

CHAPTER 89

AL-FAJR (THE DAYBREAK)

*In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.
 By the daybreak!
 And the ten nights!
 And the even and the odd!
 And the night when it departs!
 Truly in this is an oath for men of understanding.
 Has thou not considered how thy Lord dealt with 'Ad,
 (Of) Iram having lofty buildings,
 The like of which were not created in the land.
 And (with) Thamud, who hewed out rocks in the valley
 And (with) Pharaoh, the lord of host.
 Who exceeded the limits in the cities
 And made great mischief therein?
 So thy Lord poured on them a portion of chastisement.
 Surely thy Lord is ever Watchful.
 As for man, when his Lord tries him, then gives him honour and favours him, he
 says: My Lord honours me.
 But when He tries him, then straitens to him his subsistence, he says: My Lord has
 disgraced me.
 Nay, but you honour not the orphan
 Nor do you urge the feeding of the poor
 And you devour heritage, devouring all
 And you love wealth with exceeding love
 Nay, when the earth is made to crumble to pieces
 And thy Lord comes with the angels, ranks on ranks.
 And hell is made to appear that day. On that day man will be mindful, and of what
 use will being mindful be then?
 He will say: O would that I had sent before for (this) my life!
 But none can punish as He will punish on that day.
 And none can bind as He will bind on that day.
 O soul that art rest,
 Return to thy Lord, well-pleased, well-pleasing
 So enter among My servants,
 And enter My Garden.*

This chapter was revealed in Makkah. In the last chapter, *The Overwhelming Event*, great emphasis was laid on this topic - the religion of nature and working according to its dictates and the result of such actions was plainly delineated. The Holy Prophet (sas) was told to advise and exhort mankind for there cannot be any compulsion in matters of religion. Instead, his duty was to encourage others and remind them of the natural religion, that is, Islam. nevertheless, his rejecters and objectors could not bear to hear the

truth that was being propagated by the Holy Prophet and his companions. However, the Holy Prophet never resorted to compulsion to force others to accept this truth but his opponents never balked at using force in their desire to prevent him from carrying out his work of propagation. As a result, in order to preach the religion, the Holy Prophet and his companions were forced to make extraordinary exertion which in Islamic terminology, is called *jihad fi sabil-lil-Lah* (struggle in the way of Allah) that is, in order to preserve and disseminate the truth it is necessary to endure all kinds of difficulties as well as to make all kinds of sacrifices of wealth and life and to draw strength from worship and supplication to Allah, Most High. In addition to these things, in the time of the Holy Prophet, there was, and indeed in any other age, there is another kind of *jihad* (struggle) that is mandatory on the believer and that is a fight against one's own rebellious self. In order to conquer the base passions and evil urges of this *self that commands evil*, the believer has to undergo all kinds of trials and make every kind of sacrifice and above all, he has to resort to worship and supplication, which are his chief weapons. Therefore, the believer must always keep in mind the struggle against his own inner self mentioned in this chapter, *Al-Fajr* (The Daybreak), and ponder over the struggle carried out in the time of the Holy Prophet and the guidance provided by him to his followers as well as the good news he gave them concerning their eventual success. It has also been explained here that the methods adopted by one believer who wages a war against his own inner self and becomes successful can be utilised by any other striver in the way of Allah to make him, too, successful whether against his own inner self or against unbelievers. And these are the paths which, if taken by man, will help him to traverse all the spiritual stages in his journey towards closeness to Allah and pleasing Him. Following these paths will also make him a recipient of the status *nafs-ul-mutma'innah* (soul at rest) and he will become one of Allah's cherished servants who will inherit the kingdom of Heaven.

*By the daybreak!
And the ten nights!
And the even and the odd!
And the night when it departs!
Truly in this is an oath for men of understanding.*

The oaths of Allah point to hidden pieces of evidence which are called into play in order to place strong emphasis on a particular point. *Al-Hijr* is that thing which prevents a person from becoming a slave to greed and lust. That is why the intellect of man is metaphorically called *hijr* for it is supposed to control our emotions and guide them. Thus, the literal meaning of *hijr* (*hijr* comes from *hajara* which means to separate one's self from, to leave off, to abstain from, to quit) is that element which restrains a man from following the temptations of greed and lust. And the meaning of the verse above, *Truly in this is an oath for men of understanding*, is that there is a very important piece of evidence in this statement for those people who protect themselves from the evil prompting of their base self which excites greed and sexual impropriety. Let us now look at the evidence presented in the following verses:

By the dawn. The dawn is used as evidence of the beginning of success or happiness or the dawn of the day of 'Id.

