully aware of what they attribute [to Us]. (23:95–96)

The evil referred to consists in blasphemous attempts at “defining” God, but the ethical principle implied in the above injunction is the same—namely, that evil must not be countered with another evil but, rather, repelled by an act of goodness.

Help Enemies Become Friends

But [since] good and evil cannot be equal; you repel [evil] with something that is better—and lo! He between whom and you were enmity [may then become] as though he had [always] been close [unto you], a true friend! Yet [to achieve] this is not given to any but those who are patient in adversity and endowed with the greatest good fortune! (41:34–35)

Jesus spoke similar words, profound yet counterintuitive to our divisive human nature.

“But I say to you, love your enemies, bless anyone who curses you, do good to anyone who hates you and pray for those who carry you away by force and persecute you, so that you may become sons of your Father who is in heaven, who causes His sun to shine upon the good and the bad, and who pours down His rain upon the just

and upon the unjust” (Matt. 5:44–48). “You must love your neighbors as yourself” (Mark 12:31).

Strive Hard in God’s Cause

Strive hard in God’s cause with all the striving that is due to Him: it is He who has elected you [to carry His message]. It is He who has named you in bygone times as well as in this [divine writ]—“those who have surrendered themselves to God,” so that the Apostle might bear witness to the truth before you, and that you might bear witness to it before all mankind. Thus, be constant in prayer, and render the purifying dues, and hold fast unto God. He is your Lord Supreme: and how excellent is this Lord Supreme, and how excellent this Giver of Succor! (22:78)

Patience in Adversity

You give the glad tidings [of God’s acceptance] unto all who are humble—all whose hearts tremble with awe whenever God is mentioned, and all who patiently bear whatever ill befalls them, and all who are constant in prayer and spend on others out of what We provide for them as sustenance. (22:34–35)

Verily, that which is with God is by far the best for you, if you but knew it: all that is with you is bound to come to an end, whereas that which is with God is everlasting. And most certainly shall We grant unto those who are patient in adversity their reward in accordance with the best that they ever did. As for anyone—be it man or woman—who does righteous deeds and is a believer withal—him shall We most certainly cause to live a good

life. And most certainly shall We grant unto such as these their reward in accordance with the best that they ever did. (16:95–97)

No calamity can ever befall [man] unless it be by God's leave: hence, whoever believes in God guides his [own] heart [towards this truth]; and God has full knowledge of everything. (64:11)

The good life may relate either to life in this world as a true believer who invariably finds happiness in his God-consciousness, or to the happiness that awaits him in the hereafter, or to both. Guide your heart toward self-surrender to God's will, gratitude in times of ease, and patience in times of misfortune.

Self-Improvement

Importance of Education

God will exalt by [many] degrees those of you who have attained to Faith and, [above all,] such as have been vouchsafed [true] knowledge: for God is fully aware of all that you do. (58:11)

Scholars Exempted from War

It is not desirable that all of the believers take the field [in time of war]. From within every group in their midst, some shall refrain from going forth to war, and shall devote themselves [instead] to acquiring a deeper knowledge of the Faith, and [thus be able to] teach their homecoming brethren, so that these [too] might guard themselves against evil. (9:122)

Although the above verse mentions specifically religious knowledge, it has a positive bearing on every kind of knowledge because the Quran does not draw any dividing line between the spiritual and the worldly concerns of life. The Quran calls upon the believer to observe all nature and to discern God's creative activity in its manifold phenomena and laws. The Quran itself is addressed to "those who think." Intellectual activity is a valid way to better understand God's will. The obligation of scholars is to devote themselves to acquiring a deeper knowledge of the Faith and of God's works and to impart it in every branch of knowledge to their fellow believers.

Acquisition of Knowledge and Divine Revelation

We shall teach you, and you will not forget [aught of what you are taught], save what God may will [you to forget]—for, God [alone] knows all that is open to [man's] perception as well as all that is hidden [from it]—and [thus] shall We make easy for you the path towards [ultimate] ease. (87:6–8)

The above verses relate to mankind's cumulative acquisition of empirical and rational knowledge, handed down from generation to generation and from one civilization to another, except what God may cause man to forget as redundant by virtue of his new experiences and his acquisition of wider knowledge. Yet all knowledge arrived at through our observation is limited in scope and does not suffice to give us an insight into ultimate truths beyond the reach of human perception (*al-ghayb*). Since human knowledge must forever remain imperfect, man is dependent upon the aid of divine revelation, which shows us the path toward peace of the spirit.

Acquiring of Knowledge and the Prophet's Sayings

The Quranic principle of acquiring knowledge has been emphasized in many well-authenticated sayings of the Prophet. For instance:

- “Striving after knowledge is a sacred duty for every man and woman who has surrendered himself or herself to God.”
- “The superiority of a learned man over a (mere) worshipper, i.e., one who merely prays, fasts, etc. is like the superiority of the full moon over all the stars.”
- “Whoso honors the learned, honor me.”
- “Go in quest of knowledge even unto China.”
- “Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave.”
- “To spend more time in learning is better than spending more time praying.”
- “That person who shall die while he is studying, in order to revive the knowledge of religion, will be only one degree inferior to the prophets.”
- “The pursuit of knowledge is a divine commandment for every Muslim.”
- “The ink of the scholar is more holy than the blood of the martyr.”
- “He who leaves his home in search of knowledge, walks in the path of God.”
- “One hour’s meditation on the work of the Creator is better than seventy years of prayer.”

Helping Others

A *muttaqui* will work to benefit others simply because he or she is created equal by the same one God. Thus, a genuine sense of love, brotherhood, and peace develops for every other human being without exception. The concept of good works encompasses the immediate family, community, and humanity at large.

Revere Your Parents

Now [among the best of the deeds which] We have enjoined upon man is goodness towards his parents. In pain did

his mother bear him, and in pain did she give him birth; and her bearing him and his utter dependence on her took thirty months. (46:15)

His mother bore him by bearing strain upon strain, and his utter dependence on her lasted two years: [hence, O man,] be grateful towards Me and towards your parents, [and remember that] with Me is all journeys' end. (31:14)

Child nurture includes the entire period of conception, gestation, birth, and feeding, and weaning in infancy—the period of a child's utter dependence on its mother. Thus, gratitude toward parents, who were instrumental in one's coming to life, goes along with man's gratitude toward God, who is the ultimate cause and source of his existence.

Guiding Family

O you who have attained to Faith! Ward off from yourselves and those who are close to you against that fire [of the hereafter] whose fuel is human beings and stones. (66:6)

A person's responsibility is not confined to making efforts for his own salvation. His responsibility includes helping "those who are close," his family, to become morally upright. The Prophet said: "Each one of you is a shepherd and is responsible for his herd. The ruler is accountable for his subjects; the man is a shepherd of his family and is accountable to them, and the woman is a shepherd of her husband's house and children and is accountable concerning them."

Helping Community

Do good to your parents, near kin, orphans, the needy, and the neighbor among your people, the neighbor who is a

stranger, the friend by your side, the wayfarer, and those whom you rightfully possess. (4:36)

The expression “your own people” refers to the community and not to one’s actual relative. “The friend by your side” is one’s wife or husband. “Those whom you rightfully possess” refers to slaves.

Have We not shown him the two highways [of good and evil]? But he would not try to ascend the steep uphill road [towards salvation]. And what could make you conceive what it is, that steep uphill road: [It is] the freeing of one’s neck [from the burden of slavery], or the feeding, upon a day of [one’s own] hunger, of an orphan, near of kin, or a needy [stranger] lying in the dust. (90:10–16)

Taking Care of Orphans

And they will ask thee about [how to deal with] orphans. Say: “To improve their condition is best.” And if you share their life, [remember that] they are your brethren: for God distinguishes between him who spoils things and him who improves. And had God so willed, He would indeed have imposed on you hardships which you would not have been able to bear: [but,] behold, God is Almighty, wise! (2:220)

The implication is that if one shares the life of an orphan in his charge, one is permitted to benefit by such an association—for instance, through a business partnership—provided this does not damage the orphan’s interests in any way.

Helping Widows

The Prophet said, “The one who looks after for a widow or a poor person is like a warrior fighting for God’s cause; or like a person who fasts during the day and prays all the night.”

Love Thy Neighbor

The Prophet often stressed a believer's moral obligation toward his neighbors, whatever their faith. "Whoever believes in God and the Last Day, let him do good unto his neighbor. Gabriel continued to recommend me about treating the neighbors kindly and politely, so much so that I thought he would order me to make them as my heirs."

Such mundane acts as returning salutations or saying, "God have mercy on you" when someone sneezes, to accept invitations, to visit the sick, to follow funerals, visit to a family member to preserve the bond of kinship, speaking kindly, and respecting parents, all are considered good deeds and recommended by the Prophet.

Helping Fellow Man

The circle of generosity is extended to all humanity.

God enjoins justice, and the doing of good, and generosity towards [one's] fellowmen. (16:90)

"Generosity towards [one's] fellowmen" refers to a relationship common to all human beings, the fellowship of man. This concept implies the fundamental ethical postulate to care for one another's material and spiritual welfare.

Guiding Others

Now, among those whom We have created, some people guide [others] in the way of the truth and act justly in its light. (7:181) Say [O Prophet]: "No reward do I ask of you for this [message] other than [that you should] love your fellowmen." For if anyone gains [the merit of] a good deed, We shall grant him through it an increase of good: and God is much-forgiving, ever responsive to gratitude. (42:23)

Care for Animals

The Prophet urged the humane treatment of animals in the following parable: He said, "A thirsty man came across a well, got down to it, drank water and came out. Meanwhile, he saw a dog licking mud because of excessive thirst. He went down the well again and watered the dog. God thanked him for that deed."

In another parable, the Prophet said, "A woman entered the hell-fire because of a cat which she had tied, neither giving it food nor setting it free to eat from the vermin of the earth." When asked if there was a reward in serving animals, the Prophet said, "Yes, there is a reward for serving any animate [living being]. If any Muslim plants any plant and a human being or an animal eat of it, he will be rewarded as if he had given that much charity."

