

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allāh, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Looking at the beginning of Surat al-Baqarat, you will notice that the very first characteristic of the muttaqin Allah lists is that they believe in al-Ghayb - the unseen world. Besides the obvious, there are a few practical implications of this concept in your life.

Firstly, you - O Muwahhid - believe what you believe not because it is popular, easy, cute & cuddly, or will get you more visits to your website. You do not draw your scale of truth/falsehood, right/wrong, acceptable/unacceptable from the reaction of the people around you. In fact, such factors mean absolutely nothing to you. If the six billion people on this Earth believed in something, this would not cause you to budge. Rather, in this world of changing trends, fashions, and flavors of the month, you believe what you believe based on the reaction of a world that never changes its scales - the world of the Unseen... a world of divine Pleasure and Anger, Heaven and Hell, Angels and devils, that has retained the same unchanging scale of good/ evil & truth/ falsehood since the beginning of time, and will continue to do so until the end of time. The record of this scale - the Qur'an - was sprung forth from that world. It sprung forth from that world whose scales pay no mind to what those around you think, pay no mind to what will/ won't make you a household name, pay no mind to the constantly changing fashions that beliefs have unfortunately become an example of. This is why, my brother and sister, your heart grabs onto this Qur'anic scale of Tawhid being the maslaha (benefit) over all other masalih, and it grabs onto this scale of wala' & bara' being the honor of honors to carry in this era, and it holds tight to the scale that measures compromising with or bowing to a

taghut as being the humiliation of humiliations in this era - your heart holds to this and never asks what this will mean for your popularity or worldly comfort. Why not? Because your heart is holding onto a scale that comes from a world devoid of changing fashions and trends. To believe in the unseen world will keep your beliefs as firm and unchanging as the scales of that world. And in a world where overnight riddah is in style, this verse of al-Baqarah means all the more.

Because of your full conviction in the unseen world, you are not a coward. You are willing to take risks in life, especially for the sake of preserving truth. You think back to the du'a' made by the Messenger of Allah (saw) during the Battle of Badr: ***"O Allah! If this small group is defeated, You will never be worshipped on Earth!"*** You think about how this shows that the odds were so much against the Muslims that day - the risk of failure and annihilation so high - that Islam itself was in danger of being wiped out for good, and yet, this only increased the resolve of the Muslims and they went forth anyway. You think to yourself what drove them to take such a risk? What instilled this courage in their hearts? What kept them firm? You then realize that they had an advanced understanding of the forces at work in the world. They knew that the unseen world could - and would - unleash powers that the human mind cannot comprehend. They didn't know when it would unleash these powers and forces, but they knew for a fact that it could and would. In her book *'Just Five Minutes'* (p.48-49), Heba Dabbagh relates that when her mother was in prison, her interrogators asked about her son, to which she replied: *"All I know is that I raised my son to go from our house to the mosque from the mosque to the university, and that's all."* The officer then said to the interrogator: *"Prepare her for some beatings."* She replied: *"God help you. I am your mother's age, and you want to beat me?"* When she was put into solitary confinement, she complained to the warden, asking why she was in prison: *"I want to write a letter of complaint to this whole division! Give me a pen and paper."* He

replied: *"That is not allowed. It would never reach him. That is against the rules."* So, she replied: *"Then I will complain to God, the One and Only, the most Just of Judges, and God-willing, one day you will sit in my place, but you will not have the patience to bear it as I do."* Sister Heba then related: *"After a month or two, we heard about the warden's death. He died in a car crash. The steering wheel tore into his stomach."*

So, you reflect over how the unseen world controls the seen world - not vice versa - and you are emboldened because of this. No worldly power can possibly stand in your way, because you are privy to powers even greater. This is a reality we have to be 100% certain in!

As a believer in the unseen world, you are also able to absorb losses and instead see them as victories. Your whole scale and perception of what loss is is completely beyond what they are for those around you. They deal with the currency of money and health, you deal with the currency of thabat and Allah's Pleasure. For you, there is no such thing as loss so long as you are true to your principles and have fulfilled the criteria for attaining Allah's Pleasure. Loss for you is defined as weakening in your principles and violating the Shari'ah. While the Battle of Uhud was, in a worldly sense a loss, Ibn al-Qayyim dedicates roughly eight pages of 'Zad ul-Ma'ad' to in essence illustrate how it was a victory. This writing of his should be dissected and pondered over deeply by any Muslim looking for clarity in our current circumstances. By making our success/failure based on the currency of the unseen world, we can never lose, no matter what "losses" befall us in this world. Our religion will be attacked, we will be thrown in prison, our lands will be invaded and pillaged, but we never lose because these are all transactions of this world, while the flurry of activity in the unseen world - reward being recorded, palaces in Paradise being prepared - tells a very different story as to who won & who

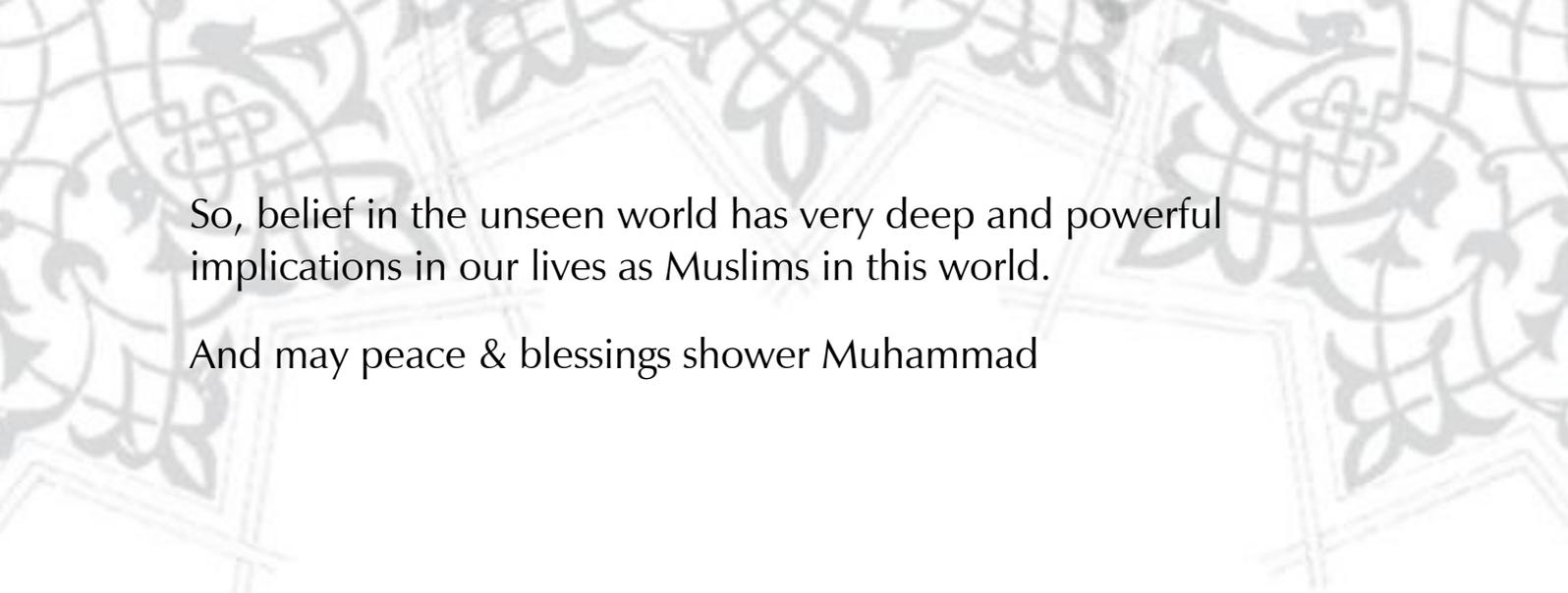
lost.

The best example in my mind to illustrate this attitude is that of the mother of our sister Aafia Siddiqui - that poor, poor woman who was subjected to so many years of physical and mental torture at the hands of those who lecture us day and night on how to treat our women. The blatant injustice experienced by this woman who was kidnapped, held in a secret American prison, torn from her children, shot twice in the abdomen in hopes of having the truth of what was done to her die along with her, and finally convicted of utterly ridiculous and laughable charges in light of her physical frailty - what this woman has been subject to leaves no words that can adequately express the heart's feelings. However, the attitude of her heroic mother is one that perfectly manifests a true belief in the unseen world turning a loss into a victory. She reacted to her daughter's conviction by saying:

*"Up until now, I've been so sick, I couldn't leave my bed. But after receiving the news of my daughter's guilty verdict, life has come back to me! If the judge thinks that today will be a dark day at Aafia's house, that her mother would faint from hearing the verdict, then let it be known to him that I couldn't have had a happier day! This day, Allah has replaced Aafia with a thousand sons for me who stand by my door everyday pledging their support!"*

Finally, she said: *"The sign of a believer is that he never bows to anyone except Allah. The day we bend to the Creation for mercy instead of Allah, we will be destroyed."*

This is the true meaning of gain/loss - based on the scales of the Ghayb, not those of this tangible world that will one day melt away.

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So, belief in the unseen world has very deep and powerful implications in our lives as Muslims in this world.