The ten nights refers to the to the last ten nights of the month of Ramadhan including the Night of Majesty on which the Holy Qur'an was revealed and during which the Holy Prophet (*sas*) used to keep awake and engage in extra prayer. It can also mean the first ten nights of the month of Dhul Hijj in which the Pilgrimage and its ritual take place and in which special prayers are offered.

By the even and the odd. These two references have very deep meanings. They refer to the prayer in the latter part of the night called the *tahajjud* which is read in even numbers, that is, in two's and after ten *rakahs* are read in this manner one *rakah* (*witr* or "odd") is read and this makes all the even *rakahs* "odd". However, by the use of the words *even* and *odd* the true meaning of which appears to be shrouded in mystery, what is really meant is this: the creation of Allah is regarded as "even" as the Holy Qur'an itself says: *And of everything We have created pairs that you may mind* (51:49). In other words, the creation is considered "even" and the Creator is called "Odd" or "one" as is recorded in the *hadith*: "Allah is One and He loves oneness."

Therefore, by the use of "even" and "odd" is meant that Allah created His creatures so that everyone should unite and become pairs, that is, among human beings there should exist co-operation, unity, sympathy and kindness exactly according to the pleasure of Allah for that is the true purpose of man's creation. On the other hand, the outstanding characteristic of the Creator is that He is *witr* or One, that is, His creatures must never accept any other teaching except the principle of the Oneness of their Maker. It is by the perfection of this principle that the "even" will become "odd" or one, that is, all will accept one authority for Allah is One and in order for His servants to perfect their obedience, love and belief in His Oneness they should form a strong connection with Him so that the "odd" may become "even". In other words, the servants must become inseparable from their Master.

It can be seen from this that man's spiritual advancement and his perfection depend on two factors. Firstly, there should be among human beings such amity and love that in spite of being "even" or "pairs" they will become one in their mutual affection and harmony. Secondly, Allah is One but His servants should forge such a powerful connection with Him, that He, in spite of being "odd" will gradually become "even". This is what is called the station of intercession and in the prayer in the latter part of the night called the *tahajjud* which contains ten even *rakahs* and one odd *rakah* in the end, the underlying objective is that man should never allow his attention to be diverted even for a second from the above-mentioned significance of "even" and "odd", for in this "even" and "odd" lies the ultimate reality of the purpose of his creation as well as his progress towards perfection.

The verse: *By the night when it departs*, refers to the last part of the night when it is drawing to an end, specifically the last third of the night when the excellence and the acceptance of prayers are particularly emphasised in the *Hadith*.

The connection between *the dawn* and the *ten nights* is that Allah has fixed the dawn of 'Id after the ten nights of extra devotion for, after the special worship in the last ten nights of Ramadhan and the rigorous efforts and the performance of the duty of fasting, comes the dawn of *'Id-ul-Fitr*, which brings the message of happiness. Similarly, after the extra worship in the first ten nights of the pilgrimage and the strenuous devotion and supplication and the performance of the duty of the pilgrimage comes the dawn of *'Id-ul-Adha* which, too, brings with it a message of joy and happiness.

For Muslims there are two "Id festivals and both of them take place only after the performance of a compulsory duty which calls for stringent devotions, the dawn of *'Id-ul-Fitr* comes after the fasts in the month of Ramadhan and the very strict exertions in the last ten nights of the month. Similarly, the dawn of *'Id-ul-Adha* is located after the performance of the pilgrimage and the extra devotions and supplications in the first ten nights of that period. It can be observed, therefore, that the "Id of a Muslim falls on the day when he completes the performance of his duty and is free of extra obligations. From this we can see that neither day of "Id is held in order to commemorate the birth or the death of anyone, nor to celebrate the joy of some military victory nor to mourn over some sorrowful event.

Thus a person who strives hard to subjugate his passions of greed and lust will discover all these spiritual truths as evidence when, during the last ten nights of Ramadhan and the first ten nights of Dhul Hijj he struggles against his inner self and forsakes his bed at night to pray. And when he begins to grasp the reality of these matters in the *tahajjud* prayer, then he worships Allah with total devotion in the "even" and "odd" (*rakahs*) and he keeps uppermost in his mind this important point - that if a strong connection is created between his sympathy and kindness to mankind and his obedience to Allah and belief in His Oneness - then He will obtain clear evidence that as a result of his exertions Allah will certainly and inevitably grant him from Himself a dawn of joy and happiness.