The Flight of Time

In the name of God, the most gracious, the dispenser of grace. Consider the flight of time! Man is bound to lose himself unless he be of those who attain to Faith, and do good works, and enjoin upon one another the keeping to truth, and enjoin upon one another patience in adversity. (103:1-3)

Freeing Slaves, Feeding the Hungry, Helping Orphans and Strangers

Have We not shown him the two highways [of good and evil]? But he would not try to ascend the steep uphill road. (Towards salvation) And what could make you conceive what it is, that steep uphill road: [It is] the freeing of one's neck [from the burden of slavery], or the feeding, upon a day of [one's own] hunger, of an orphan, near of kin, or of a needy [stranger] lying in the dust. (90:10-16)

“It is the freeing of one’s neck from the burden of sin,” alternatively; the phrase may be rendered as “the freeing of a human being from bondage” with the latter term covering all those forms of subjugation and exploitation—social, economic, or political—which can be rightly described as “slavery.”

Moderation as a Way of Life

The Islamic way calls for moderation in every aspect of life. The Quran exhorts believers not to place too great an emphasis on the physical and material aspects of their lives. Muslims are encouraged to establish a balance between living this life to its fullest (i.e., seeking family, wealth, position, legitimate enjoyment, and other such worldly pursuits) and remembering that whatever this life offers is temporary. To achieve this balance, one has to partake of but not indulge in what this life has to offer.

The Islamic attitude toward man’s existence is that his urges and desires relating to this “life of the flesh” are God-willed and legitimate. There is no inherent conflict between the spirit and the flesh, and a bold affirmation of the natural, God-willed unity of this two-fold aspect of human life. This balanced attitude, peculiar to Islam, flows directly from the concept of God-consciousness.

Thus, We have willed you to be a community of the middle way, so that [with your lives] you might bear witness to the truth before all mankind, and that the Apostle might bear witness to it before you. (2:143)

Any form of extreme behavior such as excessive religiosity (asceticism), licentiousness, exulting in riches, hopelessness in adversity, wastefulness, miserly attitude, and so forth fall outside the norm of moderation in Islam. The broad principle, which guides Islamic way of life, can be summed up in the often-repeated call for moderation in all actions, including religion.

Do Righteous Deeds and Enjoy the Good Things of Life

Those who have attained Faith and do righteous deeds incur no sin by partaking of whatever they may, so long as they are conscious of God and [truly] believe and do righteous deeds and continue to be conscious of God and to believe, and grow ever more conscious of God, and persevere in doing good: for God loves the doers of good. (5:93)

This applies to eating and drinking, as well as, metaphorically, to partaking of anything that may be desirable. God has not prohibited “the good things of life” and their pleasures, and believers need not deny themselves.

Enjoy Good Things but Do Not Waste

O children of Adam! Beautify yourselves for every act of worship, and eat and drink [freely], but do not waste: God does not love the wasteful! Say: “Who is there to forbid the beauty which God has brought forth for His creatures, and the good things from among the means of sustenance?” Say: “They are [lawful] in the life of this world to all who have attained to faith—to be theirs alone on Resurrection Day.” Thus, clearly do We spell out these messages unto people of [innate] knowledge! (7:31–32)

All good and beautiful things of life—that is, those which are not expressly prohibited—are lawful to the believers. While in the life of this world, believers and unbelievers alike share those good things, they will be denied to the unbelievers in the hereafter.

Sayings of The Prophet Regarding Good Works

“God, exalted be He, says: ‘If a servant of mine [merely] desires to do a good deed, I shall count this [desire] as a good deed; and if he

does it, I shall count it tenfold. If he desires to commit a bad deed but does not commit it, I shall count this as a good deed, seeing that he refrained from it only for My sake.' The reward of deeds depends upon the intentions, and every person will get the reward according to what he has intended."

Some Christians are taught that even to think of sinning is a sin. It's hard to control what we think, but we can usually control what we do. For a Muslim, sin or virtue lies in deeds and the intentions behind them.

God Only Enjoins Good

Say: "My Sustainer has [but] enjoined the doing of what is right; and [He desires you to] put your whole being into every act of worship," and to call unto Him, sincere in your faith in Him alone. As it was He who brought you into being in the first instance, so also [unto Him] you will return. (7:29)

Doing Good Is for Your Own Good

Hence, whoever strives hard [in God's cause] does so only for his own good: for, verily, God does not stand in need of anything in all the worlds! And as for those who attain to faith and do righteous deeds, We shall most certainly efface their [previous] bad deeds and shall most certainly reward them in accordance with the best that they ever did. (29:6–7) But as for those who have attained to faith and have done righteous deeds, We shall most certainly cause them to join the righteous [in the hereafter as well]. (29:9) Whoever does what is just and right, does so for his own good; and whoever does evil, does so to his own hurt; and in the end unto your Sustainer you all will be brought back. (45:15)

There is an often-repeated Quranic statement that those who believe in God and live righteously need have no fear. They will be rewarded far in excess of what the doer of good may have merited.

We bestowed upon you this divine writ, setting forth the truth for [the benefit of all] mankind. And whoever chooses to be guided [thereby does so for his own good, and whoever chooses to go astray, goes but astray to his own hurt; and you have not the power to determine their fate. (39:41) O children of Adam! Whenever there come unto you apostles of your own, conveying messages unto you, then all who are conscious of Me and live righteously—no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve; (7:35)

Give Us a Life Truly Virtuous

“O our Sustainer! We heard a voice call [us] unto faith, ‘Believe in your Sustainer!’—And so we came to believe. O our Sustainer! Forgive us, then, our sins, and efface our bad deeds; and let us die the death of the truly virtuous! “And, O our Sustainer, grant us that which Thou hast promised us through Thy apostles, and disgrace us not on Resurrection Day! Thou never fail to fulfill Thy promise!” And thus does their Sustainer answer their prayer: “I shall not lose sight of the labor of any of you who labors [in My way], be it man or woman: each of you is an issue of the other. (3:193–195)

Luqman Counseling His Son

Luqman was a fabled ancient wise man who appears in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish traditions. He was a legendary figure, firmly established in ancient Arabian tradition as a prototype of the sage who disdains worldly honors or benefits and strives for inner perfection. The

person of Luqman had become, long before the advent of Islam, a focal point of innumerable legends, stories, and parables expressive of wisdom and spiritual maturity. It is for this reason that the Quran uses this mythical figure as a vehicle for some of its admonitions bearing upon the manner in which man ought to behave.

Gratefulness, a Virtue

Indeed, We granted this wisdom unto Luqman: "Be grateful unto God—for he who is grateful [unto Him] is but grateful for the good of his own self; whereas he who chooses to be ungrateful [ought to know that], God is self-sufficient, ever to be praised!" (31:12)

Nothing Is Hidden from God

"O my dear son," [continued Luqman,] "if there be but the weight of a mustard-seed, and though it be [hidden] in a rock, or in the skies, or in the earth, God will bring it to light: for God is unfathomable [in His wisdom], all-aware." (31:16)

Enjoin Good and Forbid Wrong

"O my dear son! Be constant in prayer and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and bear in patience whatever [ill!] may befall you: this is something to set one's heart upon!" (31:17)

Prayer of Gratitude

And so, when he attains to full maturity and reaches forty years, he [that is righteous] prays: "O my Sustainer!

Inspire me so that I may forever be grateful for those blessings of Thine with which Thou hast graced my parents, and me and that I may do what is right [in a manner] that will meet with Thy goodly acceptance; and grant me righteousness in my offspring [as well]. (46:15)

The age of forty is when man is supposed to attain to full intellectual and spiritual maturity.

Verily, God does not wrong [anyone] by as much as an atom's weight; and if there be a good deed, He will multiply it, and will bestow out of His grace a mighty reward. (4:40) Indeed, unto God belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth: and so He will reward those who do evil in accordance with what they did and will reward those who do good with ultimate good. (53:31) Whoever shall come [before God] with a good deed will gain ten times the like thereof; but whoever shall come with an evil deed will be requited with no more than the like thereof; and none shall be wronged. (6:160) And be constant in prayer, and render the purifying dues; for, whatever good deed you send ahead for your own selves, you shall find it with God: behold, God sees all that you do. (2:110) Yea, indeed: everyone who surrenders his whole being unto God, and is a doer of good withal, shall have his reward with his Sustainer; and all such need have no fear, and neither shall they grieve. (2:112) And [withal,] We do not burden any human being with more than he is well able to bear: for with Us is a record that speaks the truth [about what men do and can do]; and none shall be wronged. (23:62)

Happiness in the afterlife is a result of man's endeavor to attain righteousness and inner illumination. Therefore, every act of good is

described as good for oneself because of the reward waiting in the afterlife. Paradise is not an arbitrary reward but a continuation of righteous living into the hereafter. Below are some more examples of virtuous actions and attributes of the blessed people of paradise.

Kept Covenant with God and Man

They who are true to their bond with God and never break their covenant; and who keep together what God has bidden to be joined and stand in awe of their Sustainer... and who are patient in adversity out of a longing for their Sustainer's countenance, and are constant in prayer, and spend on others, secretly and openly, out of what We provide for them as sustenance, and [who] repel evil with good. (13:20–22)

The “covenant” is, in this context, a general term embracing the spiritual obligations arising from one’s faith in God and the moral and social obligations toward one’s fellow men. The phrase “What God has bidden to be joined” refers to all ties arising from human relationships—the bonds of family, responsibility for orphans and the poor, the mutual rights and duties of neighbors. It also applies to the spiritual and practical bonds that exist among all who belong to the brotherhood of Islam (8:75). It includes man’s spiritual obligation to remain conscious of the unity of purpose underlying all of God’s creation and hence the moral duty to treat all living beings with love and compassion.

The phrase “repel evil with good” may mean that “if they have committed a sin, they repel it [i.e., its effect] by repentance,” or doing of a good deed in the atonement of a bad deed. They do not repay evil with evil but repel it by doing good. The end result of their patience in adversity will be the attainment of the ultimate abode or life in the hereafter.