And may peace & blessings shower Muhammad

In Surat al-Baqarah, v.21-22; Allah Says:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ  
لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمْ الْأَرْضَ فِرَاشًا وَالسَّمَاءَ بِنَاءً وَأَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ  
مَاءً فَأَخْرَجَ بِهِ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ رِزْقًا لَكُمْ فَلَا تَجْعَلُوا لِلَّهِ أَنْدَادًا وَأَنْتُمْ  
تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾

*{ " O Mankind! Worship your Lord Who Created you and those who were before you so that you become pious; Who has made the Earth a resting place for you and the sky as a canopy... " }*

What you can come away with from these verses is that if your faith is weak, at a low point, a quick way to strengthen it is to look at two things: yourself and your surroundings. Set aside maybe fifteen minutes of your day to just sit and think about the wonder of your own anatomy, and you will find your attachment to Allah becoming gradually stronger throughout the rest of your day.

From a single microscopic clot of sperm & egg, your body was formed and composed into bones, nerves, blood vessels, flesh, skin, etc. Organs that are external and organs that are internal, each and every one - large and small - has its own appearance, dimensions, and location in order to fulfill its own specific function.

Look, for example, at your skeleton. It is composed of hard bones that grew out of that liquid sperm clot. Look at how it supports your body, and how each bone is unique with its own function

and appearance. Some are large, some are small, some are long, some are short, some are round, some are hollow, some are wide, some are narrow, some are dense, and some are light. Think about the mere fact that your skeleton is not simply one large single bone, in which case you would be prevented from any movement. Instead, you have hundreds of bones, each connected through joints in such a precise manner to allow you the movements you make throughout your day ... each group of bones designed by Allah to allow for a specific set of movements. Look at how each bone sticks to the adjacent one through a ligament, and look at the manner in which the edge of one bone is a ball that fits perfectly into the socket of its neighbor, allowing fluidity in movement that seems effortless.

Look at your muscles, of which there are hundreds in your body, each made of flesh, nerves, and tendons, and each located and designed in such a manner to fulfill a very precise set of functions, and each one necessary in its own right to help carry out that specific function. More than two dozen muscles are involved in the movement of your eyelid alone. If just one of the muscles was missing, you would be unable to open your eyes at all! Likewise, each organ in the body has its own group of muscles specific to it, without which it would be useless. The eyelid itself is a wonder, perfectly placed to protect the eye from dust and excess light.

Look at the eyes themselves, composed of the most delicate retina, fovea centralis, optic nerve, sclera, vitreous humour, lens, iris, and cornea - all working together to help you read these words, to observe the heavens, to enjoy the stars and clouds and colors and plants and animals that you set your sights on regularly. All of this takes place without thought or effort on your part.

Look also at your ears, how they are designed and structured with the crevices that cause any sound that comes your way to collect and concentrate toward the eardrum, to be heard clearly.

Look at your tongue, that muscle that allows you to express outwardly what you are thinking and feeling. Look at how your mouth is beautified with teeth that re lined up symmetrically. Some of these teeth bite, others are meant to chew and grind. Each tooth has its own function and purpose. Your lips seal your mouth, give it color, and allow you to distinctly pronounce and differentiate between the letters in the words you wish to speak. Allah fashioned your larynx to allow the sound carrying those words to emanate from your throat; each larynx distinct between the human race to allow a listener to recognize who he is listening to. All of this involves intricate details, processes, and wonders that would take too long to delve into here.

Look at you hand, how it is able to fulfill its purposes. Look at the flatness of your palm, your five fingers, four all to one side opposite the thumb that stands alone, in order to allow that thumb access to all other fingers. There is simply no other way to design the hand that would allow it to fulfill its purpose, none at all. Imagine if all five fingers were adjacent to one another, all on the same side. How would you even write a sentence?

Then look at something as seemingly insignificant as your fingernails, which serve to beautify your fingers (imagine nail-less fingers/ toes), provide a sort of spine for them, and allow you to pick at things that you would otherwise be helpless to access. How many times have your fingernails helped in snapping open a can of soda or scratching an itch on your arm or leg? Such an unnoticeable and seemingly insignificant part of your body would leave you helpless in many ways were it to be absent.

All of this and more makes up the wonder that is your body - all of this grew out of a single liquid microscopic clot. All of this is you, and you are just one of billions of humans living among countless other creatures on this one planet that is orbiting a run-of-the-mill star in an ordinary galaxy of which there are billions in a universe

that is constantly expanding. The wonders of this universe and its stellar miracles are such that it would not be just to even attempt to summarize them here. It cannot be random, all of this.

All of this was an effortless creation of Allah, the Creator. He points in these two verses of al-Baqarah to i) ourselves, and ii) our surrounding to build up our desire to worship Him: *{ " O Mankind! Worship your Lord Who Created you and those who were before you so that you may become pious; Who has made the Earth a resting place for you and the sky as a canopy..." }*

So, whenever you feel slacking in your faith and worship, and just don't feel that sweetness and energy, look through an anatomy book or do a Google Photos search for images from the Hubble Telescope, and just think for a while.

In Surat al-Baqarah, v.61, Allah reminds the Children of Israel:

وَإِذْ قُلْتُمْ يَا مُوسَىٰ لَنْ نَصْبِرَ عَلَىٰ طَعَامٍ وَاحِدٍ فَادْعُ لَنَا رَبَّكَ يُخْرِجْ  
لَنَا مِنَّا ثَمَرًا مِّنَ الْأَرْضِ مِنْ بَقْلِهَا وَقِثَّائِهَا وَفُومِهَا وَعَدَسِهَا  
وَبَصِلِهَا قَالَ أَتَسْتَبْدِلُونَ الَّذِي هُوَ أَدْنَىٰ بِالَّذِي هُوَ خَيْرٌ  
أَهْبِطُوا مِصْرًا فَإِنَّ لَكُمْ مَّا سَأَلْتُمْ وَضُرِبَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الذِّلَّةُ  
وَالْمَسْكَنَةُ وَبَاءُوا بِغَضَبٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا  
يَكْفُرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَيَقْتُلُونَ النَّبِيِّنَ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ ذَٰلِكَ بِمَا  
عَصَوْا وَكَانُوا يَعْتَدُونَ ﴿٦١﴾

*{ "And remember when you said: "O Moses! We cannot endure having just one kind of food. So, invoke your Lord to bring forth for us what grows from the ground - its herbs, cucumbers, wheat, lentils, and onions." He replied: "Do you exchange what is better for what is lower? Go to any town, and you will find what you want!" And they were stricken with humiliation and misery... }*

Any group or nation that is subject to continuous injustice will eventually become comfortable and accustomed to a state of subjugation. if the period of injustice is extended, this will become a quality ingrained in the heart, infused in the character and mindset, deeply.

The oppression and injustice of Pharaoh deeply affected the Children of Israel and ingrained in their characters this quality of subjugation. This occurred despite the fact that Allah had sent Prophet Moses to bring them out of Egypt as a means of taking them from a state of slavery to one of freedom and honor. On their way shortly after leaving Egypt behind, they felt tired and hungry. So, they began to complain and actually blame Moses for taking them away from Egypt and the food they would enjoy therein! It's reported in Exodus 16:3 that the Children of Israel said to Moses and Aaron: *"If only we had died by the Lord's Hand in Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."* And this is when they made the complaint in the verse from Surat al-Baqarah to have Allah provide more types of food. Despite what they faced in Egypt, they still longed for it because of these pleasures! Furthermore, when Moses left them for a few days to converse with his Lord, they took the ornaments of Pharaoh they'd been carrying and constructed a golden calf that they proceeded to worship! This is how much veneration they had in their hearts for the very masters who had enslaved them.

So, while they had been freed physically, they were still very much enslaved & subjugated psychologically. This was to the point that when they were told to enter the Holy Land promised to them, they literally said to Moses: *"You and your Lord can go fight for it. We'll sit here."* They had no sense of honor.

The first way to revive & rejuvenate a person or group or nation that's been subject to injustice & oppression is to bring about a

new character and mindset that is free, independent, and based on honor - what we can call an 'uncolonized mind' - and combine that personality with knowledge of the Shar' and the application of that knowledge, in that order. Our primary problem is not ignorance or deviations here and there. We see many du'at and a'immah who are very educated & well-read in the Sunnah, but there's still that feeling that something is missing.

What we need to understand is that any person - regardless of the beliefs he adopts & lives by - can fulfill wonders so long as he is free in both body and mind. That's just how the world works. So, for the Children of Israel, and likewise with us today, the first step towards our goals is not to obtain knowledge or engage in worship rituals. The first step for us is to learn how to be true human beings, to know our worth, to free ourselves from psychological subjugation. These are the signs of life: for us to retrieve our sense of pride and reject weakness & mental submissiveness. Otherwise, we are walking corpses.

So, the first problem & the first solution have to do with this internal deprogramming that must occur. The first problem is not ignorance (academic), deviation in secondary matters, lack of unity - although these certainly are major problems. We must begin with the most basic, universal, human issue, otherwise we will get nowhere when it comes to true da'wah, and our lives as Muslims in general. The Children of Israel believed in Allah, they prayed, etc. But mentally, they remained in a state of subjugation to the masters that weren't enslaving them physically. So, as soon as they became hungry, they longed for the food & drink that came along with slavery, and preferred that over the hunger that came with

their freedom.