Now, if the idea enters the mind that as the opposing forces of unbelief are so mighty it is impossible for us to put an end to the dark night of misguidance and error, then take heart from this fact that in the past great powers and mighty nations came head to head with the religion of Allah, and what happened? They were all beaten back and destroyed. So, today, when we have the greatest of all truths in the form of the Holy Qur'an and the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*), can the enemy forces of the world ever prevail?

The Holy Qur'an now gives us some examples of past peoples who fought against truth.

*Has thou not considered how thy Lord dealt with 'Ad,
(Of) Iram having lofty buildings,
The like of which were not created in the land.*

There were two ancient Arabian tribes the first of which was called the first "Ad and the second was called 'Ad of Iram or the second 'Ad. But Iram was also the name of the grandfather of the first "Ad and their capital city was also called Iram. Probably it was

this grandfather who had founded that city. The term *dhatul 'imad* (having lofty columns) was used in reference to them for several reasons:

1. They were of strong body and tall in stature. *'Imad* means "columns" and this word was used to emphasise their strength as if, as it were, they were tall and broad as columns.
2. As signs of their military victories and power they used to build tall columns just as the kings and emperors of India used to build tall monuments, for example, the memorial columns of Ashok and Feroze Shah which are still present in Delhi.
3. This tribe lived in the south of Arabia and flourished in the region of Hadramaut and used to build tall buildings. Modern researches have established the fact that the civilisation of Egypt pre-dated that of India, but older than the civilisation of Egypt was that of Yaman. Recent archaeological discoveries in that region have unearthed a plaque on which the name of the Prophet Hud is written together with some incidents relating to his life. This plaque has silenced those Christian priests who had denied the historicity of the Prophet Hud and has confirmed the truth of the Holy Qur'an which was the first book to make mention of Hud. In short, these people possessed in their time such a mighty and advanced civilisation that the Holy Qur'an itself testifies to it in the above verse: *The like of which (buildings and cities) were not created anywhere else in the world.*

Look how cultivated an aesthetic sense the Muslim kings possessed that the whole of this chapter, *Al-Fajr* (The Daybreak) is written on the door of the Taj Mahal at Agra in beautiful mosaic style. And this was done just because of this verse: *The like of which was not created in the land.* The underlying idea behind putting this verse on the door of the Taj Mahal was to demonstrate to the world that in point of exquisite beauty and elegance the Taj Mahal would be unrivalled today as Iram was in its time. And we all know that the Taj Mahal is considered as one of the seven wonders of the world.

And (with) Thamud, who hewed out rocks in the valley

This tribe lived in the northern region of the Hejaz in a very rocky area which they populated and for strength and fortification these people built houses for themselves by hewing out rocks and mountains. Evidence of their civilisation has existed for centuries for these houses hewn out of the rocks are still extant. In fact, quite recently a marvellous city made out of red stone was discovered. Pictures of this city and its history were recently published in *The Times* of India.

Houses hewn out of rocks are very strong. In Aden, there is a dry, rocky mountain in the sea and the English have cut through it and built a fort in the heart of this rocky mountain. If any foreign warship should attempt to pass through there without their permission then the large cannons hidden in the interior of the rock would destroy them.

And (with) Pharaoh, the lord of hosts (or tent pegs)

Pharaoh was the title of the kings of Egypt. The vast number of his army has been described as *autad* (tent pegs) because when a large army is encamped in an area all that can be seen is a massive conglomeration of horses and tent poles.

Here, three nations have been mentioned. The first was the tribe of 'Ad who lived to the south of Makkah, the second was the people of Thamud who settled to the north of Makkah. The third reference was to Pharaoh who was an opponent of the prophet of the Children of Israel, the law-bearing Prophet, Moses, to whom the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) claimed a resemblance. And in speaking of these three, the Holy Qur'an has mentioned all the major powers and resources at man's command. These are:

1. The large stature and physical strength of the people.
2. The huge and massive buildings, fortresses and monuments to commemorate their victories in war.
3. The construction of large, powerful buildings carved out of stone.
4. The possession of mighty armies.

However, in spite of possessing all those advantages, when they rebelled against Allah and opposed the truth the result was that all their supposedly invincible resources availed them naught. Therefore the Holy Qur'an states:

*Who exceeded the limits in the cities
And made great mischief therein?*

Two things are mentioned here - they spread corruption in the land because of their transgression and cruelty and their disobedience to Allah, and secondly, they were very rebellious in their opposition to the truth.

So thy Lord poured on them a portion of chastisement.