Striving for Here and Hereafter

But as for those who care for the [good of the] life to come and strive for it as it ought to be striven for and are [true] believers withal—they are the ones whose striving finds favor [with God]! All [of them]—these as well as those—do We freely endow with some of thy Sustainer's gifts, since thy Sustainer's giving is never confined [to one kind of man]. How We bestow [on earth] more bounty on some of them than on others: but [remember that] the life to come will be far higher in degree and far greater in merit and bounty. (17:19–21)

Doing Right, Forbidding Evil, Prayer, and Charity

And [as for] the believers, both men and women—they are close unto one another: they [all] enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and are constant in prayer, and render the purifying dues, and pay heed unto God and His Apostle. It is they upon whom God will bestow His grace: verily, God is almighty, wise! (9:71)

Hold Anger in Check, Pardon Others, and Repentance

But unto him who shall have stood in fear of his Sustainer's Presence, and held back his inner self from base desires, paradise will truly be the goal! (79:40–41) And pay heed unto God and the Apostle, so that you might be graced with mercy. And vie with one another to attain to your Sustainer's forgiveness and a paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth, which has been readied for the God-conscious who spend [in His way] in the time of plenty and in the time of hardship and hold in check their anger

and pardon their fellow-men because God loves the doers of good. (3:132–134)

Feeding the Hungry without Recompense

[The truly virtuous are] they [who] fulfil their vows and stand in awe of a Day the woe of which is bound to spread far and wide, and who give food—however great be their own want of it—unto the needy, and the orphan, and the captive, [saying, in their hearts,] “We feed you for the sake of God alone: we desire no recompense from you, nor thanks: behold, we stand in awe of our Sustainer’s judgment on a distressful, fateful Day!” And so, God will preserve them from the woes of that Day, and will bestow on them brightness and joy, and will reward them for all their patience in adversity with a garden [of bliss] and with [garments of] silk. (76:7–12)

The term “captive” denotes anyone who is a captive either literally (e.g., a prisoner) or figuratively (i.e., a captive of circumstances that render him helpless). The Prophet said, “Thy debtor is thy captive; be, therefore, truly kind to thy captive.” The injunction of kindness toward all who are in need of help—and therefore captive—applies to believers and nonbelievers alike, and also to animals dependent on man.

Prostrate in Adoration

Only they [truly] believe in Our messages who, whenever they are conveyed to them, fall down, prostrating themselves in adoration, and extol their Sustainer’s limitless glory and praise; and who are never filled with false pride; [and] who are impelled to rise from their beds [at night] to

call out to their Sustainer in fear and hope... They would lie asleep during but a small part of the night and would pray for forgiveness from their innermost hearts. (32:15; 51:17)

Charity

Is, then, he who [in his earthly life] was a believer to be compared with one who was iniquitous? [Nay,] these two are not equal! As for those who attain to faith and do righteous deeds—gardens of rest await them, as a welcome [from God], in result of what they did. (32:18–19) [But,] behold, the God-conscious will find themselves amid gardens and springs, enjoying all that their Sustainer will have granted them [because], verily, they were doers of good in the past;... and [would assign] in all that they possessed a due share unto such as might ask [for help] and such as might suffer privation. (51:15, 19)

This applies to those who suffer from the scarcity of things that are essential for well-being, such as food and warmth, and to all living creatures, whether human beings or animals, irrespective of whether the need is of a physical or emotional nature.

Faith and Doing What Is Just and Right

For, as for him who shall have believed in God and done what is just and right, He will [on that Day] efface his bad deeds and will admit him into gardens through which running waters flow, therein to abide beyond the count of time: that will be a triumph supreme! (64:9) Thus, there shall be such as will have attained to what is right: oh, how [happy] will be they who have attained to what is right! (56:8)

Peace Be unto You

And if one happens to be of those who have attained to righteousness, [he, too, will be welcomed into paradise with the words,] "Peace be unto thee [that art] of those who have attained to righteousness!" (56:90–91) Those who attain to faith and do righteous deeds shall have gardens of bliss, to abide therein in accordance with God's true promise: for He alone is almighty, truly wise. (31:8–9)

Martyrs in God's Cause

[But] do you think that you could enter paradise without having suffered like those [believers] who passed away before you? Misfortune and hardship befell them, and so shaken were they that the apostle, and the believers with him, would exclaim, "When will God's succor come?" Oh, verily, God's succor is [always] near! (2:214)

The intellectual cognition of the truth cannot by itself be a means of attaining ultimate bliss. It must be complemented by readiness to sacrifice and spiritual purification through suffering. The term "the apostle" is used here in a generic sense, applying to all the apostles.

Persecuted and Slain

Hence, as for those who forsake the domain of evil, and are driven from their homelands, and suffer hurt in My cause, and fight [for it], and are slain—I shall most certainly efface their bad deeds and shall most certainly bring them into gardens through which running waters flow, as a reward from God: for with God is the most beautiful of rewards. (3:195) And as for those who are slain

in God's cause, never will He let their deeds go to waste: He will guide them [in the hereafter as well], and will set their hearts at rest, and will admit them to the paradise which He has promised them. (47:4–6)

Sacrificed Their Lives and Possessions

O you who have attained to faith! Shall I point out to you a bargain that will save you from grievous suffering [in this world and in the life to come]? You are to believe in God and His Apostle, and to strive hard in God's cause with your possessions and your lives: this is for your own good—if you but knew it! [If you do so,] He will forgive you your sins, and [in the life to come] will admit you into gardens through which running waters flow, and into goodly mansions in [those] gardens of perpetual bliss: that [will be] the triumph supreme! And [withal, He will grant you] yet another thing that you dearly love: succor from God [in this world], and a victory soon to come: and [thereof, O Prophet,] you give a glad tiding to all who believe. (61:10–13)

The “victory soon to come” relates to a spiritual victory of the Quranic message and its spread among people who had not previously understood it.

20

Record of Those Who Attained Righteousness after Sinning

AFTER THE ULTIMATE desolation of earth and extinction of all living save the divine, we have the final proclamation by God of His absolute and omnipotent oneness. This is in accord with repeated Quranic statements that all living creatures will taste death. Those who did righteous deeds need not have a fear of punishment for any sin that they may have committed nor a diminution of their merit. The righteous shall be recompensed in the hereafter in accordance with the best that they ever did, and God will efface their bad deeds.

God will exempt the righteous from the supreme awesomeness of the Day of Resurrection. The terror and the tribulations of the Day of Resurrection will cause no grief to the righteous. This is an allusion to the unbroken spiritual life in this world—and, therefore, happiness in the hereafter—of those who have attained faith and have done righteous deeds.

In the final analysis, God's mercy is the key to salvation. All human beings including highly exalted Prophets are in need of God's forgiveness. The Prophet said, "Act and try to act as righteously as you possibly can but know that the action of a person alone will not make him enter Paradise." When asked about his own actions, Muhammad

replied, "Yes, even I will not go to paradise on the strength of my actions unless my Lord covers me up in His mercy."

Jesus's Explanation

"Behold," one came to him and said, "Good teacher, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?"

He said to him, "Why do you call me good? [Jesus stressing his humanness] No one is good but one; that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."

"Which ones?"

Jesus said, "You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not offer false testimony. Honor your father and mother. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself."

The young man said to him, "All these things I have observed from my youth. What do I still lack?"

Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

But when the young man heard the saying, he went away sad, for he was one who had great possessions. Jesus said to his disciples, "Most assuredly I say to you, a rich man will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven with difficulty. Again, I tell you, it is easier for a rope to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God."

When the disciples heard it, they were exceedingly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?"

Looking at them, Jesus said, "With men this is impossible, but with God, all things are possible." (Matthew 19:16–26).

It is only through righteous deeds and God's mercy that one will enter eternal life—a concept consistent with Quranic teachings.

Record Placed in the Right Hand

[But] one Day We shall summon all human beings [and judge them] according to the conscious disposition which

governed their deeds [in life]: whereupon they whose record shall be placed in their right hand—it is they who will read their record [with happiness]. Yet none shall be wronged by as much as a hair's breadth. (17:71) Not [even] the most hidden of your deeds will remain hidden. Now as for him whose record shall be placed in his right hand, he will exclaim: "Come you all! Read this my record! Behold, I did know that [one day] I would have to face my account!" (69:18–20)

This is a symbolic expression of “right” and “left” as “righteous” and “unrighteous.” “They whose record shall be placed in their right hand” had always been conscious of resurrection and judgment and had tried to behave accordingly, and his record shows that he was righteous in his life on earth.

Record of Virtuous Witnessed by Prophets, Saints, and Angels

Nay, verily, the record of the truly virtuous is [set down] in a mode most lofty! And what could make thee conceive what that mode most lofty will be? A record [indelibly] inscribed, witnessed by all who have [ever] been drawn close unto God. (83:18–21).

The record of the virtuous will be witnessed by “all who have [ever] been drawn close unto God,” such as the prophets and saints of all time, as well as by the angels.

Weight of Righteousness Heavy in Balance

And they whose weight [of righteousness] is heavy in the balance—it is they, they who will have attained to a happy state. (23:102) Whereas anyone—be it man or woman—who does [whatever he can] of good deeds and

is a believer withal, shall enter paradise, and shall not be wronged by as much as [would fill] the groove of a date-stone. (4:124) Behold, [only] those who attain to faith and do righteous deeds and humble themselves before their Sustainer—[only] they are destined for paradise, and there shall they abide. (11:23)

21

Accounting of the Righteous of Other Monotheistic Faiths

Exclusivity of Salvation

ISLAM IS THE only major religion that categorically states that followers of other faiths can also attain salvation in the afterlife, an ultimate example of not only tolerance of other faiths but equality of all God's religions. If, for example, only the followers of Judaism are worthy of salvation, as some Jews believe, then out of seven billion humans, only a few million will enter paradise. If the Christian fundamentalists are correct and only they will go to heaven, then six and a half billion humans are hell-bound. If only the Muslims go to heaven, then five and a half billion humans are condemned.

This claim of exclusive salvation is even more controversial because it is not exactly by choice that most human beings adopt a particular religion. For example, a child born to a Hindu family will most likely grow up to be a follower of Hinduism, or a child born in a Jewish family will probably grow up to be a follower of Judaism, and so on. The randomness of the process of birth and parental/societal influences usually determine the future religious preference. Across all cultures, most believers take great pride in the religious

traditions of their ancestors, and therefore conversion to a new religion is a rare phenomenon.

The obvious question is how a loving God can knowingly create all these souls as fodder for hell. It does not portray God as loving or a merciful God. The Quran solves this dilemma by declaring that all righteous people regardless of their denomination are eligible for salvation.