In Surat al-Baqarah, v.79, Allah said:

فَوَيْلٌ لِلَّذِينَ يَكْتُبُونَ الْكِتَابَ بِأَيْدِيهِمْ ثُمَّ يَقُولُونَ هَذَا مِنْ  
عِنْدِ اللَّهِ لِيَشْتَرُوا بِهِ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا ۖ فَوَيْلٌ لَهُمْ مِمَّا كَتَبَتْ  
أَيْدِيهِمْ وَوَيْلٌ لَهُمْ مِمَّا يَكْسِبُونَ ﴿٧٩﴾

*{“Then woe to those who write the book with their own hands and then say, ‘This is from Allah!’ to purchase a small prize with it. Woe to them for what their hands wrote and woe to them for what they earn!”}*

Human tampering with divine revelation is prevalent in many of the world's religions, is a constant historical occurrence, and has had devastating consequences for the reputation of religion in general. A classic example is the series of events that led up to the conflict between science and religion in Western thought.

Back in the 4th century, Christianity entered the pagan Roman Empire. However, rather than affect Rome with its originally monotheistic teachings, Christianity instead was affected by the pagan traditions of the Romans. As emperor of the Romans, Constantine brought about a sort of hybrid tradition that joined both Christian and Roman pagan doctrine. The result was a distorted version of Christ's original teachings exercising full authority in what is now Europe. All through the Middle Ages, this

version of "Christianity" – a.k.a. the Catholic Church – remained the supreme reference for all aspects of European life. Therefore, as the sole interpreter of the Bible, the Pope was both the supreme religious and political head of state. Revelation – or rather, the Pope's interpretation of it – was the source of all knowledge, religious and secular/scientific.

However, by the 15th century, there emerged a sort of protest against what the Catholic Church had by then incorporated into Christianity, such as the notion of the Trinity, confession, etc. The reform efforts of Martin Luther, Calvin, among others rejected the Pope's exclusive authority to interpret divine scripture, and also rejected many beliefs that were added onto the original Christian doctrine – such as the Trinity – rather than having been original teachings of Prophet Jesus. The result was the formation of the Protestant Church (from the word "protest"), which seceded from the Church in Rome. So, this was a response to the Church's distortion of religious teachings of Christ.

Two centuries later, you saw rebellion against the erroneous scientific teachings it had taken upon itself to formulate and impose. The Catholic Church violently opposed any type of scientific discovery that contradicted its teachings. All of this was done in the name of religion, and the scientists and philosophers at the time, with their natural desire to inquire into the scientific matters the Church had already ruled on, were thus put at odds with religion, namely the Church. This November marks the 350th anniversary of the formation of the Royal Society in London, which was the dozen or so scientists of various fields who met and were said to have developed the processes of scientific publishing, peer

review, and organized experimentation. In short, they are credited by the Western World with founding modern science. The important thing to note was that this was seen as a challenge to accepted Church teachings – it was seen as a challenge to "religion."

So, the 17th century saw a decline in the regard given to the authority, and this was in reaction to the Church's oppressive enforcement of baseless teachings regarding the physical world, which was inseparable from its distortion of the pure monotheistic teachings of Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him). This decline coincided with religion being subject to increased debate and discussion by European philosophers.

Towards the middle of the 18th century, the trend emerged where religion became subject to reason, while before, reason was subject to religion when Church doctrine was the undisputed authority in all areas of life. So now, reason and rationale took precedence over all other sources of knowledge and guidance, and replaced religion as the source of politics, law, etiquettes, and even religion itself. This "knowledge" was manifested in the ideas of philosophers. This period in European history was known as the Age of Enlightenment, the Age of Humanism, and the Age of Deism – deism because these philosophers made "intellect" and "reason" the replacement for God. They taught that all authority belonged to the intellect, and intellect alone. Their goal was to debase religion as the authority, and they were driven to this goal as the result of the conditions brought upon European life by the corrupt teachings of the Church in the areas of religion, politics and science.

By the 19th century, there were those who thought that the Age of Enlightenment didn't go far enough in wiping religion out of the spheres of life. See, the philosophers for the most part didn't wish to deny the concept of religion in totality. They merely wished to subject it to reason, to make reason and rationale the authority by which all other sources of knowledge were to be judged, including religion. This new philosophy, however, sought to deny legitimacy to anything that was not tangible, anything not seen in the nature around us. So, not only was religion defunct as a source, but the faculties of reason and intellect were now considered as having no inherent value or authority except as the result of whatever nature imparted them. Whatever could not be seen physically and felt by the senses was deceit, according to this emerging school of thought. In short, this was the point when science was overtly used as a tool to oppose religion (namely, the Catholic Church). Once again, this was a reaction to the manner in which the Church distorted existing beliefs, formulated additional ones, and imposed them on Europe in an exploitive manner. When Darwin refused to attribute the creation of the human being to Allah, it wasn't because he had scientific facts to prevent him from doing so. I remember how surprised I was when I took a cultural anthropology class in college and learned that Darwin didn't even have a theory as to when the ape-to-human shift allegedly took place. Rather, his motivation was to counter the Church, due to conditions it had placed on society.

Here in America, in Massachusetts, if one wishes to take serious religion classes at Harvard University, he must walk half a mile to the secluded and separate Divinity School – this at a university that was founded in 1636 as a training ground for Christian

missionaries, and had as its motto for over 200 years '*Christ et Ecclesiae*' (For Christ and the Church) until it was taken down in 1843 and replaced with '*Veritas.*'

Thus emerged the gap and historical conflict between religion (rather, the Western concept of it) and science. It was all a direct result of the distortions carried out by the Church all those centuries back. So, praise be to Allah who has left His final Revelation unaltered and left no contradiction between it and the confirmations of Science.

Allah said, in Surat al-Baqarah, v.85:

ثُمَّ أَنْتُمْ هَؤُلَاءِ تَقْتُلُونَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَتُخْرِجُونَ فَرِيقًا مِّنكُمْ مِّن دِيَارِهِمْ تَظَاهَرُونَ عَلَيْهِم بِالْإِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ وَإِن يَأْتُوكُم أُسْرَىٰ تَفْدُوهُمْ وَهُمْ هُوَ مُحْرَمٌ عَلَيْكُمْ إِخْرَاجُهُمْ أَفْئُوتٌ مِّنُونَ بَعْضِ الْكُتُبِ وَتَكْفُرُونَ بِبَعْضِ فَمَا جَزَاءُ مَن يَفْعَلُ ذَلِكَ مِّنكُمْ إِلَّا خِزْيٌ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يُرَدُّونَ إِلَىٰ أَشَدِّ الْعَذَابِ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٨٥﴾

*{ "After this, it is you who kill one another and drive out a party of you from their homes, assist their enemies against them in sin and transgression. And if they come to you as captives, you ransom them although their expulsion was forbidden for you... " }*

This verse highlights a historical trait of the Israelites, which is that they never abandon their own.

In the civil strife that ensued following the death of Joshua, the Israelite tribes would fight each other and expel one another into the hands of the external enemy. Yet, they would always end up rescuing their brothers from the enemy even though they were the ones initially responsible for their captivity! You see this today, as well, with how Israel reacts to its soldiers being taken prisoner by surrounding enemies. Regardless of the truthfulness of the claim, the pretext for the entire Israeli attack on Lebanon in the summer of 2006 was to exert pressure on those who had captured a handful of its soldiers. Even when looking at prisoner swaps between Israel and Hamas, you notice figures like 10,000

Palestinians swapped for three Israelis. So, this is a historical trait of the Children of Israel that can still be seen today: when it comes to their own falling into the hands of an enemy, they will stop at nothing to gain that captive's release.

The early Muslims were exactly as protective over their brethren who fell captive into the hands of the enemy. 'Umar bin 'Abd al-'Aziz was famous for offering whatever he had to ransom Muslim prisoners. Al-Imam al-Awza'i took it upon himself to write and send a timely reminder to Abu Ja'far al-Mansur to do whatever it took to free some Muslims who had been captured by the Romans. Ibn Taymiyyah was a tireless activist – writing letters, negotiating, fighting – when it came to winning the release of Muslim captives. Even the most tyrannical rulers, such as al-Hajjaj and al-Mu'tasim, would not hesitate in launching invasions of entire cities just to free one or two Muslims that had fallen prisoner to the Kuffar. Al-Mansur bin Abi 'Amir rode on horseback all the way from Cordova to northern Andalusia just to recover one Muslim who was left as a prisoner in the hands of the Christian army, at the request of his mother.

This was our past, this is our heritage – one of loyalty, courage, and selflessness. It was a past where people placed the interests of others over and above their own comfort and safety. You should learn a lesson from them – and from the Israelites – and try to remove some of that cowardice from your heart, try to remove some of that selfishness from your mentality, try to display a bit more loyalty to your Ummah, and it's about time you do that now. How people can consider themselves "active members of the Muslim community" and whatnot while they are not exerting all they can for the cause of brothers (and sisters, now!) locked up across Canada, America, Guantanamo Bay, Britain, and elsewhere is beyond me, let alone those who choose to exert nothing. What will it take?? The "scholars" in the West are clearly uninterested, so look beyond. The Prophet (**saw**) was a head of state, a military

commander, a husband, a father, a teacher, a Messenger from Allah! Yet, in the midst of all this, he would not hold back from supporting and remembering the oppressed by name while carrying out around-the-clock responsibilities. Abu Hurayrah related that in the prayer, the Prophet would supplicate and mention men by name, saying, ***"O Allah! Rescue al-Walid bin al-Walid, and Salamah bin Hisham, and 'Ayyash bin Abu Rabi'ah, and the oppressed believers!"*** He would do this openly and publicly.