Just as when some rogues are causing a disturbance somewhere and an administrative officer comes and flogs and chases them away, similarly Allah administers a flogging on those who oppose His messengers and sow corruption in the land so that they are defeated and put to ignominious flight and none remains. Therefore, even today the Holy Qur'an affirms:

Surely thy Lord is ever Watchful.

Nothing is hidden from the Lord, Most High, and just as the general of an army watches from a look-out and as soon as an opportunity arises he falls on the enemy forces and destroys them, so, too, Allah is always on the alert. He is fully aware of the mischief of the evildoers and when the opportune time comes, such will be His seizure of them in the midst of their wickedness that they will not be able to move.

As for man, when his Lord tries him, then gives him honour and favours him, he says: My Lord honours me.

But when He tries him, then straitens to him his subsistence, he says: My Lord has disgraced me.

In those two verses, the Holy Qur'an has solved the question behind the disparity in prosperity and straightened circumstances, and wealth and poverty in the world. Whenever people are intoxicated with riches and power, they do not like to listen to any advice or preaching from anyone. The religion of the poorer classes, especially, holds no attraction for them. On the other hand, pride in the possession of wealth and worldly status creates in them such an inflated attitude of themselves that they begin to think, or at least they give off this feeling, that Allah is happy and pleased with them and so He has so blessed them with His favours that wherever they go power and wealth run towards them.

In this connection, we relate a very interesting incident. Many years ago in the time of the late Maulana Nur-ud Din, the first successor to the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, and just after the Balkan War, a delegation of Christian priests went to Lahore and began to give lectures. Their main point was that through the grace of God, the Messiah Jesus, the Christian Empire was successful and was predominant all over the world whereas the condition of Muslims was so wretched that even their only Sultanate, that of Turkey, had suffered destruction. On hearing of this, Maulana Nur-ud Din sent a delegation of Ahmadis to them with the advice that they should support the Christian priests when they spoke the truth but they must refute whatever false allegations they may make. They should also convey to them the message that the reason for Christian domination which they gave was not the true one. Instead, the true reason is contained in an incident recorded in the Gospel which for them is an authentic book. The incident he reminded them of was that for forty days continuously Jesus, the Messiah, was tempted by Satan who transported him over jungles and mountains. At last he carried him to the top of a mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world. He then said to Jesus: "If you bow to me, all these kingdoms shall be yours."

Whereupon Jesus replied: "Get thee hence, Satan, for it is written in the former Scriptures that you must make prostration to God alone. Therefore, it is not fitting for me to bow to you."

Jesus, the Messiah, refused to bow to Satan and rejected the kingdom of the world. But Christians saw that the result of his action was that for his whole life he suffered poverty and indigence. They thought, therefore, that it was not wise to follow him in this matter so they prostrated before Satan and received in return worldly kingdoms. In other words, the fact that they inherited all the kingdoms of the world was, according to the Gospel, because they had bowed down to Satan. The Christian priests could not give a reply to this message and a few days later they fled the city.

In short, in two verses the Holy Qur'an has solved this riddle which the Gospel could not do. It says that abundance of wealth and poverty are but two trials. In other words, trials continue to come from Allah for the purpose of testing the character of His servants. Therefore, to consider abundance of riches and honour as signs that Allah is pleased with us and more than that, He is conferring honour on us because of his diverse favours is a dangerous error. Similarly, to consider penury and indigence as evidence of Allah's anger or His contempt in that he is depriving us of wealth and riches is also a very grave mistake. These two conditions befall man as a form of trial. Look how beautifully 'Umar Faruq (*ra*) expressed this sentiment when he said: "In times of difficulty and straitened circumstances, we show patience, but when we are tried by opulence and prosperity we are unable to practise restraint." He applied this statement to himself in all humility with the result that both in poverty and in prosperity he became a peerless example of fortitude. Unfortunately, however, his statement fitted the later Muslims so closely that the words that came from his mouth turned out to be a prophecy regarding their behaviour for when kingdoms and riches came to the lot of Muslims, they failed to upkeep their religion as their predecessors had done.

In short, prosperity and indigence are two conditions of trial for man. Until Allah, Himself, tells us that favours, success, power or wealth have come to us because of our good deeds and are blessings given to us as a reward for our actions; or, if we suffer disgrace and abasement and Allah does not tell us beforehand that we will suffer such treatment as punishment for our wrongful behaviour, then for any individual or nation to attribute wealth and power to the pleasure of Allah, or poverty and disgrace to the anger of Allah is a serious mistake and indeed an absurd position.