The claim of exclusive salvation amounts to spiritual arrogance and self-righteousness, which is the cause of many evils. Such an attitude of narcissism dehumanizes anyone belonging to a different religious group. The process of denigration leads to discrimination, and if taken to the extreme, can result in violence and genocide.

Timeless Doctrine of Salvation

Verily, those who have attained to faith [in this divine writ] [Muslims], as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Christians, and the Sabians—all who believe in God and the Last Day and do righteous deeds—shall have their reward with their Sustainer; and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve. (2:62) For, verily, those who have attained to faith [in this divine writ], as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Sabians, and the Christians—all who believe in God and the Last Day and do righteous deeds—no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve. (5:69)

The Quranic passages lay down a fundamental doctrine of salvation, which transcend all religious affiliations. It is of timeless import, as it applies to Adam down to the last human on this earth. With a breadth of vision unparalleled in any other religious faith, salvation is granted by the grace of God for having faith, belief in Judgment Day, and doing good works while avoiding major sins. If good deeds

exceed sins, salvation will be granted through God's grace regardless of the person's denomination.

Paradise for the Righteous Regardless of Denomination

And they claim, "None shall ever enter paradise unless he is a Jew"—or, "a Christian." Such are their wishful beliefs! Say: "Produce an evidence for what you are claiming, if what you say is true [i.e., from your own scriptures]!" Yea, indeed: everyone who surrenders his whole being unto God, and is a doer of good withal, shall have his reward with his Sustainer; and all such need have no fear, and neither shall they grieve. Furthermore, the Jews assert, "The Christians have no valid ground for their beliefs," while the Christians assert, "The Jews have no valid ground for their beliefs"—and both quote the divine writ! Even thus, like unto what they say, have [always] spoken those who were devoid of knowledge; but it is God who will judge between them on Resurrection Day with regard to all on which they were wont to differ. (2:111–113)

Definition of Islam

The expression "Who self-surrender unto God," repeated in the Quran several times, provides a perfect definition of Islam. It is derived from the root verb *aslama*, "he surrendered himself," which means "self-surrender to God," and it is in this sense that the terms Islam and Muslim are used throughout the Quran.

Salvation Open to All Denominations

Thus, according to the Quran, salvation is not reserved for any particular denomination but is open to everyone who consciously realizes the oneness of God, surrenders himself to His will, and, by living righteously, gives practical effect to this spiritual attitude. Such are

the wishful beliefs of those who assert that only the followers of their own denomination shall partake of God's grace in the hereafter.

God Will Judge on How They Differ

God will confirm the truth of what was true in their respective beliefs and show the falseness of what was false therein. The Quran maintains throughout that there is a substantial element of truth in all faiths based on divine revelation, and that their subsequent divergence was the result of "wishful beliefs" (2:111) and of a gradual corruption of the original teachings (see 22:67–69).

God Will Grant a Mighty Reward

But as for those from among them [Jews] who are deeply rooted in knowledge, and the believers [Muslims] who believe in that which has been bestowed upon thee from on high as well as that which was bestowed from on high before thee, and those who are [especially] constant in prayer, and spend in charity, and all who believe in God and the Last Day—these it is unto whom We shall grant a mighty reward. (4:162)

Those among the Jews who are deeply rooted in knowledge do not content themselves with a mere observance of rituals but try to penetrate the deepest meaning of faith. In reference to "Those who are [especially] constant in prayer," the construction of the sentence is such that it is meant to stress the special, praiseworthy quality attaching to prayer and to those who are devoted to it.

Zoroastrianism

Zoroastrianism is one of the world's oldest monotheistic religions, much older than Judaism and Christianity. Magians were members of the Zoroastrian priestly caste of the Medes and Persians.

Zoroastrians are not fire worshippers, a common misconception, and for them, fire is a symbol of God's light or wisdom. The Prophet Zoroaster (or Zarathustra) founded this religion in ancient Iran approximately 3500 years ago. For 1000 years, Zoroastrianism was one of the most powerful religions in the world. It was the official religion of Persia (Iran) from 600 BCE to 650 CE. Now, its followers are a small minority. They are represented today by the Gabrs of Iran and, more prominently, by the Parsis of India and Pakistan.

Dualism

Zoroastrians believe there is one God called *Ahura Mazda* (Wise or Good Lord), who created the world. Dualism in Zoroastrianism is the existence of, yet complete separation of, good and evil. This is recognized in two interconnecting ways:

Cosmic dualism refers to the ongoing battle between the good (*Ahura Mazda*) and evil God (*Angra Mainyu*) within the universe. The *Angra Mainyu* is the destructive energy that opposes God's creative energy.

Moral dualism refers to the opposition of good and evil in the mind of mankind. God's gift to man was free will; therefore, man has the choice to follow the path of evil or the path of righteousness. The path of evil leads to misery and ultimately hell. The path of righteousness leads to peace and everlasting happiness in heaven. Belief in evil as completely independent of *Ahura Mazda* denies God's omnipotence and cannot be categorized as pure monotheism. Zoroastrianism combines cosmogonic dualism and eschatological monotheism in a manner unique to itself among the major religions of the world.

Sabians

The Sabians seem to have been a monotheistic religious group intermediate between Judaism and Christianity. Their name was probably derived from the Aramaic verb *tsebha*, "he immersed himself

in water.” They were followers of John the Baptist—in which case they could be identified with the Mandaeans community, which to this day is to be found in Iraq. They are not to be confused with the so-called Sabians of Harran, a Gnostic sect that still existed in the early centuries of Islam and that may have deliberately adopted the name of the true Sabians in order to obtain the advantages accorded by the Muslims to the followers of every monotheistic faith.

Christianity

Some Muslims argue that faith in one God is essential for salvation, and the Quranic verses above refer to the early Christians who were true Unitarians. The Trinitarian Christians are guilty of the sin of associationism by raising Jesus Christ to Godhead. Just as some Christians believe that all non-Christians are damned, so many Muslims believe the same myth for non-Muslims. The Quran does not differentiate between Unitarian and Trinitarian Christians in the context of salvation.

Paradise for Righteous Christians

Thou wilt surely find that, of all people, they who say, “Behold, we are Christians,” come closest to feeling affection for those who believe [in this divine writ]: this is so because there are priests and monks among them, and because these are not given to arrogance. For, when they come to understand what has been bestowed from on high upon this Apostle, thou canst see their eyes overflow with tears, because they recognize something of its truth; [and] they say: “O our Sustainer! We do believe; make us one, then, with all who bear witness to the truth. And how could we fail to believe in God and in whatever truth has come unto us, when we so fervently desire that our Sustainer counts us among the righteous?” And for this

their belief God will reward them with gardens through which running waters flow, therein to abide: for such is the requital of the doers of good. (5:82–85) Verily, as for those who have attained to faith [in this divine writ] [such as Muslims], and those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Sabians, and the Christians, and the Magians, [on the one hand,] and those who are bent on ascribing divinity to aught but God, [on the other,] verily, God will decide between them on Resurrection Day: for, behold, God is witness unto everything. (22:16–17)

The followers of Zoroaster (Magians) and Christians are included in the category of Unitarian faith, along with Jews, Muslims, and Sabians in verse 22:16. It is noteworthy that the Quran does not, in this context, include the Christians and Magians among those who are bent on ascribing divinity to anything besides God, although Christians and Magians do attribute divine qualities to other beings besides God. On the other hand, “those who are bent on ascribing divinity to beings other than God” by obvious implication reject the principle of His oneness and uniqueness (22:17). God will decide their destiny with justice on the resurrection, and they will not be arbitrarily condemned.

Why Are the Magians and Christians Included in the Category of Unitarian Faith?

Intentions behind Actions

Christians regard those beings as no more than manifestations—or incarnations—of the One God, thus persuading themselves that they are worshiping one God alone. Their actions can only be interpreted based on intentions. In Islam, the intention behind actions is the basis for moral judgment. A similar argument can be applied to the followers of other religions. The Prophet’s saying is thus: “The

reward of deeds depends upon the intentions, and every person will get the reward according to what he has intended.”

The element of intent is being expressed in the use of the past tense, for although by their deification of Jesus they are guilty of the sin of “shirks” (the ascribing of divinity to anyone or anything besides God), Christians do not consciously worship a plurality of deities. Theoretically, their theology postulates belief in the One God, who is conceived as manifesting Himself in a trinity of aspects, or “persons,” of whom Jesus is supposed to be one. Their worship of Jesus is not based on conscious intent but rather flows from their overstepping the bounds of truth in their veneration of Jesus (see 4:171, 5:77).

Prediction of Byzantines’ Victory over Persians

In the verses below, it is clear that God favors Christians over Persians. This irrefutable argument is supported by the prediction of the Quran of the victory of Byzantines, who believed in the Trinity as a depiction (adulterated version) of monotheism, over the dualist of Persians, indicating God’s favor for Christianity over Zoroastrianism.

Defeated have been the Byzantines in the lands close-by; yet it is they who, notwithstanding this their defeat, shall be victorious within a few years: [for] with God rests all power of decision, first and last. (30:2–4)

The Thirtieth *Surah* (The Byzantines), revealed during the Mecca period about six or seven years before the *Hijrah*, takes its designation from the prophetic reference to the Byzantines in the opening verses. It is an unequivocal prediction of events that at the time of its revelation were still shrouded in the mists of the future.

The defeats and victories spoken of above relate to the centuries-long struggle between the Byzantine and Persian Empires. In the early seventh century, the Persians conquered parts of Syria and

Anatolia, “the lands close-by,” near the heartland of the Byzantine Empire; later they took Damascus, Jerusalem, and Egypt, and they laid siege to Constantinople itself. At the time of the revelation of this *Surah*, the destruction of the Byzantine Empire seemed imminent. The few Muslims around the Prophet were despondent upon hearing the news of the utter discomfiture of the Byzantine Christians. The pagan Quraysh, on the other hand, sympathized with the Persians who, they thought, would vindicate their own opposition to the one-God idea. When the Prophet enunciated the above Quran verses predicting a Byzantine victory “within a few years,” the Quraysh received this prophecy with derision. The term “a few” in Arabic denotes any number between three and ten; and, as it happened, in 622—six or seven years after the Quranic prediction—the tide turned in favor of the Byzantines. In that year, Emperor Heraclius succeeded in defeating the Persians and drove them out of Asia Minor. By 626, the Persian armies were completely routed by the Byzantines.