The Children of Israel were simply manifesting an aspect of the fitrah that they had retained. It would be a shame for us to fall behind in claiming our right to the same; behind them! It would be a shame for them to beat us at living up to our own heritage.

In Surat al-Baqarah, v.93, Allah described the Children of Israel:

وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَاقَكُمْ وَرَفَعْنَا فَوْقَكُمُ الطُّورَ خُذُوا مَا  
ءَاتَيْنَاكُمْ بِقُوَّةٍ وَأَسْمِعُوا قَالُوا سَمِعْنَا وَعَصَيْنَا وَأُشْرِبُوا  
فِي قُلُوبِهِمُ الْعِجْلَ بِكُفْرِهِمْ قُلْ بِسْمَايَأْمُرُكُمْ  
بِهِ إِيمَانُكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٩٣﴾

*{ "...and their hearts drank up the veneration of the calf..." }*

When Prophet Moses left for Mt. Sinai to converse with Allah, the Children of Israel became restless and sought out a new god to worship besides Allah. So, they ended up worshipping an artificial golden calf (mentioned in pt. 3). Allah described their veneration of this calf using the word *'ushribu'* (they drank up, or soaked, or absorbed), thus likening their deviance to the act of drinking or soaking up liquid.

Elsewhere, guidance and knowledge is also given this likeness. In a hadith reported by both al-Bukhari and Muslim, the Prophet (saw) said: *"The likeness of the guidance and knowledge that Allah sent me with is that of a rain that fell on some land... so, Allah benefited the people with it and they drank from it and quenched their thirst..."* They also report a hadith where he said: *"While I was sleeping, I was given a container of milk. I drank from it until I could see it coming out from beneath my fingernails. I then gave what I had left over to 'Umar bin al-Khattab."* When he was asked to interpret this dream, he said: *"This represents knowledge."* Also, in the hadith of the Isra' and Mi'raj, the Prophet said: *"... I was then presented with two containers, one containing milk and the other containing wine. I was told: "Drink from whichever you*

*want." So, I took the milk and drank it, and I was told: "You chose the fitrah (the pure, natural choice). If you had chosen the wine, your people would've been misguided."'''*

Just like the body has its thirst quenched by fluid, the heart has its thirst quenched by knowledge and proper guidance. When seeking to quench the body's thirst, one will only drink what is pure and wholesome. If presented with a glass of water, however, that has been tainted with even the smallest drop of black ink, he will reject it and not quench his thirst from this polluted source. The thirst of the heart should likewise only be quenched from a pure, untouched source of knowledge and guidance. It was this approach that chiseled out the incredible generation of the Prophet's Companions. It was this approach that created hearts and minds unmatched in their wisdom and strength. This approach was intentional and planned, and was not the result of desperation or lack of alternative sources of guidance. Sayyid Qutb commented:

"The Holy Qur'an was the only source from which they quenched their thirst, and this was the only mold in which they formed their lives. This was the only guidance for them, not because there was no civilization or culture or science or books or schools. Indeed, there was Roman culture, its civilization, its books, its laws, which even today are considered to be the foundation of European culture. There was the heritage of Greek culture – its logic, its philosophy, and its arts, which are still a source of inspiration for western thought. There was the Persian civilization, its art, its poetry, and its legends, and its religion and system of government. There were many other civilizations, near or far, such as the Indian and Chinese cultures, and so on. The Roman and Persian cultures were established to the north and to the south of the Arabian Peninsula, while the Jews and Christians were settled in the heart of Arabia. Thus we believe that this generation did not place sole reliance on the Book of Allah for understanding of their religion

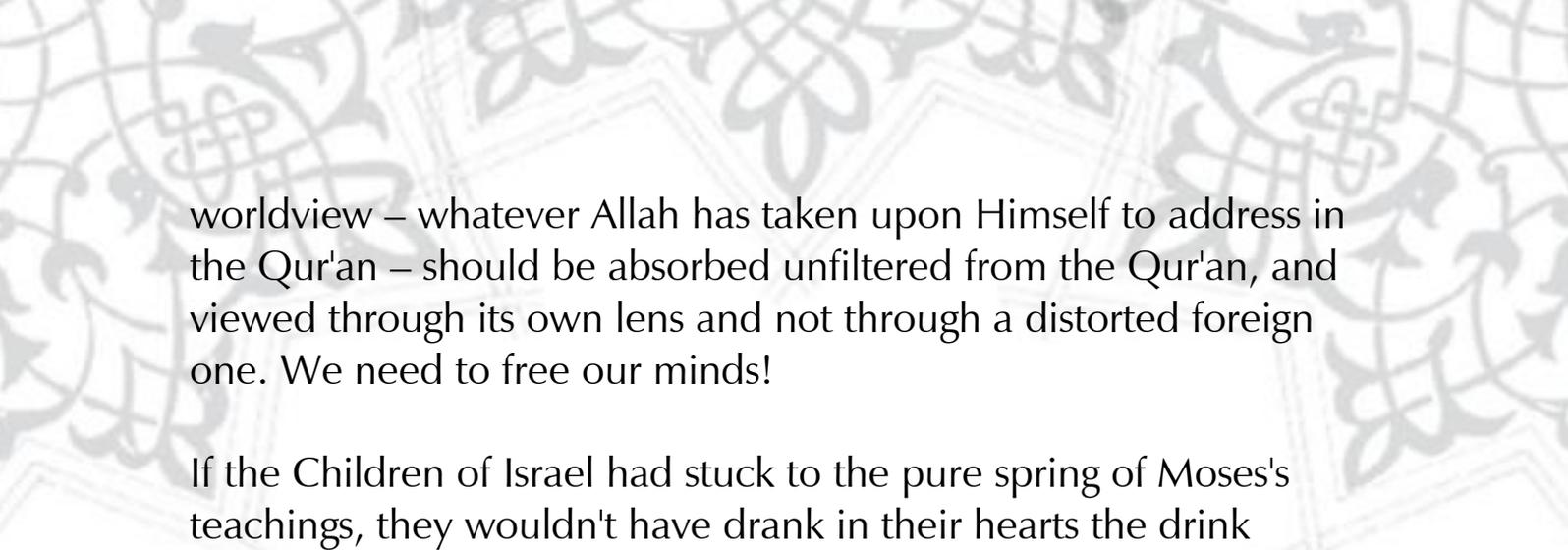
because of any ignorance of any civilization and culture. Rather, it was all according to a well-thought out plan and method... This generation, then, drank solely from this spring and thus attained a unique distinction in history. In later times, it so happened that other sources mingled with it..."

For them, the Qur'an was in and of itself a source of outlook on life, and it was in itself a lens through which to be understood. It did not require – and, in fact, rejected – that it be viewed and understood and interpreted through a foreign lens. The Prophet made sure to limit strictly the filters through which the Companions absorbed what the Qur'an had to offer them, and that strict limit was maintained throughout the era of the Companions, keeping the Ummah guided, united, and strong. At the end of their generation, however, and spilling over into the early Tabi'in, their pure source of knowledge became blemished. The Qadariyyah appeared, the Mu'tazilah emerged in Basrah, the Jahmiyyah in Khurasan, and so on. The emergence and proliferation of these foreign, illegally innovated beliefs was the result of that original pure source now being understood through a foreign lens – the lens of the philosophers of Greek civilization, Persian literature, etc. Rather than limiting themselves to the Qur'anic understanding of itself, and the Prophetic understanding of the Qur'an, and the Salafi lens through which that pure early generation understood what the Qur'an came to offer, the Qur'an was now being filtered through and presented by a foreign approach – through the lens of those whose so-called "civilization" came to bedazzle these Arabs who had the true meaning of civilization and knowledge right in the self-sufficient Qur'an and Sunnah. That original glass of pure, clear water was now tainted, making it toxic to the heart. It was heroes like Imam Ahmad bin Hambal who went through periods of imprisonment and torture at the hands of al-Mu'tasim, etc. in an effort to reverse this trend and halt this pollution of source. Back then, this pollution mainly affected details of theology, such as the

understanding of Allah's Attributes.

Today, the pollution of source affects areas that were not affected back then. For example, while al-Mu'tasim would enforce Mu'tazili beliefs to the point of ordering Imam Ahmad whipped, he would also send out expeditions regularly, raze cities to the ground to retrieve a single Muslim oppressed by the kuffar, and so on. Despite his deviance in the area of theology, his worldview was untainted and was still derived purely from the Qur'an. He still retained the concept of 'izzah, still retained the concept of selflessness and loyalty to the believers, still retained the concept of Islam vs. Kufr, still had ghayrah for the believers, still retained the concept of shielding them from their enemies. He still retained the same worldview that the earlier generations had absorbed and soaked up from the Qur'an's clear, unambiguous verses in Al 'Imran, an-Nisa', al-Anfal, at-Tawbah, and so on. It is these concepts, this Qur'anic worldview, understood so well and clear by even the likes of al-Mu'tasim that today has been distorted for no other reason than that it is viewed through a lens foreign to the self-sufficient Qur'an. It is the filtering of the pure Qur'anic spring through a foreign, alien, Western filter that has nearly abrogated the concepts that al-Mu'tasim understood so well from the Western Muslim mentality. The wala' and bara' understood and practiced by the earlier Muslims is replaced with a capitalist mindset of 'every man for himself.' It is that tainting that drives even "scholars" – who got right what al-Mu'tasim got wrong – to prefer Western media terminology ('militants') to Qur'anic terms ('mujahid'). So, the Qur'anic worldview is today's victim of the pollution of a pure source of knowledge and guidance, due to it being viewed through a foreign, colonial lens; a Western lens.