Therefore, the opponents of Islam should not regard their wealth and authority as indications that Allah is pleased with them and so He will not punish them. The Holy Qur'an emphatically denies this belief and promises them retribution instead, for Allah's pleasure is won through good works and high morals of which they are devoid. So, to consider their prosperity as proof that Allah is pleased with and is honouring them is an egregious error. Wealth by itself does not necessarily constitute a sign of Allah's approval.

*Nay, but you honour not the orphan
Nor do you urge the feeding of the poor
And you devour heritage, devouring all
And you love wealth with exceeding love*

In these four verses the Holy Qur'an explains why wealth alone is not necessarily a sign of Allah's pleasure as it lists four grave short-comings in the behaviour of materialistic-minded people. It accuses them of not honouring the orphan and not encouraging one another to feed the poor. These two words, *yatim* (orphan) and *misikin* (poor) need some clarification. *Yatim* means one who is left alone in the world and his condition is such that he cannot look after himself and has to depend on others. That is, he does not yet have the ability to work and provide for his own livelihood and those who provided

sustenance for him and cared for him before are no longer alive. Therefore, a person whose father is dead is called an orphan (*yatim*).

Miskin (poor) comes from *sakana* (to be quiet, to rest) and it means a work which was in progress has now suddenly come to a standstill. It is applied to a person who has the knowledge and expertise to work for his living and care for himself but has lost the means or tools for doing so. Therefore, one who has been deprived of the resources for earning his daily bread is called a *miskin* (needy).

No society in the world can ever establish a foundation of prosperity and claim honour for itself until the people apply themselves diligently to find means to ameliorate the condition of these two classes in their midst - the orphan and the poor. It is because of neglect of these two groups that prosperity and honour depart from a community. If people were to support and maintain these two sections of the society, then they will suffer no fear of losing their riches and well-being nor their honour and renown. Look how beautifully the Holy Qur'an discloses the manner of sustaining them:

1. **The orphan.** The orphan can be fostered in two ways: he can either be treated honourably or humiliatingly. That is why the command is given here to honour the orphans. In other words, their rights should be safeguarded and their upbringing be such that they do not suffer abasement. The Holy Qur'an emphasises that every orphan, whether of rich or poor parentage, should be accorded respect - his right should be protected and in his upbringing, education and training, due consideration should be given to his status so that he may never be allowed to look down on himself with contempt nor to develop low habits. Thus he can become a useful member of the society. As regards the upbringing of this kind of orphan, the Holy Prophet (*sas*) is reported to have said: "I and the one who takes responsibility for an orphan, whether of his own kin or of others, will be in paradise thus" and he pointed his forefinger and middle finger with a slight space between them. (*Bukhari*)
2. **The poor.** Here by *feeding the poor* does not mean giving them food to eat but the command is really to urge one another to find means of livelihood (a job or occupation) for the needy ones. It is indeed an act of virtue to feed the needy but the word *ta'am* (food) does not refer only to cooked food but also means a source of livelihood and here it carries both meanings, hence the command to *encourage one another to feed the poor*.

The underlying meaning is that until a society or nation gets together and through mutual consultation devises a system that will help its poorer section to obtain a source of livelihood, that society or nation is in danger of losing its affluence and honour. If a nation wishes to maintain its position of prosperity and honour, then, in order to improve the welfare of its distressed section, it is mandatory for the people of that nation through planning and consultation to set up a national institution that will make provision for the livelihood of the poor among them. And is it not the purpose of the *zakah* (poor-rate) and the *bait-ul-mal* (public treasury) to collect taxes from the wealthy and place them in a

central body, and for the sake of ameliorating the plight of the orphan and the needy, to set up an institution that will provide the means of their upbringing and education in a dignified manner?

If such a treasury should exist and Muslims should entrust their *zakah* (poor-rate) to a central authority and spend it on deserving cases, then in a matter of days the condition of the Muslim nation will improve and instead of hardship it will enjoy ease and from abjection it will rise to eminence.

In the verses above, the verse, *Nay, but you do not honour the orphan*, goes with, *And you devour heritage, devouring all*, and, *Nor do you urge the feeding of the poor*, relates to, *And you love wealth with exceeding love*, to highlight the fact that disgrace is bound to befall a nation which not only dishonours orphans but denies them a due share in their inheritance; and instead of providing the means of livelihood for the needy, they love wealth with an ordinate love and are guilty of niggardliness. These people are not only contemptible in the eyes of Allah but in this very life their end will surely be one of humiliation and ruin.