22

Accounting of the Righteous among Nonbelievers and Those in Limbo

THE ENTIRE QURAN condemns worshipping idols as an unforgivable sin, especially by those who deliberately deny the truth of God's oneness after all the evidence was given to them. In the pagan society of pre-Islamic Arabia, idolatry had a close association with such evils as sexual immorality, sacrificing children to idols, superstitions, many arbitrary restrictions, and greed in all forms. The severe condemnation of idol worship in the Quran is partly due to the association of Arabian idolatry with all sorts of evil acts. But what about those who worshiped idols but otherwise lived righteously? It is clear from the verses below that one can live righteously while holding erroneous beliefs, because most right and wrong reflect universal values.

No Punishment for Erroneous Beliefs

For, never would thy Sustainer destroy a community for wrong [beliefs alone] so long as its people behave righteously [towards one another]. (11:117) Never would We destroy a community unless its people are wont to do wrong [to one another]. (28:59)

In this life, God's chastisement does not afflict any people merely on account of their holding beliefs amounting to shirk and *kufr* but afflicts them only if they persistently commit evil in their mutual dealings, deliberately hurt other human beings, and act tyrannically toward them. The wrong beliefs include a denial of the truths revealed by God through His prophets, refusal to acknowledge His existence, or the ascribing of divine powers or qualities to anyone or anything beside Him.

Rewards for Good Deeds of Nonbelievers

The following Quranic verses depict that the final judgment will not be so arbitrary and cut and dried. Righteous men and women of all denominations have a hope of salvation through the grace of God. Even some unrepentant sinners who were confused or sinning out of weakness may also attain salvation.

Record of Good Works with God

Unto Him ascend all good words, and the righteous deed does He exalt. (35:10) And everything [that man does], be it small or great, is recorded [with God]. (54:53) And [withal,] We do not burden any human being with more than he is well able to bear: for with Us is a record that speaks the truth [about what men do and can do]: and none shall be wronged. (23:62)

Atom Weight of Good and Evil

On that Day will all men come forward, cut off from one another, to be shown their [past] deeds. And so, he who shall have done an atom's weight of good, shall behold it; and he who shall have done an atom's weight of evil, shall behold it. (99:6-8) And true will be the weighing

on that Day: and those whose weight [of good deeds] is heavy in the balance—it they, they who shall attain to a happy state; whereas those whose weight is light in the balance—it is they who will have squandered their own selves by their willful rejection of Our messages. (7:8–9)

Men will come forward alone or as separate entities to face justice (see 6:94—“And now, indeed, you have come unto Us in a lonely state, even as We created you in the first instance”), thus stressing the individual, nontransferable responsibility of every human being.

Those Who Worship Idols Are Irretrievably Doomed?

In the great dialogue between Pharaoh and Moses, Pharaoh asked about the previous generation, who used to worship a plurality of deities. Are they irretrievably doomed?

Said [Pharaoh], “And what of all the past generations?” [Moses] answered: “Knowledge thereof rests with my Sustainer [alone and is laid down] in His decree; my Sustainer does not err, and neither does He forget.” (20:51–52)

Moses replied that God alone decrees their destiny in the life to come, for only He knows their motives and understands the cause of their errors, and He alone can appreciate their spiritual merits and demerits. Moses did not declare that they all are fodder for hell.

Good and Evil Deeds of Polytheists Counted Equally

And so, [O Prophet,] be not in doubt about anything that those [misguided people] worship: they but [thoughtlessly] worship as their forefathers worshipped aforetime; and, behold, We shall most certainly give them their

full due [for whatever good or evil they have earned], without diminishing aught thereof. (11:109)

Forgive Those Who Denied the Judgment Day

Tell all who have attained to faith that they should forgive those who do not believe in the coming of the Days of God, [since it is] for Him [alone] to requite people for whatever they may have earned. (45:14)

Those Who Were Confused or Were Helpless

Though We may efface the sins of some of you [referring to hypocrites], We shall chastise others—seeing that they were lost in sin. (9:66) But excepted shall be the truly helpless—be they men or women or children—who cannot bring forth any strength and have not been shown the right way: as for them, God may well efface their sin—for God is indeed an absolver of sins, much-forgiving. (4:98–99)

The above Quranic verses express the doctrine that in His final judgment, God will consider all that is in a sinner's heart and will not indiscriminately condemn anyone. Those hypocrites who have been sinning out of weakness or out of an inner inability to resolve their doubts, and not out of a conscious inclination to evil, God out of his mercy and grace may efface their sins. Similarly, those who were helplessly confused and could not grasp the basic demands of Islam, or, alternatively, that the message relating to these requirements has not been adequately conveyed and explained to them, will also receive forgiveness. Children are considered sinless—not accountable for their actions—and will remain untouched by the ordeals and terrors of the Day of Judgment.

Those in Limbo and Waiting for Judgment

The Indifferent Ones

After the unrepentant hardened sinners receive their punishment and the righteous are granted paradise on the Judgment Day, there is still another group that deserves neither hell nor heaven. In their lifetime, they were able to discern between right and wrong but did not definitely incline to either—in brief, the indifferent ones. Their lukewarm attitude prevented them from doing either much good or much wrong, with the result that they deserve neither paradise nor hell. Below is the dialogue between “the indifferent ones” and the inmates of paradise and hell.

Dialogue with the Inmates of Paradise and Hell

And there will be persons who [in life] were endowed with the faculty of discernment. Among them are some who keep halfway [between right and wrong]... And they will call out to the inmates of paradise, “Peace be upon you!”—not having entered it themselves, [but longing for it]. And whenever their eyes are turned towards the inmates of the fire, they will cry: “O our Sustainer! Place us not among the people who have been guilty of evildoing!” And they who [in life] had possessed this faculty of discernment [the indifferent ones] will call out to those whom they recognize by their marks [as sinners], saying: “What has your amassing [of wealth] availed you, and all the false pride of your past? Are those [blessed ones] the self-same people of whom you once solemnly declared, ‘Never will God bestow His grace upon them’? [For now they have been told,] ‘Enter paradise; no fear need you have, and neither shall you grieve!’” (7:46–49)

The expression “you solemnly declared” is a metaphor for the unbelievers’ utter conviction in this respect, implying either that the believers did not deserve God’s grace or that God does not exist. Since only the hardened sinners will face the ultimate punishment of hell, in the end, God’s mercy will prevail over His wrath, and those in limbo will also be forgiven.

Part 5: Heavenly Bliss,
Delights, and Pleasures
of Paradise

23

The Prophet's Night Journey and Glimpse of Heaven

WHILE THE GOD-CONSCIOUS will see paradise on Judgment Day, the Prophet had a glimpse of heaven and hell on the "Night Journey" (*Isra*) from Mecca to Jerusalem and his subsequent "Ascension" (*Miraj*) to heaven. In reality, they are two stages of one mystic experience, dating almost exactly one year before the exodus to Medina.

Physical or Spiritual Experience

Since the Prophet himself did not leave any clear-cut explanation of this experience, Muslim thinkers have always widely differed as to its true nature. Many of the Companions believed that both the Night Journey and the Ascension were physical occurrences; however, Aishah, the Prophet's widow and most intimate companion of his later years, declared emphatically that "he was transported only in his spirit, while his body did not leave its place."

The Night Journey (*Isra*)

In this otherworldly experience, the Apostle of God, accompanied by the Angel Gabriel, found himself transported by night to the site of Solomon's Temple at Jerusalem, where he led in prayer a

congregation of many of the earlier, long-since deceased prophets; some of them he encountered again in heaven afterward. On the occasion of his Night Journey, the Prophet led a prayer in the Temple of Jerusalem, in which all other prophets ranged themselves behind him. This expresses the doctrine that Islam, as preached by the Prophet Muhammad, is the fulfillment and perfection of mankind's religious development, and that Muhammad was the last and the greatest of God's message-bearers. It should be noted that the Prophet's Night Journey from Mecca to Jerusalem, immediately preceding his Ascension, was apparently meant to show that Islam is not a new doctrine but a continuation of the same divine message that was preached by the prophets of old who had Jerusalem as their spiritual home. His encounters with other prophets, mentioned in this connection, symbolize the same idea.

From Mecca to Jerusalem

Limitless in His glory is He who transported His servant by night from the Inviolable House of Worship [at Mecca] to the Remote House of Worship [at Jerusalem]—the environs of which We had blessed—so that We might show him some of Our symbols: for, verily, He alone is all-hearing, all-seeing. (17:1)

The Inviolable House of Worship (*al-masjid al-haram*) is one of the designations given in the Quran to the Temple of the Kabah, the prototype of which owed its origin to Abraham and was "the first Temple set up for mankind," the first ever built for the worship of the one God. "The Remote House of Worship" denotes the ancient Temple of Solomon—or, rather, its site—which symbolizes here the long line of Hebrew prophets who preceded the advent of the Prophet Muhammad and are alluded to by the phrase "the environs of which We had blessed." The juxtaposition of these two sacred temples is

meant to show that the Quran does not inaugurate a “new” religion but represents a continuation and the ultimate development of the same divine message that was preached by the prophets of old. The expression “some of Our symbols” refers to insight, through symbols, into some of the ultimate truths.

The Ascension (*Miraj*)

The second phase of the journey, called the Ascension (*Miraj*), finds the Prophet led by Gabriel toward the very throne of God. Legendary descriptions of the Prophet's excursions follow him through the various levels of heaven, where he once again meets all the major prophetic forebears. However, Muhammad did not see God. Besides the splendors of heaven, Gabriel also showed him hell and the horrors of the damned. The lote-tree at the boundary of paradise is paralleled by the tree of *zaqqum* at the pit of hell, with its bitter smell and flowers like the heads of demons. The Prophet must have time-traveled into the future after the Judgment Day to see people in fire or in the Garden.

Ascension is important from the viewpoint of Muslim theology, as it was in the course of this experience that the five daily prayers were explicitly instituted, by God's ordinance, as an integral part of the Islamic faith.