It is therefore imperative to go back and quench the thirst of our hearts through a drink untainted. Math, chemistry, physics, biology, astronomy, medicine, agriculture, technology, etc. can be studied safely from any source. But our beliefs, our lifestyle, our

A decorative geometric pattern in the top left corner, featuring intricate, interlocking lines forming a star-like or floral motif. The pattern is rendered in a light gray color against a white background.

worldview – whatever Allah has taken upon Himself to address in the Qur'an – should be absorbed unfiltered from the Qur'an, and viewed through its own lens and not through a distorted foreign one. We need to free our minds!

If the Children of Israel had stuck to the pure spring of Moses's teachings, they wouldn't have drunk in their hearts the drink tainted with the foreign influence of idolatry that led them to worship the golden calf instead of their Creator.

In Surat al-Baqarah, v.152, Allah said,

فَاذْكُرُونِي أَذْكَرْكُمْ وَأَشْكُرُوا لِي وَلَا تَكْفُرُونِ ﴿١٥٢﴾

*{“So, remember Me, and I will remember you...”}*

A number of points should be mentioned about this verse. Firstly, you should feel honored by it, thinking to yourself: *‘Amazing... Allah would remember me?’* The human being naturally loves to be recognized for the good he/she has done. Whether it is graduating from school, feeding the poor, cleaning the masjid, - whatever the deed is, you feel good when another human being recognizes you for that and mentions you because of that. That's why some hang their college degrees on their walls, awards, plaques, and so forth. It is that recognition by others that serves as a testament to something good that you've done and are proud of. Implicitly, this means that you place a certain level of value to the opinion of those whose recognition evokes that pride within you. It also reflects on the significance of your original deed that you are even recognized for it.

So, the fact that, not a human being, but rather, the Creator and Master of all human beings and the Universe around them has recognized and mention YOU should shake you to the core, and should lead you back to that original deed that He is recognizing you for: *‘What is it about dhikr that would lead Allah to recognize me – out of His millions and billions and trillions of other creatures – for engaging in this seemingly simple deed?’* So, you who feels honor and pride when other people mention you and your accomplishments cannot help but to feel exponentially magnified pride and honor when reading this brief verse. This is recognition that you cannot put value of any limit on.

Second, you should know that dhikr is of two types: habitual vs.

conscious, and only one of these types will bring about Allah's recognition. Ibn al-Jawzi illustrates this:

*"The heedless one says "Subhan Allah" (glory to Allah) out of habit. As for the conscious one, he is constantly thinking about the wonders of creation, or the awesome nature of the Creator, and this thinking drives him to say: 'subhan Allah.' So, this tasbih is the fruit of these thoughts, and this is the tasbih of the conscious... Likewise, they think about the ugliness of past sins, and this leads them to ponder, to have anxiety, to have regret. The fruit of this thought is that they say: 'astaghfirullah.' (I seek Allah's Forgiveness). This is the true tasbih and istighfar.*

*As for the heedless, they merely utter these out of habit. And what a difference there is between the two types..."*

Finally, this verse shows the Generosity of Allah, in that He remembers and recognizes and rewards you for remembering Him, yet what drove you to remember Him in the first place was witnessing His blessing upon you! You remember Him when preparing to eat the food He provided you, when entering the home He provided you, when preparing to sleep in the bed He provided you, when waking up and using the eyesight He provided you, when viewing the wonders of nature He created, when you experience joy at the birth of the child He provided you – your very life is a gift and blessing, all from Him. So, this verse tells you that you are recognized by Allah for remembering Him in response to what are blessings from Him in the first place!

In Surat al-Baqarah, v.153, Allah said:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ  
الصَّابِرِينَ ﴿١٥٣﴾

*{O you who believe! Seek help in patience and prayer..."}}*

Sitting here in a prison cell, I can easily relate to this verse, and I can understand the union of patience and prayer in it, and I can relate a few manifestations of this union.

**So, here are five ways prayer helps with staying patient:**

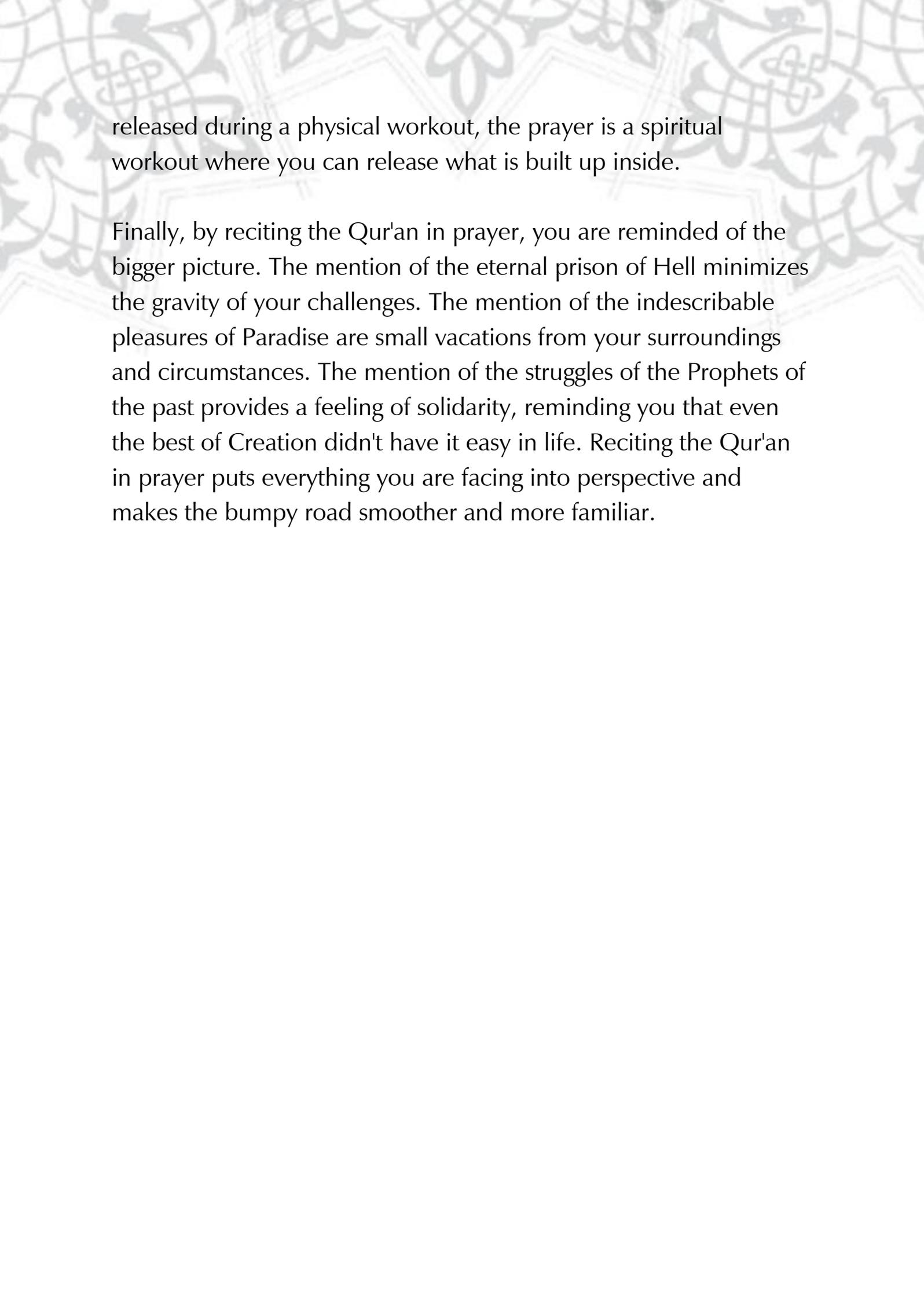
When you stand with your head pointed to the ground, or you are bowing or prostrating, you are physically reminding yourself that you are the controlled praying to the Controller. This makes it so much easier to live comfortably with whatever befalls you of your status, putting you in your place as a subject to a Master. The same Master for Whom you touch your noble face to the ground is the Master that put you where you are, or gave you that disease, or deprived you of wealth, or struck you with that crisis. When your face is glued to the ground and you are obediently repeating '*Subhan Rabi al-A'la*', you are making that connection. You are reminding yourself that just as you surrender your face to the ground before Him, you are to surrender yourself to the reality that He has chosen for you. Controller and Controlled.

The prayer instills a sense of discipline, which keeps you in check at a time when you might have the tendency to freak out. So, you must keep track of the time, and only pray each prayer within its

stated time. You must abide by the proper number of *rak'at* in each respective prayer. You must pray at a calm, relaxed pace. You must not miss any prayer... and so on. By praying, you abide by a system that cannot be violated just because you're in prison, or you don't have a job, etc. This restrains you, shapes you, gives your life form and purpose regardless of what you wish you could be doing. It disciplines you at a time that others would normally descend into chaos.