In short, in the above verses, Allah's main objective is to make man understand that when he is tried by abundant wealth he should not fall prey to pride and self-conceit. Further, he should not consider his riches as proof of God's honour to him for that thought can very well lead to his destruction. On the other hand, if a man is tried by straitened circumstances he should never entertain the idea that he is pre-destined to live a life of penury and abasement for this idea is a great hindrance to human progress and advancement. Poverty is not necessarily a sign of degradation. The real signs of dishonour are those base morals and vile actions of which man is guilty. The moral, therefore, is that man should not exult in his wealth nor should Muslims surrender to abject despondency because of their poverty. Instead they should develop high moral qualities which are the essence of genuine honour.

*Nay, when the earth is made to crumble to pieces
And thy Lord comes with the angels, ranks on ranks.*

A simple minded person thinks that no one is seeing his evil deeds nor are his wicked actions witnessed by anyone. But Allah says that He and His angels are close at hand, but He is invisible for between Him and an evil person there is an intervening veil of worldly and material means. A time will certainly come when this veil will be lifted and all mundane expedients will be dissipated and Allah will emerge from on high and seize the evil one in the midst of his mischief. For example, take the case of a thief who is stealing fruits from a garden and thinks that no one is seeing him, but the owner and his servants are observing him from a hiding-place and as soon as the thief begins to move away with the stolen fruits, they emerge from their hiding-place or from behind the cover of the trees and catch him red-handed with the stolen loot. Similar is the example of man and his Lord.

This worldly screen between man and Allah is rent on three occasions:

1. The first occurs at the time of death and this is called the minor resurrection.
2. The second time when the veil is removed is in the life of a prophet when his followers reap the reward of success whilst the unbelievers reap a harvest of humiliation and destruction. In reference to this the Holy Qur'an states in another verse: *But Allah came to them from a place they expected not and cast terror into their hearts...*(59:2). The unbelievers in their pride and reliance on their worldly power desire to obliterate the believers but they themselves suffer the same defeat, abasement and destruction that they planned for the believers; for the hand of Allah becomes visible and He, together with His angels, come to assist the faithful and to punish the unbelievers from whence they perceive not. For example, Pharaoh pursued the Children of Israel in order to capture them but he, himself, was captured and was drowned in the sea. The unbelievers of Makkah, too, set off towards Madinah to wipe out the Muslims, but they, also, suffered an inglorious defeat at Badr at the hands of a handful of Muslims. The treaty of Hudaibiyah ostensibly strengthened the hand of the unbelievers against the Muslims but that very seemingly one-sided treaty was the cause of the fall of Makkah and the permanent defeat of the unbelievers. The lifting of this screen is called the middle resurrection.
3. The third occasion when the veil will be lifted will be on the Day of Resurrection when all hidden things will be made manifest. That is called the Great Resurrection.

And hell is made to appear that day. On that day man will be mindful, and of what use will being mindful be then?

The Holy Qur'an says that when the worldly veil is torn apart, and the servant is seized and brought before his Lord in order to give an account of his bad deeds, and the hell which he was fashioning with own hands is brought before his eyes, then he will come to his senses. But then his repentance and realisation will be futile just as it is for a student who idles away his time and does not do well in his examinations and so fails outright. To cry tears of repentance when the results are published is useless.

He will say: O would that I had sent before for (this) my life!

In this verse, the Holy Qur'an points out to us that the true life is the life of the Hereafter. So, wise is the one who prepares beforehand for that life which is the real one.

*But none can punish as He will punish on that day.
And none can bind as He will bind on that day.*

Everything that Allah has created is unique. There is no limit to His favours; His punishment ought to be the same and so, too, His seizure should be such that no one can approach its totality. Man can evade the capture of man and even escape it outright;

man's punishment, too, may be tainted by errors and flaws. But no one can elude the grasp of Allah nor get away from it. His punishment is eminently suited to the crime and in perfection it is unrivalled. Therefore, it will be an act of wisdom for man to try to avoid the punishment of Allah. How ironical it is that even a wise man tries to escape from the punishment of worldly judges and sometimes even succeeds, yet he cares not for Allah's punishment although His seizure is so comprehensive that no one can escape it. The purpose of this announcement is to advise man that he should try to endure every difficulty on earth but he should try to save himself from Allah's punishment and for the sake of this he should bear all the punishment of worldly judges if he has to, for their punishment is nothing compared to Allah's.