Lote-Tree: The Symbol of Paradise

And, indeed, he saw him a second time by the lote-tree of the farthest limit, near to the garden of promise, with the lote-tree veiled in a veil of nameless splendor.... [And withal,] the eye did not waver, nor yet did it stray: truly did he see some of the most profound of his Sustainer's symbols. (53:13–18)

The above verses allude to the Prophet's mystic experience of ascension to heaven. He saw the angel Gabriel manifested in his true shape

and nature the second time. The Prophet had no more than twice in his lifetime a vision of this angelic force “manifested in its true shape and nature”: once after the period of hiatus of revelation (see *Surah* 74) and another time in the course of his mystic vision known as the Ascension. Owing to the abundance of its leafy shade, the Arabian lote-tree appears in the Quran as well as in the Traditions relating to the Ascension as a symbol of the “shade”—the spiritual peace and fulfillment of paradise. The qualifying term “of the utmost or farthest limit” is indicative of the fact that God has set a definite limit to all knowledge accessible to created beings. That implies, in particular, that human knowledge, though potentially vast and penetrating, can never, not even in paradise, attain an understanding of the ultimate reality, which the Creator has reserved for Himself.

“The lote-tree veiled in a veil of nameless splendor” is a phrase deliberately vague, indicative of the inconceivable majesty and splendor attached to this symbol of paradise, which no description can picture and no definition can embrace. During this mystic experience, the Prophet is said to have been “made to see”—given to understand some, but not all, of the ultimate truths.

24

Paradise Brought into View and a Beatific Vision of God

[On that Day] every human being will come to know what he has prepared [for himself]. (81:14) Every human being shall be recompensed for what he has earned and none shall be wronged. (45:22) And [on that Day] paradise will be brought within sight of the God-conscious, and will no longer be far away: [and they will be told:] “This is what you were promised—[promised] unto everyone who was wont to turn unto God and to keep Him always in mind—[everyone] who stood in awe of the Most Gracious although He is beyond the reach of human perception, and who has come [unto Him] with a heart full of contrition. Enter this [paradise] in peace; this is the Day on which life abiding begins!” (50:31–34)

Righteous Brought into Paradise

Every human being is bound to taste death: but only on the Day of Resurrection will you be requited in full [for whatever you have done]—whereupon he that shall be drawn

away from the fire and brought into paradise will indeed have gained a triumph: for the life of this world is nothing but an enjoyment of self-delusion. (3:185) God has promised the believers, both men and women, gardens through which running waters flow, therein to abide, and goodly dwellings in gardens of perpetual bliss: but God's goodly acceptance is the greatest [bliss of all]—for this, this is the triumph supreme! (9:72)

Honored Guests of Paradise

On the Day when We shall gather the God-conscious unto [Us,] the Most Gracious, as honored guests. (19:85) Clearly, indeed, have We spelled out these messages unto people who [are willing to] take them to heart! Theirs shall be an abode of peace with their Sustainer; and He shall be near unto them in result of what they have been doing. (6:126–27) Say: "Which is better—that, or the paradise of life abiding which has been promised to the God-conscious as their reward and their journey's end—a promise given by thy Sustainer, [always] to be prayed for?" On that same Day those who are destined for paradise will be graced with the best of abodes and the fairest place of repose. (25:15–16, 24)

Light Emanating from Believers

On the Day when you shall see all believing men and believing women, with their light spreading rapidly before them and on their right, [and with this welcome awaiting them:] "A glad tidings for you today: gardens through which running-waters flow, therein to abide! This, this is the triumph supreme!" (57:12)

The metaphor of “the right hand” or “right side” is used in the Quran to denote “righteousness” and, therefore, “blessedness.” It is symbolized in the present context by the “light spreading rapidly” before and on the right side of the believers as a result of their cognition of God, their high morality, and their freedom from ignorance and blameworthy traits.

Faces Shining with Bliss

[And] some faces will on that Day shine with bliss, well-pleased with [the fruit of] their striving, in a garden sublime, wherein thou wilt hear no empty talk. Countless springs will flow therein. (88:8–12)

This metaphor of the life-giving element is analogous to that of the “running waters” frequently mentioned in Quranic descriptions of paradise.

Welcome to Paradise

[But,] verily, the God-conscious will find themselves [on that Day] in gardens and in bliss, rejoicing in all that their Sustainer will have granted them... [And they will be told:] “Eat and drink with good cheer as an outcome of what you had done, reclining on couches [of happiness] ranged in rows!” (52:17, 19) God has promised the believers, both men and women, gardens through which, running waters flow, therein to abide and goodly dwellings in gardens of perpetual bliss. (9:72) [And God will say:] “O you servants of Mine! No fear need you have today, and neither shall you grieve. [O you] who have attained to faith in Our messages and have surrendered your own selves unto Us! Enter paradise, you and your spouses, with happiness blest!” (43:68–70)

The “reclining on couches” or “on carpets” in paradise is a symbol of inner fulfillment and peace of mind. The righteousness of their children increases the merit of the parents; however, the righteousness of the parents cannot absolve their offspring from individual responsibility.

But those who were conscious of their Sustainer will be urged on in throngs towards paradise till, when they reach it, they shall find its gates wide-open; and its keepers will say unto them, “Peace be upon you! Well you have done: enter, then, this [paradise], herein to abide!” And they will exclaim: “All praise is due to God, who has made His promise to us come true, and has bestowed upon us this expanse [of bliss] as our portion, so that we may dwell in paradise as we please!” And how excellent a reward will it be for those who labored [in God’s way]! (39:73–74)

They shall find their fulfillment in the hereafter—Gardens of perpetual bliss, which they shall enter together with the righteous from among their parents, their spouses, and their offspring. The angels will come unto them from every gate [and will say], “Peace be upon you because you have persevered!” How excellent, then, is this fulfillment in the hereafter! (13:22–24)

Greeting of Peace

[But,] verily, as for those who have attained to faith and do righteous deeds—their Sustainer guides them aright by means of their faith. [In the life to come,] running waters will flow at their feet in gardens of bliss; [and] in that [state of happiness] they will call out, “Limitless art Thou in Thy glory, O God!”—and will be answered with the greeting, “Peace!” And their call will close with [the

words], "All praise is due to God, the Sustainer of all the worlds!" (10:9–10)

The term *Salam* comprises the concepts of spiritual soundness and peace, freedom from faults and evils of any kind, and inner contentment. Its closest—though by no means perfect—equivalent would be the French *salut*, in the spiritual sense of that word.

A Beatific Vision of God

And [as for all such believers,] no human being can imagine what blissful delights, as yet hidden, await them [in the life to come] as a reward for all that they did. (32:17)

The expression "what is kept hidden for them" refers to the unknowable—and, therefore, only an allegorically describable quality of life in the hereafter. We are told to imagine the most joyous sensations, bodily as well as emotional, accessible to man—indescribable beauty, love physical and spiritual, the consciousness of fulfillment, perfect peace and harmony. Imagine these sensations intensified beyond anything imaginable in this world and at the same time entirely different, and you have an inkling, however vague, of what is meant by paradise.

Angels Surrounding the Throne of God

Behold, [in the life to come] the truly virtuous will indeed be in bliss: [resting] on couches, they will look up [to God]: upon their faces thou wilt see the brightness of bliss. (83:22–24) And thou wilt see the angels surrounding the throne of [God's] almightiness, extolling their Sustainer's glory and praise... and the word will be spoken: "All praise is due to God, the Sustainer of all the worlds!" (39:75)

The throne of God is used as a metaphor for His absolute dominion over all that exists, because God unlimited, and a throne of course has physical limitation.

God Is Truly Benign and Ultimate Love

And they [who are thus blest] will turn to one another, asking each other [about their past lives]. They will say: "Behold, aforetime when we were [still living] in the midst of our kith and kin—we were full of fear [at the thought of God's displeasure]:.and so God has graced us with His favour, and has warded off from us all suffering through the scorching winds [of frustration]. Verily, we did invoke Him [alone] ere this: [and now He has shown us] that He alone is truly benign, a true dispenser of grace!" (52:25–28)

This symbolic "asking one another about their past lives" is meant to bring out the fact, often stressed in the Quran, that man's consciousness invariably survives his bodily death, to continue unbroken in the life to come. The Prophet in the well-authenticated *hadith* has summed up the impossibility of man's really imagining paradise. Supporting the nonmaterialistic and allegorical interpretation of paradise, the Prophet said: "The joy of joys consists in the beatific vision in which the veil, which divides man from God, will be rent forever and His heavenly glory disclosed to the soul untrammelled by its earthly raiment." A similar Prophet's statement for the favored of God is to "see his Lord's face night and morning is a felicity which will surpass all the pleasures of the body, as the ocean surpasses a drop of sweat." The Prophet indicated the essential difference between man's life in this world and in the hereafter in these words: "God says, I have readied for My righteous servants what no eye has ever seen, and no ear has ever heard, and no heart of man has ever conceived."

25

Infinite Gardens Heavenly Drinks and Fruits of Paradise

THE CONDITIONS OF heavenly bliss are described with all the vividness of Eastern imagery for people who lived in an arid climate. Paradise is referred to as Gardens, plural. The description of a paradise as vast as the “heavens and the earth” is the Quranic synonym for the entire created universe. We have the image of Gardens abounding with deep rivers of cool, crystal water, of milk, honey, and wine. There is neither too much heat in the Garden, nor bitter cold. Springs spout everywhere, lush vegetation of wondrous hues, blissful shade, flowering meadows, boundless fertility, fruits of every kind. At the top of the realm of the Gardens, there is a lote-tree.

Gardens through Which Running Waters Flow

[But,] verily, they who attain to faith and do righteous deeds shall [in the life to come] have gardens through which running waters flow—that triumph most great! (85:11)

This is the earliest Quranic reference to “Gardens through which running waters flow” as an allegory of the bliss that awaits the righteous in the hereafter.