Prayer also helps you make use of your time. I personally divide my day up in here using the prayer. So, between *Fajr* and *Dhuhr*, I have certain tasks scheduled for myself, with a different set of tasks to be taken care of from *Dhuhr* to *'Asr*, and so on. This way, I get a lot accomplished during the days while the rest of the unit lives in a stretched out, monotonous, blurry day where one hour is indistinguishable from the one before it or after it. Being productive is essential to maintaining patience.

Prayer is also a workout for the soul. Just like one release pent up aggression during a physical workout, the prayer – *du'a'* in particular – is a chance to let out your inner feelings to the Hearer and Responder. Every complaint, every desire, every worry, every hope, every anguish, every emotion – this is the time to let it all out. Let those tears flow. Let it come from the heart. Stand up in *qunut* in *Witr* in the depths of night and converse with your Lord – your own personal Lord, Who will listen and respond to you personally and specifically – and simply express to Him what you feel. He is the One you should direct your complaints to, as Prophet Jacob said in Surat Yusuf, v.86: ***"I only complain of my grief and sorrow to Allah."*** So, just like the energy in the body is



released during a physical workout, the prayer is a spiritual workout where you can release what is built up inside.

Finally, by reciting the Qur'an in prayer, you are reminded of the bigger picture. The mention of the eternal prison of Hell minimizes the gravity of your challenges. The mention of the indescribable pleasures of Paradise are small vacations from your surroundings and circumstances. The mention of the struggles of the Prophets of the past provides a feeling of solidarity, reminding you that even the best of Creation didn't have it easy in life. Reciting the Qur'an in prayer puts everything you are facing into perspective and makes the bumpy road smoother and more familiar.

In Surat al-Baqarah, v.158, Allah said:

﴿إِنَّ الصَّفَا وَالْمَرْوَةَ مِنْ شَعَائِرِ اللَّهِ ۗ فَمَنْ حَجَّ الْبَيْتَ أَوْ اعْتَمَرَ ۖ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِ أَنْ يَطَّوَّفَ بِهِمَا وَمَنْ تَطَوَّعَ خَيْرًا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ شَاكِرٌ عَلِيمٌ﴾

*{"Verily, as-Safa and al-Marwah are from the rituals of Allah. So, it is no problem for the pilgrim to the Sacred House to traverse between them..."}*

At first glance, the verse doesn't stick out, but the circumstance of its revelation show how significant it is.

As-Safa and al-Marwah are two mountains in Makkah where Prophet Abraham left Hajar and his son Ishmael before heading to Palestine. In her quest to find some water for her son, she ran back and forth between the two mountain tops seven times (as-sa'i). This was the source of the sa'i in Hajj when Prophet Abraham called people for pilgrimage to Makkah later on. When polytheism later took root in Arabia, idols were placed atop the two mountains, and they were venerated while the pilgrims performed the sa'i. When Islam came to reclaim Makkah from the pagans and Hajj was reinstated in its monotheistic form, there was uncertainty as to whether sa'i could still be performed between as-Safa and al-Marwah in light of the paganism it was used for, and the Companions were reluctant to engage in a ritual tainted with the stain of jahiliyyah. Al-Bukhari and Muslim related that Anas bin Malik was asked: *"Did you hate to perform sa'i between as-Safa and al-Marwah?"* So, he replied: *"Yes! Because it was from the rituals from the time of jahiliyyah! But this was until Allah revealed: {Verily, as-Safa and al-Marwah are from the rituals of Allah. So, it is no problem for the pilgrim to the Sacred House to traverse*

*between them.*"} So, the ritual was maintained because it was originally a Sunnah of Prophet Abraham's Hajj, despite the Makkan pagans corrupting it afterwards.

This verse, then, tells us a very significant fact about the Companions' approach to the Din, and about the nature of Islam itself. The Companions treated everything as suspect until proven acceptable in Islam. For them, the Din was a revolution for their hearts, minds, behavior, outlook. Islam was like an electrical current that ran through their entire being, rearranging and polishing and leaving a new product. An electrical current, when it is fired through a group of atoms, will rearrange their electron configuration completely. Islam did that to the Companions. When they decided to be Muslims, they would then look at each and every aspect of their lives and see where it stood in light of the Qur'an. Whatever went along with Islam, they kept. Whatever contradicted it in any way, they would not come near, because this was considered a leftover of jahiliyyah. Sayyid Qutb said:

*"When a person embraced Islam during the time of the Prophet (saw), he would immediately cut himself off from the jahiliyyah. When he stepped into the circle of Islam, he would start a new life, separating himself completely from his past life of ignorance of the Shariah. He would look upon the deeds during his life of ignorance with caution, with a feeling that these were impure deeds intolerable in Islam. With this feeling, he would turn to Islam for new guidance... and would turn to the Qur'an to mold himself according to its guidance.*

*... This abandonment of the jahili environment, its customs, traditions, ideas & concepts was the result of polytheism being replaced with the concept of pure, true monotheism, of the jahili view of life and the world being replaced by the Islamic view... This was the parting of ways and the start of a new journey – a journey free of the pressures of the values, concepts, and practices*

*of the jahili society."*

So, this was what Islam was to them. It was like an electrical current rushing through their entire being, rearranging the lifestyle and mindset they had in jahiliyyah. If they had never lived in jahiliyyah, they would inspect every major and minor detail of their personalities and evaluate them in light of Islam, and make changes accordingly, no matter how drastic. This was what Islam was to them, and it is the same Islam we have with us today, as we face today's jahiliyyah.

Commenting on a statement attributed to 'Umar bin al-Khattab: *"The bonds of Islam will come loose, one by one, so long as one grows up as a Muslim without knowing what jahiliyyah is,"* Ibn al-Qayyim said:

*"Because of this, the Companions were the most knowledgeable of Islam and its details, its methods, and its subjects, and they were the most enthusiastic about it, they loved it the most, struggled the most against its enemies, warning against what contradicted it – all due to their complete knowledge of its opposite. Islam came to them and all of its aspects conflicted with what they were used to. So, their knowledge, love, and struggle for it was greater because of their familiarity with its opposite!*

*This is like someone who is constricted, sick, poor, afraid, and lonely suddenly being rescued and taken to an environment of relaxation, security, wealth, and prosperity. Such a person will be happier due to what he was previously experiencing."*

I've always wished that a student of knowledge in the West would take it upon himself to compile a sort of modern-day version of the classic treatise 'Masa'il al-Jahiliyyah.' When a clear, comprehensive profile is constructed of the 21st century jahiliyyah, it would be much easier to compare/contrast it with Islamic teachings, and thus

make it much easier for us to help each other live in this world according to the Sunnah! No doubt, such a compilation would have to touch upon world view/politics, social norms (e.g. physical appearances, Islam vs. jahili), entertainment, family life, education, community, attitudes toward religion in society, use of foul language, role of wealth, health issues, gender issues, racism, sexuality in society, and on and on – all aspects of the 21st century jahiliyyah contrasting with Islam that can be compiled and turned into a 'DO NOT DO' list, in effect making it easier to know and show what TO do, and allowing us to truly appreciate and approach Islam today as the Companions did back then.

As Ibn al-Qayyim said in 'Madarij as-Salikin': *"One will never taste the sweetness of faith, and the flavor of truthfulness and certainty, until every last bit of jahiliyyah leaves his heart."* This is what the Companions had in mind when they were hesitant to perform the sa'i between as-Safa and al-Marwah.

May Allah be pleased with them, and put us on their path.

In Surat al-Baqarah, v.172, Allah said:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا كُلُوا مِن طَيِّبَاتِ مَا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوا لِلَّهِ  
إِن كُنْتُمْ ءِتِيَاهُ تَعْبُدُونَ ﴿١٧٢﴾

*{"... Eat of the good things We have provided you, and be thankful to Allah if it is indeed He Whom you worship."}*

Three points regarding food are contained in this verse that remind us of Tawhid.

The first is that Allah didn't say to eat anything, but specified to eat what is '*tayyib*' – good, wholesome, healthy, beneficial to the body and not just the tastebuds. This is because our bodies are not truly 'ours.' They are a trust given to us as a means to an end, which is to worship. This is why Allah dedicated space in the Qur'an to instructing us as to what to put in our bodies. By choosing the *tayyibat*, we are directly influencing our preservation of this trust, and the best foods for the body are those that look the same going into it as they did coming out of the ground, that have no food labels. The phytochemicals and micronutrients in fruits and vegetables support the natural rejuvenating processes of the body. These processes become compromised in accordance with weight gain, and this results in high blood sugar, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure that damages the lining of the arteries. Eating five servings a day of fruits and vegetables results in a much lower incidence of heart disease and strokes than eating less than two servings, and tomatoes, broccoli, and other cruciferous vegetables have been shown to have protective effects against certain kinds of cancer.