*O soul that art rest,
Return to thy Lord, well-pleased, well-pleasing
So enter among My servants,
And enter My Garden.*

The plight of the unbelievers when the veil of worldly resources is lifted has already been described. The focus now is on the condition of the believers who at night engaged themselves in worship and struggled to defeat their lower self and who, in times of error and misguidance, were concerned with propagating the religion and fighting in the way of Allah, all the while strenuously striving to develop high moral and spiritual excellence. As a result, they were awarded that exalted rank called *nafs-ul-mutma'innah* (soul at rest).

Everyone knows that the Holy Qur'an has given us three stages in the development of the human soul. The first is called *nafs-ul-ammara* (the spirit that commands evil). At this stage, the lower self of man is wont to command evil and under the instigation of his passions and desires he commits evil deeds without even feeling ashamed.

The second stage is that of *nafs-ul-lawwamah* (the accusing spirit). At this level there is a continuous war between man and Satan. Man desires to save himself from evil and from the wicked promptings of Satan as well as his own animal passions and instincts. Sometimes he is successful and saves himself from evil but sometimes in the face of satanic impulses he finds himself powerless to do so and does commit a sin, whereupon his inner self or his conscience duly blames him.

The third level is that of *nafs-ul-mutma'innah* (the soul at rest) at which stage the war between Satan and man comes to an end. Satan finally suffers a permanent defeat as was the case of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) when he said: "My jinn (that is, Satan) has become a Muslim." In this condition, deeds of righteousness begin to flow from man freely and spontaneously as if it had become second nature to him to do good.

The meaning of "the soul at rest" has been explained by Allah Himself in the words, *well-pleased, well-pleasing*. *Well-pleased* means that the servant in his life on earth had cheerfully accepted the decrees of Allah and had been obedient to the *Shari'ah* (Law), and *well-pleasing* indicates that the devotee has won the pleasure of his Lord through obedience to His commands and resignation to His decrees. How deserving of envy is the

state of peace and tranquillity of this servant who was always well-pleased with every command and action of Allah and with whose word and deed Allah, too, was correspondingly pleased. The following is a further elucidation of these two expressions mentioned above.

Radiyah (well-pleased) means to be pleased with the commands of Allah and His decrees. Man is happy when he gets what he likes. When a person reaches the position of "soul at rest" he observes the dictates of the Law, that is, the commands and prohibitions of Allah, without any difficulty. Even more, his obedience creates a feeling of joy and delight in his heart and so disobedience is impossible for him for this will cause him pain and agony. This is the station of *'ubudiyyat* (servitude) which is the ultimate point of man's perfection. At this stage, obedience becomes second nature and brings into being its own paradise. This is why the Holy Prophet (*sas*) said: "Prayer is the coolness of my eyes," and Sayyid Abdul Qadir Jilani explains that when this stage is reached, getting a reward for prayer is no longer the object of man's worship, for now prayer itself becomes a source of pleasure for him so he seeks no other reward. The reward for prayer is contained in the prayer itself, so if at this point the summons from Allah comes to him: *Enter among My servant*, it will indeed be most appropriate for him.

Similarly, whatever Allah decrees for His servant, for example, alternating conditions of happiness and sadness, of delight and agony, is borne with cheerful resignation by the one who has reached the stage of "soul at rest".

One admissible reaction to sorrow and pain is that in spite of a heavy burden on a person's soul, man does not lament or weep over Allah's decrees but silently endures all that comes his way. This is called the station of resignation which every Muslim should try to acquire. However, there is a higher response which is called the station of pleasure and this is the preserve of the "soul at rest". At this stage, the believer enjoys a feeling of delight and comfort from the sorrow and pain which he suffers because he feels that Allah's will has been fulfilled. The Sufis have written that when Allah allows something to happen according to our wishes, we ought to be happy over it, but not so much as when Allah decides that a matter should take place according to His pleasure and we have to abandon our own desire in preference to His will.

Thus, it is written in the *Hadith* that if a servant of Allah made supplications that were not answered according to his wishes and Allah instead decreed according to His will with which the servant was pleased, the magnitude of the reward for resignation which the servant will receive on the Day of Resurrection will be such that he will wish that all his supplications had remained unanswered.

Someone once asked the saint, Rabiah of Basra, whether she ever felt sadness, to which she replied: "Yes, when there is no sadness in my heart." It is natural for man to feel sadness under certain circumstances, but in the midst of the pain, if a person experiences pleasure at the thought that this is the will of his Lord and so becomes pleased with his Lord's pleasure, he indeed attains a most elevated state in which his soul enjoys peace

and tranquillity. This state is called Heaven and if at this juncture he is told: *Enter My Garden*, then how deserving it will be for him.