Yet those who attain to faith and do righteous deeds We shall bring into gardens through which the running water flow, therein to abide beyond the count of time: this is, in truth, God's promise—and whose word could be truer than God's? (4:122) Running waters will flow at their feet [all blessings will be at their command]; and they will say: "All praise is due to God, who has guided us unto this; for we would certainly not have found the right path unless God had guided us! Indeed, our Sustainer's apostles have told us the truth!" And [a voice] will call out to them: "This is the paradise which you have inherited by virtue of your past deeds!" (7:43)

Goodness Supreme

But [when] those who are conscious of God are asked, "What is it that your Sustainer has bestowed from on high?"—they answer, "Goodness supreme!"... Gardens of perpetual bliss will they enter—[Gardens] through which running waters flow—having therein all that they might desire. (16:30–31)

Gardens with Wondrous Hues, Springs, and Every Kind of Fruit

But for those who of their Sustainer's Presence stand in fear, two gardens [of paradise are readied]...[two Gardens] of many wondrous hues... In [each of] these two [Gardens] two springs will flow... In [each of] these two will include two kinds of every fruit be [found]. Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? (55:46, 48, 50, 52–53) And besides those two will be yet two [other] gardens... two [Gardens] of the deepest green... In [each of] these two [Gardens] will two springs gush forth... In

both of them will be [all kinds of] fruit, and date-palms and pomegranates. (55:62, 64, 66, 68)

The “two Gardens,” or two kinds of paradise to be experienced simultaneously, contain a pointed allusion to the allegorical character of all descriptions of the life to come as well as to the inexpressible intensity (or multiplication) of all imaginable and unimaginable sensations in that afterlife. The juxtaposition of “two other Gardens” with the two previously mentioned is meant to convey the idea of infinity in connection with the concept of paradise as such—Gardens beyond Gardens beyond Gardens in an endless vista, slightly varying in description, but all of them symbols of supreme bliss. The “two springs” and the subsequent descriptions of the joys of paradise must be understood in the same symbolic light.

The adjective “green” is often used in the Quran to indicate ever-fresh life—the “green garments” that the inmates of paradise will wear (18:31 and 76:21) or the “green meadows” upon which they will recline (see 55:76).

Flowering Meadows

And in the flowering meadows of the gardens [of paradise thou wilt see] those who have attained to faith and done righteous deeds: all that they might desire shall they have with their Sustainer: [and] this, this is the great bounty—that [bounty] whereof God gives the glad tiding to such of His servants as attain to faith and do righteous deeds. (42:22–23)

Perfect Environment of Ease

In that [Garden] they will on couches recline and will know therein neither [burning] the sun nor cold severe, since its

[blissful] shades will come down low over them, and low will hang down its clusters of fruit, most easy to reach. (76:13–14)

Heavenly Drinks

[They will be seated] on gold-encrusted thrones of happiness, reclining upon them, facing one another [in love]. Immortal youths will wait upon them with goblets, and ewers, and cups filled with water from unsullied springs by which their minds will not be clouded and which will not make them drunk; and with fruit of any kind that they may choose, and with the flesh of any fowl that they may desire. (56:15–21)

“Fruit and meat in abundance—whatever they may desire” represents symbolic “abundance” of sensual satisfaction that will not lead to satiety but rather to a pleasurable desire which—contrary to what is man’s lot in this world—can always be gratified. A goblet is a vessel for drinking, usually of glass or metal, with a base and stem but without handles.

Rivers of Water, Milk, Honey, and Wine

[And can] the parable of the paradise which the God-conscious are promised—[a paradise] wherein there are rivers of water which time does not corrupt, and rivers of milk the taste whereof never alters, and rivers of wine delightful to those who drink it, and rivers of honey of all impurity cleansed, and the enjoyment of all the fruits [of their good deeds] and of forgiveness from their Sustainer. (47:15)

Drink from Unsullied Springs

And in that [paradise] they shall pass on to one another a cup which will not give rise to empty talk, and neither incite to sin. (52:23) A cup will be passed round among them [with a drink] from unsullied springs, clear, delightful to those who drink it: no headiness will be in it, and they will not get drunk thereon. (37:45–47) [Whereas,] behold, the truly virtuous shall drink from a cup flavored with the calyx of sweet-smelling flowers: a source [of bliss] whereof God's servants shall drink, seeing it flow in a flow abundant. (76:5–6)

There are different meanings given to *kafur* by lexicologists: the calyx (*kimm*) of the grape before its flowering; the calyx of any flower; the spathe of a palm tree, and so forth. The meaning of *kafur* in the above context is an allusion to the sweet, delicate fragrance of the symbolic drink of divine knowledge, having it always at their disposal.

Seek Thy Way

And in that [paradise] they will be given to drink of a cup flavoured with ginger, [derived from] a source [to be found] therein, whose name is "Seek Thy Way." (76:17–18)

Namely, this means to "seek thy way" to paradise by means of doing righteous deeds. It contains the highly allegorical character of the concept of paradise as a spiritual consequence of one's positive endeavors in this world. That its delights are not of a material nature is also evident from their varying descriptions—"a cup flavored with ginger" and "flavored with the calyx of sweet-smelling flowers." Or

“they will be waited upon with trays and goblets of gold” and “vessels of silver and goblets that will [seem to] be crystal—crystal-like [but] of silver,” and so forth.

Divinely Drink

And their Sustainer will give them to drink of a drink most pure. [And they will be told:] “Verily, all this is your reward since your endeavor [in life] has met with [God’s] goodly acceptance!” (76:21–22)

This implies that God Himself will slake their spiritual thirst by purifying their inner selves of all envy, rancor, and malice, all that leads to harm, and all that is base in man’s nature, and by allowing them to drink of His own light.

Pure Wine from the Fountain of Paradise

They will be given a drink of pure wine whereon the seal [of God] will have been set, pouring forth with a fragrance of musk. To that [wine of paradise], then, let all such aspire as [are willing to] aspire to things of high account: for it is composed of all that is most exalting a source [of bliss] whereof those who are drawn close unto God shall drink. (83:25–28)

The pure wine of the hereafter—which, contrary to the wine of this world, will carry “the seal” (the sanction) of God because no headiness will be in it—will not get them drunk. It is another symbol of paradise, alluding—by means of comparisons with sensations that can be experienced by man—to the otherworldly sensations of joy which, in a form intensified beyond all human imagination, are in store for the righteous. Some of the great Muslim mystics (such as Jalal ad-Din Rumi) see “pure wine” as an allusion to a spiritual vision of God. Most of the classical commentators regard the infinitive

noun *tasnim* as the proper name of one of the allegorical “fountains of paradise,” flowing with the “wine” of divine knowledge, which is ennobling or exalting.

Fruits of Paradise

Righteous Deeds Mirrored in Fruits of Heaven

The Quran speaks thus of the blessed in paradise:

Whenever they are granted fruits therefrom as their appointed sustenance, they will say, “It is this that in days of yore was granted to us as our sustenance!”—for they shall be given something that will recall that [past]. (2:25)

There will be infinitely varied and unending delights, and yet somehow comparable to what may be conceived of as most delightful in this world, which will recall that past.

Not so, however, God’s true servants: [in the hereafter,] theirs shall be a sustenance, which they will recognize as the fruits [of their life on earth]; and honored shall they be in gardens of bliss. (37:40–43)

It is this that we have been promised during our life on earth as a reward for faith and righteous deeds. In other words, man’s actions and attitudes in this world will be mirrored in their “fruits,” or consequences, in the life to come. They will not be deprived of reward for the least of their good deeds but will be granted blessings far beyond their actual deserts.

Eat and Drink in Good Cheer

[As against this,] behold, the God-conscious shall dwell amidst [cooling] shades and springs, and [partake of]

whatever fruit they may desire; [and they will be told:] "Eat and drink in good cheer in return for what you did [in life]!" Thus, behold, do We reward the doers of good. (77:41–44) And so he will find himself in a happy state of life, in a lofty paradise, with its fruits within easy reach. (69:21–23)

Everlasting Fruits

The parable of the paradise promised to those who are conscious of God [is that of a Garden] through which running waters flow: [but, unlike an earthly Garden,] its fruits will be everlasting, and [so will be] its shade [its gift of happiness]. Such will be the destiny of those who remain conscious of God. (13:35)

Fruits of Good Deeds Endure Forever

And it is God [alone] who determines all things. Wealth and children are an adornment of this world's life: but good deeds, the fruit whereof endures forever, are of far greater merit in thy Sustainer's sight, and a far better source of hope. (18:45–46)

The expression "good deeds, the fruit of which endures forever" occurs in the Quran twice—in the above verse as well as in 19:76.

Fruit-Laden Lote-Trees

And We shall bestow on them fruit and meat in abundance—whatever they may desire. (52:22) [They, too, will find themselves] amidst fruit-laden lote-trees, and acacias flower-clad, and shade extended, and waters gushing,

and fruit abounding, never-failing and never out of reach. (56:28–33) And therein shall you abide, [O you who believe] for such will be the paradise which you shall have inherited by virtue of your past deeds: fruits [of those deeds] shall you have in abundance, [and] thereof shall you partake! (43:71–73)

Delightful Food

[And] there will be thrones [of happiness] raised high, and goblets placed ready, and cushions ranged, and carpets spread out... (88:13–16) And they will be waited upon with vessels of silver and goblets that will [seem to] be crystal crystal-like, [but] of silver—the measure of which they alone will determine. (76:15–16)

Immortal Youth

And they will be waited upon by [immortal] youths, [as if they were children] of their own, [as pure] as if they were pearls hidden in their shells. (52:24) When thou seest them, thou wouldst deem them to be scattered pearls; and when thou seest [anything that is] there thou wilt see [only] bliss and a realm transcendent. (76:19–20)

The expression “immortal youth” is an allusion to the imperishable quality (the eternal youthfulness) of all the experiences in the state described as paradise. Light will emanate from the believers as a result of their freedom from blameworthy traits.

26

Reuniting with Family and Spouses in the State of Perfect Happiness

Companions of Paradise

[In such a paradise the blest will dwell,] reclining upon carpets lined with rich brocade; and the fruit of both these gardens will be within easy reach. (55:54) In these [Gardens] will be [all] things most excellent and beautiful... [There the blest will live with their] companions pure and modest, in pavilions [splendid]... [Companions] whom neither man nor invisible being will have touched ere then... [In such a paradise will they dwell,] reclining upon meadows green and carpets rich in beauty... Hallowed be thy Sustainer's name, full of majesty and glory! (55:70, 72, 74, 76, 78) [But,] verily, for the God-conscious there is supreme fulfillment in store: luxuriant gardens and vineyards, and splendid companions well matched, and a cup [of happiness] overflowing. (78:31–34)

Supreme fulfillment refers to all that a human being may ever desire, symbolized by the “luxuriant Gardens.” The term *kawib* has

the meaning “glorious (or splendid) beings,” without any definition of sex, and in combination with the term *atrab*, it denotes “splendid companions well-matched,” alluding to the relationship of the blessed with one another and stressing the absolute mutual compatibility and equal dignity of all of them.