Secondly, the verse mentions that Allah is the Provider of these foods. Each time we lift a bit of food to our mouths using our fingers, a fork, or a spoon, it is a confirmation of our status in the

Universe. It is a confirmation that no matter how wealthy or poor, how famous or unknown, how powerful or weak, every human on the face of the planet is in need of sustenance by something higher than his or herself. Food reminds us of who we are, and who we are not. It reminds us that no matter how much authority one is fooled into thinking he commands among other creatures, he is just that: a creature at the mercy of a Creator. Because most of those reading this can expect food on the table during the day, we often are distracted by matters of taste, variety, preparation, and so forth and miss exactly what our sitting down to eat with our family and friends represents: our weakness in relation to Allah, and His strength in relation to us. The providing of food is a characteristic specific to Allah such that He made it a distinguishing factor between the Creator and the Created in Surat adh-Dhariyat, v.57: *{ "... nor do I ask that they should feed Me..." }* And indeed, in this prison, when meals are delayed just 30min. past their scheduled times, you should see the panicked reaction of hungry inmates who begin shouting and banging on their doors – an expression of need, of dependence of what the human being cannot provide on his own. So, the next time you are about to enjoy a meal or a snack, do so while aware of the underlying significance of it all.

Lastly, the realization of the aforementioned reality leads you to thank. In 'Sahih Muslim,' the Prophet (saw) said: ***"Indeed, Allah is Pleased that a worshipper eats some food and praises Him for it..."*** This is both a manifestation of Tawhid and an acknowledgement that this bit of food is, for millions of fellow humans who you will probably never even see in your life, a mere fantasy that they can only dream of – one needs only to look at the horrific starvation rampant in Somalia, or Haiti. These inmates around me began panicking and thrashing when food that they KNEW was eventually coming was merely delayed. Imagine for a minute that you simply have no food anywhere in sight. You have no guarantee that you will be able to put anything in your mouth for the entire day, or the entire week. What will you do short of

running around like a madman to remedy this nightmare that we living even in the poorest conditions in the West can never fathom? Imagine now that in addition to your own hunger, you have a spouse and a handful of children who you must feed before yourself?! Fortunately for you, this is limited to a temporary scenario in the inner recesses of your mind. But for untold millions around the world, this is reality. This is life, one that cannot be escaped from by simply changing the train of thought. So, one who eats to his heart's content without appreciating both the source of his food (Allah) and the value of it (priceless) in reality does not deserve to be eating that food.

There's a story related where al-Imam al-Awza'i traveled from Damascus on his way to the coast of Sham. So, he stopped by a friend in his hometown on the way, and the man prepared supper for them both. When they were ready to eat, the man said: *"Eat, O Aba 'Amr. Forgive me, as you have visited at a time of hardship."* So, al-Awza'i held his hand back and refused to eat. The man kept insisting that he eat, and al-Awza'i kept refusing until the man finally removed the spread and they went to sleep for the night. When they awoke the following morning, the man asked: *"What made you refuse the food yesterday?"* al-Awza'i replied: *"I didn't want to touch food that Allah was not thanked over, or His blessings were denied in the presence of."*

So, food is all about Tawhid.

In Surat al-Baqarah, v.217, Allah said,

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الشَّهْرِ الْحَرَامِ قِتَالٍ فِيهِ قُلْ قِتَالٌ فِيهِ كَبِيرٌ وَصَدٌّ  
عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَكُفْرٌ بِهِ وَالْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَإِخْرَاجُ أَهْلِهِ مِنْهُ  
أَكْبَرُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَالْفِتْنَةُ أَكْبَرُ مِنَ الْقَتْلِ وَلَا يَزَالُونَ يُقِنُّونَكُمْ  
حَتَّى يَرْدُّوكُمْ عَنْ دِينِكُمْ إِنِ اسْتَطَعُوا وَمَنْ يَرْتَدِدْ مِنْكُمْ  
عَنْ دِينِهِ فَيَمُتْ وَهُوَ كَافِرٌ فَأُولَئِكَ حَبِطَتْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ فِي  
الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَأُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا

خَالِدُونَ ﴿٢١٧﴾

*{ "They ask you about fighting in the Sacred Months. Say: Fighting is a great transgression therein, but a greater transgression is to prevent people from the path of Allah, disbelief in Him, preventing access to the Sacred Mosque, and to drive out its inhabitants..." }*

This verse was revealed in the second year after Hijrah. The Prophet had dispatched 'Abdullah bin Jahsh and a dozen others to intercept a food caravan of Quraysh at a place called *Nakhlah* (between Makkah and at-Ta'if) and find out what they were up to. Once Ibn Jahsh had gotten to the caravan, he and the others discovered that it contained some of the pagans who had meted out the worst oppression to the Muslims back when they were in Makkah – stealing their money, kicking them out of their homes, torturing the Companions, repeatedly attempting to kill the Prophet – and the idea occurred to them to confront them and take back the value of some of what was taken from them back in Makkah. The only problem was that this was in the month of

*Rajab*, which was a Sacred Month during which it was forbidden to engage in hostilities. After long contemplation, the group of Muslims decided that which was a justifiable exception in light of the circumstances and history, and they fought the Qurashi pagans and took back some of their usurped wealth.

This troubled the Prophet greatly, and the pagans capitalized on this event as an opportunity to create an uproar and turn public opinion against the Muslims by claiming that they had violated the divine rules of warfare; that they were violent, militants, warmongers; that they were against peace and freedom, and so forth. At the end of the day, the fact that Ibn Jahsh and his small group had indeed initiated military action against the caravan left the rest of the Muslims divided as to how to respond to these allegations. Finally, to answer the question, Allah revealed this verse, confirming that yes, it was forbidden to initiate combat during the Sacred Months, but what was worse was what the pagans of Quraysh had been doing to the Muslims all along that led up to this violation of the Sacred Month occurring, and that this latter point nullified the legitimacy of their uproar against the Muslims.

This verse contains a valuable lesson in dealing with similar situations. That lesson is that when the opponents of Islam capitalize on certain events to put us on the defensive, our response should be to instead go on the offensive. The pagans focused on that one apparent transgression by Ibn Jahsh in a deceptively compartmental manner that completely ignored their own myriad of transgressions that served as the direct catalyst for what they were now making an uproar about. Rather than give them the pleasure of a defensive, apologetic response, Allah directed the Muslims to instead point out what the pagans had been doing to them all along, as if to say: *'Excuse me? Who are you calling violent?! Just look at your own record!'*

Obvious to all, we find ourselves today in identical circumstances. When we are faced with accusations of terrorism, violence, and the other terms you are more than familiar with, the tendency on the part of many – even those with good intentions – is to lapse into defensive mode, with: *'Don't let the actions of a few ruin the reputation of many.'* *'We are a peace-loving people,'* *'Islam condemns the killing of innocents,'* among other trademark slogans thrown around. While the statements may be true in and of themselves, their utterance overtly manifests the defensive and apologetic mindset that characterizes Western Muslims. This is a trap set for us by our opponents: they want us to react defensively and apologetically in order to provide a smokescreen for their own violent, bloody history of terrorizing others. For this reason, the verse teaches us to do away with the pathetic knee-jerk reactions and instead turn the tables on our opponents by laying out their dirty laundry. And there is plenty.

Just as the verse instructed the Muslims to outline the past transgressions of Quraysh one by one to silence their uproar, we should learn about and list the transgressions of our opponents and bring them up whenever they have the audacity to accuse us of being 'violent' or 'terrorists' while portraying themselves as benevolent peacemakers.

So, we should study the genocide of the Native Americans, who were 10 million-strong in the current United States upon the arrival of Columbus, but were eventually reduced to less than a million after European invaders came into the picture.

We should study the history of slavery in Africa, where a total of 50 million human beings lost their lives in the centuries considered to be the beginnings of modern Western civilization at the hands of slave traders and plantation owners in Western Europe and America – the countries deemed to be the most 'civilized' in the world.

We should study the history of the Mexican-American war, and the meaning of the term '*manifest destiny*.'

We should study the history of the Filipino revolt against American occupation at the end of the 19th Century.

We should read about the atomic bombs dropped over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which instantly incinerated over 150,000 people who were just living their everyday civilian lives – the only time in the history of mankind that one nation used nuclear weapons on another, and ironically by the same nation which now traverses the globe lecturing others about not letting nuclear weapons fall into the wrong hands. (Check out '*Hiroshima*' by John Hersey)

We should study the history of America's involvement in Latin America, specifically El Salvador, Chile, Panama, Nicaragua, Honduras, Grenada, and Guatemala. (Howard Zinn's books are a good start)

We should study the history of the Gulf War of 1990 and the ensuing US-led embargo, in which the starvation of children and preventing them from medicine was used as a method of warfare. In a 1996 interview on '*60 Minutes*,' Madeline Albright confirmed it to be "*worth it*" to have starved more Iraqi children to death than were killed in the atomic bombing of Hiroshima.

We should study the history of the 1993 US invasion of Somalia which killed no less than 2,000 Somalis.

We should study the details of America's aid to Israel, which is directly manifested in every bullet, missile, bomb, bulldozer, and warplane that is used to kill our own brothers and sisters in Palestine. (See Norman Finkelstein's books)

We should ask how they have the audacity to call us violent at a time when they are spending hundreds of billions of dollars a year invading, occupying, and bombing two of our countries.

There is a concept in psychology known as *psychological projection*, in which one who is guilty of a particular misdeed will attempt to relieve his conscience by deflecting attention from himself and accusing others of what he is guilty of. Perhaps this phenomenon plays a role when it comes to much of what we hear today from our opponents and enemies. In any case, Allah teaches us clearly in this verse how to respond to what we hear (and how not to).