Mardi'ah (well-pleasing) refers to those who have gained the favour and approbation of Allah. And how can this be obtained? There are two ways open to man: obedience to the laws of Allah and cheerful resignation to, and acceptance of His decrees. Therefore, if a servant fulfils these two conditions and is happy and content with them, then in return his Lord will respond to him in like manner. One should consider, therefore, how fortunate is the person who has won the pleasure of his Lord. In this everyday world, when a person receives a certificate of commendation from a ruler whose tenure even is transient, he can hardly contain himself for joy. So just think for a moment how unimaginably happy will be that person who receives a mark of approbation from the Best of all rulers, the Lord of the worlds! Here *well-pleased* is placed before well-pleasing because the former is the response of the servant whilst the latter is the consequence, for indeed it is a servant's conduct that attracts the pleasure of Allah, Most High.

To be pleased with one's Lord in this world is such a difficult task that very few are those who achieve this. If a servant accepts the commands of his Lord and moreover, is pleased with them, then how can he be disobedient? But if every day a servant grumbles over the decrees of his Lord, and if he suffers a slight pain and something happens against his desire and expectation, he loses his temper and abandons his beliefs and his religion and exceeds the bounds in ingratitude, then it will be impossible for him to be pleased with his Lord. Thus it can be seen that to remain pleased with Allah without the least complaint is indeed a very difficult goal to achieve. That is why the *Hadith* tells us that if every day a person sincerely recites certain expressions, Allah will be pleased with him on the Day of Resurrection. These words are: "I am satisfied with Allah as my Lord, Muhammad (*sas*) as His Messenger and Islam as my religion."

The root of all difficulties is that the wisdom underlying the commands of Allah and the consequences of acting according to them are hidden from man and so he stumbles along the way. Thus to be pleased with one's Lord is the highest point in belief in the Unseen and it is for this reason that Allah's favour and pleasure in return are the highest and most unsurpassable of all bounties. There is no doubt that a recipient of such magnanimity has displayed his servitude to Allah to the best of his ability and together with calmness and contentment of the soul he has become an inheritor of paradise. This to receive the invitation, *So enter among My servants, and enter My Garden*, is eminently fitting for such a servant.

Two further points for consideration

Firstly, the Holy Qur'an has confirmed the error of the philosophy of pantheism for, according to the Holy Qur'an, the highest stage of man's perfection is that of *'ubudiyyat* (servitude) and not that of becoming a sort of Creator, however much he may discover and control some of the forces of nature. This is supported by the verse, *Enter among My servants and enter My Garden*, from which we can see that the strongest bond between man and his Lord is that of total submission. His progress towards the status of slave of Allah increases in proportion to his obedience just as his *fana fil-lah* (self-effacement in

Allah), that is, his union with Him, becomes stronger as he treads further on the path of submission, for there is no other path available by which man can unite with Allah except that of obedience. That is why the station of greatest honour for man in the Court of his Lord is that of slave of Allah as this verse of the Holy Qur'an testifies:

I have not created the jinn and the men except that they may become My slaves (51:56).

This explains why the most honourable title conferred on the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) was that of slave of Allah. This is confirmed firstly by the following verse of the Holy Qur'an:

If you are in doubt as to that which We revealed to our 'abd (slave) (2:23)

and secondly by this testimony:

I bear witness that Muhammad is the 'abd (slave) of Allah.

Without being a slave he could not have become an apostle. Just as man's highest rank in relationship to Allah is that of slave, so, too, in relation to the Holy Prophet (*sas*) man's greatest rank is that of *ummatis* (follower). And the more our obedience to the Holy Prophet (*sas*) increases, in the same measure does our status of follower rise. In other words, self-obliteration in the Holy Prophet (*fana fir-rasul*) is another name for *ummatis* (perfect discipleship) and this is corroborated by the following verse of the Holy Qur'an:

Say, if you love Allah, follow me: Allah will love you (3:30). In other words, the more we become disciples of the Holy Prophet (*sas*), that is, *ummatis* (followers), the more will Allah love us.

The second point is that from this verse, *Return to thy Lord*, it seems that just after death in the state of *barzakh*, the blessings of Paradise begin to come into operation. However, those who have attained the state of "soul at rest" and have advanced to the stage of *'ubudiyyat* (servitude) begin to experience the sweetness of paradise right here on earth, for the verse, *Enter among My servants, and enter My Garden*, indicates to us that becoming a slave and entering the Garden take place simultaneously. That is, whoever becomes a slave enters paradise straightaway.