Pure Companions, Most Beautiful Eyes

[As against this—] verily, the God-conscious will find themselves in a state secure, amid gardens and springs, wearing [garments] of silk and brocade, facing one another [in love]. (44:51–53) And [with them will be their] companions pure, most beautiful of eye, most beautiful of eye like unto pearls [still] hidden in their shells [as free of faults]. [And this will be] a reward for what they did [in life]. No empty talk will they hear there, nor any call to sin, but only the tiding of inner soundness and peace. (56:22–26) And [with them will be their] spouses, raised high: for, behold, We shall have brought them into being in a life renewed, having resurrected them as virgins, full of love, well-matched with those who have attained to righteousness: a good many of olden times, and a good many of later times. (56:34–40)

The term *zawj* denotes “a pair” or “a couple” or a spouse; hence it signifies either “husband” or “wife.” The noun *hur*, rendered as “companions pure,” is a plural of both *ahwar* (masculine) and *hawra* (feminine), either of which describes a person distinguished by “intense whiteness of the eyeballs and lustrous black of the iris.” In a more general sense, it signifies simply “whiteness” or, as a moral qualification, “purity.” Hence, the compound expression *hurin* signifies “pure beings” or “companions pure,” “most beautiful of eye.” It is in the gender-neutral sense the Quran uses the term *hur*. In the post-Quranic

era or in the current form, the term *hur* has feminine connotation, signifying the righteous among the women of humankind.

“As if they were hidden [ostrich] eggs” is an ancient Arabian figure of speech derived from the habit of the female ostrich, which buries its eggs in the sand for protection. Its particular application to the women who attain Paradise becomes clear from 56:34, which states that all righteous women, irrespective of their age and condition at the time of death, will be resurrected as beautiful maidens. The Prophet stated on several occasions that all righteous women, however old and decayed they may have been on earth, will be resurrected as virginal maidens and will, like their male counterparts, remain eternally young in paradise. The term “well-matched” primarily denotes persons of equal age. However, this term is also used in the sense of persons equal in quality, a significance that is eminently appropriate here, as it is meant to stress the equal excellence of all who have attained righteousness, whether they be men or women. In contrast with the foremost, who have always been “drawn close unto God”—and of whom there are less and less as time goes on—there will always be many of those who attain righteousness after initial stumbling and sinning.

Spouses with Modest Gaze

But those who attain to faith and do righteous deeds We shall bring into gardens through which running waters flow, therein to abide beyond the count of time; there shall they have spouses pure: and [thus] We shall bring them unto happiness abounding. (4:57) Let [all] this be a reminder [to those who believe in God]—for, verily, the most beautiful of all goals awaits the God-conscious: gardens of perpetual bliss, with gates wide-open to them, wherein they will recline, [and] wherein they may [freely] call for many fruits and drink, having beside them well-matched mates of modest gaze. This is what you are

promised for the Day of Reckoning: this, verily, shall be Our provision [for you], with no end to it! (38:49–54)

The expression “modest gaze,” or such as restrained their gaze and have eyes only for their mates, applies to the righteous of both sexes, who in the life to come will be rejoined with those whom they loved and by whom they were loved in this world. The primary meaning of *zill* is “shade.” However, in ancient Arabic usage, the word *zill* also means “a state of ease, pleasure, and plenty,” or simply “happiness.” In the combination of *zill zalil*, “abundant happiness,” which seems to agree best with the allegorical implications of the term paradise.

Family Reunion

Everyone will be reunited with his or her family and spouses.

Prayer of Angels “And O, our Sustainer, bring them into the gardens of perpetual bliss which Thou hast promised them, together with the righteous from among their forebears, and their spouses, and their offspring—for Thou alone art almighty, truly wise.” (40:8)

Reuniting with Offspring

And as for those who have attained to faith and whose offspring will have followed them in faith, We shall unite them with their offspring; and We shall not let aught of their deeds go to waste: [but] every human being will be held in pledge for whatever he has earned. (52:21)

Conversations of the Blessed

No empty talk they will hear in that [paradise], nor any lie. [All this will be] a reward from thy Sustainer, a gift in accordance with [His Own] reckoning [a reward from]

the Sustainer of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them, the Most Gracious! (78:34–37)

The conversation of the blessed, which follows here, is allegorical and is meant to stress the continuity of individual consciousness in the hereafter.

Reminiscing about the Past Life

And they will all turn to one another, asking each other [about their past lives]. One of them speaks thus: “Behold, I had [on earth] a close companion who was wont to ask [me]. ‘Why—art thou really one of those who believes it to be true [that] after we have died and become mere dust and bones we shall, forsooth, be brought to judgment?’” [And] he adds: “Would you like to look [and see him]?”—and then he looks and sees that [companion of his] in the midst of the blazing fire and says: “By God! You have almost destroyed me [too, O my erstwhile companion]—for had it not been for my Sustainer’s favor, I would surely be [now] among those who are given over [to suffering]! (37:50–57)

No Empty Talk

No empty talk they will hear there—nothing but [tidings of] inner soundness and peace; and there will they have their sustenance by day and by night: this is the paradise which We grant as a heritage unto such of Our servants as are conscious of Us. (19:62–63)

The term *rizq* (sustenance) applies to all that might be of benefit to a living being, spiritually as well as physically. They hear no idle talk and face each other as brethren, all being equal in dignity. They

enjoy fruits neither forbidden nor out of reach, meat as well as cool drink from shining streams of delicious wine, from which they suffer no hangover.

Freedom from Unworthy Thoughts and Feelings

But those who attain to faith and do righteous deeds... they are destined for paradise, therein to abide, after We shall have removed whatever unworthy thoughts or feelings may have been [lingering] in their bosoms. (7:42–43) And [by then] We shall have removed whatever unworthy thoughts or feelings may have been [lingering] in their breasts, [and they shall rest] as brethren, facing one another [in love] upon thrones of happiness. No weariness shall ever touch them in this [state of bliss], and never shall they have to forgo it. (15:47–48)

The soul will reach its fullest stage of spiritual development, the condition in which all base instincts and desires are removed. There will be freedom from unworthy thoughts, sorrow, struggle, and weariness. None will suffer from bodily ailments or be subject to unpleasant bodily functions. The faithful are content, peaceful, and secure. Finally, human beings will conquer death, and they will remain young forever in everlasting life.

Freedom from Sorrow, Struggle, and Weariness

And they will say: "All praise is due to God, who has caused all sorrow to leave us: for, verily, our Sustainer is indeed much-forgiving, ever-responsive to gratitude—He who, out of His bounty, has made us alight in this abode of life enduring, wherein no struggle can assail us, and wherein no weariness can touch us!" (35:34–35)

They will be facing each other as brethren and all being equal in dignity, and therefore free from envy. The plural noun *surur*, which literally denotes “couches” or, occasionally, “thrones,” also signifies seats or thrones of eminence or of happiness. The sublime quality of these “thrones of happiness” is in some instances further symbolized by expressions like “gold-encrusted” (56:15) or “raised high” (88:13).

Bracelets of Gold, Garments of Silk and Brocade

Upon those [blest] will be garments of green silk and brocade; and they will be adorned with bracelets of silver. (76:21) [When you are promised splendors] as though [of] rubies and [of] pearls—which, then, of your Sustainer’s power can you disavow? Could the reward of good be aught but good? (55:58–60) Wherein they will be adorned with bracelets of gold and pearls, and where silk will be their raiment: for they were [willing to be] guided towards the best of all tenets, and so they were guided onto the way that leads to the One unto whom all praise is due. (22:23–24) [But,] behold, as for those who attain to faith and do righteous deeds—verily, We do not fail to requite any who persevere in doing good... they will be adorned with bracelets of gold and will wear green garments of silk and brocade, [and] wherein upon couches they will recline: how excellent a recompense, and how goodly a place to rest! (18:30–31)

The above reference to the “adornment” of the believers with gold and jewels and silk and their “reclining upon couches” is an allegory of the splendor, the ever-fresh life (symbolized by “green garments”) and the restful fulfillment that awaits them. It is a result of the many acts of self-denial, which their faith had imposed on them during their earthly life. The active form of the above clause (“they

will wear...”) alludes to what the righteous will have earned by virtue of their deeds. The passive form (“they will be adorned...”) denotes all that will be bestowed on them by God above and beyond their deserts. Reclining on the couches, the blessed are adorned with bracelets of gold and pearls, robes of silk and brocade.

Mansions of Paradise

Whereupon unto those who have attained to faith and wrought good works We shall most certainly assign mansions in that paradise through which running waters flow, therein to abide: how excellent a reward for those who labor—those who are patient in adversity and in their Sustainer place their trust! (29:58–59) As against this, they who of their Sustainer are conscious shall [in the life to come] have mansions raised upon mansions high, beneath which running waters flow: [this is] God’s promises—[and] never does God fail to fulfill His promise. (39:20)

Perfect Peace and Fulfillment

“Behold, those who are destined for paradise shall today have joy in whatever they do: in happiness will they and their spouses on couches recline; [only] delight will there be for them, and theirs shall be all that they could ask for: peace and fulfillment through the word of a Sustainer who dispenses all grace. (36:55–58)

In the Quranic descriptions of paradise, the term “shade” is often used as a metaphor for happiness. The “couches” on which the blessed are to recline are a symbol of inner fulfillment and peace of mind. Peace and fulfillment, a composite expression, is the nearest approach in English to the concept of *Salam* in the above context.

Conquering Death and Achieving Everlasting Life

But then, [O my friends in paradise,] is it [really] so that we are not to die [again,] beyond our previous death, and that we shall never [again] be made to suffer? (37:58) In that [paradise]... resting in security; and neither shall they taste death there after having passed through their erstwhile death... an act of thy Sustainer's favour: and that, that will be the triumph supreme. (44:55–57)

Higher Stage of Evolution for Man

But as for those who [by virtue of their past deeds] will have been blest with happiness, [they shall live] in paradise, therein to abide as long as the heavens and the earth endure—unless thy Sustainer wills it otherwise—as a gift unceasing. (11:108) In that [paradise] they shall have whatever they may desire—but there is yet more with Us. (50:35)

God wills to bestow upon them a yet greater reward—unless He opens up to man a new, yet higher stage of evolution.

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