Allah said in Surat Al 'Imran, v.35:

إِذْ قَالَتِ امْرَأَتُ عِمْرَانَ رَبِّ إِنِّي نَذَرْتُ لَكَ مَا فِي بَطْنِي مُحَرَّرًا فَتَقَبَّلْ مِنِّي إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿٣٥﴾

*{ "And when the wife of 'Imran said: "O my Lord! I have vowed to You what is in my womb to be dedicated to you..." }*

A prison chaplain once told me: *"A person will never sacrifice for the truth until he first loves it more than he loves himself and his comfort. Otherwise, he will never give up a thing for it."* Surat Al 'Imran is all about sacrificing for the truth. The Surah is exactly 200 verses long, but contains only two stories – one in the first half, another near the end. Although the two stories took place 700 years apart, they beautifully link the entire Surah together through the common theme of dedicating one's all for the sake of the Din – even one's family.

The first story is of the household of 'Imran, after whom the Surah is named. We're talking about a family that dedicated all of its generations to the spreading and upholding of the truth: 'Imran and his wife, their daughter Maryam (the Virgin Mary), and her uncle Zakariyya and his son Yahya (John the Baptist), and her own son, 'Isa (Jesus Christ). This is a family that will be upholding the Word of Allah from the moment 'Imran's wife made the vow in this verse over 2,000 years ago until 'Isa returns at the end of time, rids the world of its final tawagit (the Dajjal and Ya'juj and Ma'juj), and rules by the Shariah.

The second story in the Surah involves another setting in which

entire families gave their all to uphold the Din of Allah. On that one day of the Battle of Uhud, seventy Muslims attained Shahadah at the hands of the pagans. From these casualties were the entire male side of the family of a woman from the tribe of Bani Dinar – she had lost her husband, father, and brother on that one day. Hudhayfah bin al-Yaman went out to Uhud with his father, whom he lost before his eyes. Hamnah bint Jahsh met the Prophet (saw) on his way back, and he sadly informed her that her brother 'Abdullah (the one mentioned in the previous article), her uncle Hamzah bin 'Abd al-Mutallib, and her beloved husband Mus'ab bin 'Umayr had all been among the casualties that day. So, just as with the family of 'Imran, these families as a whole dedicated themselves to upholding the banner of Tawhid and Iman.

And we see instances after them of generations within the same family doing the same: Ibn Taymiyyah's father & grandfather were both renowned scholars in their own right (his grandfather's *'Muntaqa al-Akhbar'* became the subject of ash-Shawkani's *'Nayl al-Awtar'*); Muhammad bin 'Abd al-Wahhab's descendents continued his mission to spread Tawhid (best of which was his grandson Sulayman, who authored the first and most useful commentary on *'Kitab al-Tawhid'*), and so on. You also have a whole generation of a family living for the Din in the Qutbs (Sayyid, his brother Muhammad, and sisters Hamidah and Aminah were all held behind bars at the same time).

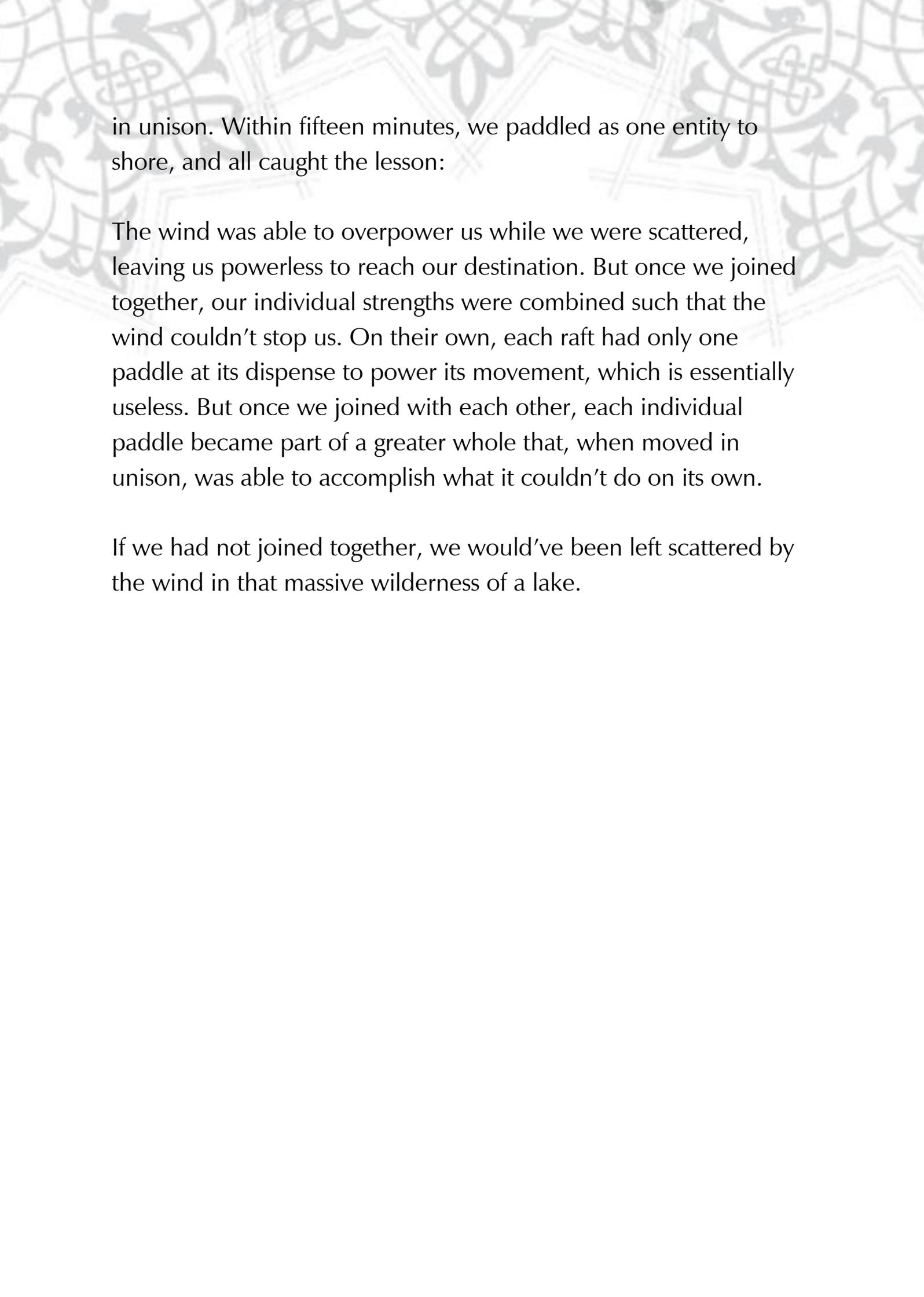
How wonderful it would be if decades down the road, our own families and descendents can be pointed to as continuations of this service to the Din! But it starts with the individual.

In Surat Al 'Imran, v.103, Allah said:

وَأَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا وَاذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ  
عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ بِنِعْمَتِهِ إِخْوَانًا  
وَكُنْتُمْ عَلَى شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِنَ النَّارِ فَأَنْقَذَكُمْ مِنْهَا كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ  
لَكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ ﴿١٠٣﴾

{*“And hold fast all of you together to the Rope of Allah, and do not be divided among yourselves...”*}

A thought on unity (upon truth) and its importance: I once went rafting with some brothers in a massive lake. We were four rafts in all, two to a raft. We each went our separate ways to all ends of the lake. A few of us weren't taking it seriously and lost our paddles to the water. So, some of the rafts were depending on a single paddle. It suddenly became quite windy and chilly. One of the rafts sprung a leak, bringing freezing cold water into the picture. Each raft was attempting on its own to make it to a part of the shore that contained a clearing through which we could walk back to base, but the winds were blowing us everywhere except where to wanted to be, which couldn't be countered with a single paddle's worth of power. After literally 3 hours of this, we signalled and yelled to each other from across our respective corners of the lake that we were inescapably stuck. Finally, a genius among us yelled out: *“If we can't each make it on our own, let's join together!”* So we each made our way to the center of the lake, formed a caravan by having each raft link by hand to the one adjacent to it, and those who had kept their paddles began rowing



in unison. Within fifteen minutes, we paddled as one entity to shore, and all caught the lesson:

The wind was able to overpower us while we were scattered, leaving us powerless to reach our destination. But once we joined together, our individual strengths were combined such that the wind couldn't stop us. On their own, each raft had only one paddle at its dispense to power its movement, which is essentially useless. But once we joined with each other, each individual paddle became part of a greater whole that, when moved in unison, was able to accomplish what it couldn't do on its own.

If we had not joined together, we would've been left scattered by the wind in that massive wilderness of a lake.

In Surat Al 'Imran, v. 119, Allah said:

هَآأَنُتُمْ أَوْلَآءُ تُحِبُّونَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِبُّونَكُمْ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِآلِ كِتَابِ كُلهٗ ؕ وَإِذَا  
لَقَوُكُمْ قَالُوا ءَامَنَّا وَإِذَا خَلَوْا عَضُّوا عَلَيْكُمْ الْأَنَامِلَ مِنَ الْغَيْظِ قُلْ  
مُوتُوا بِغَيْظِكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ ﴿١١٩﴾

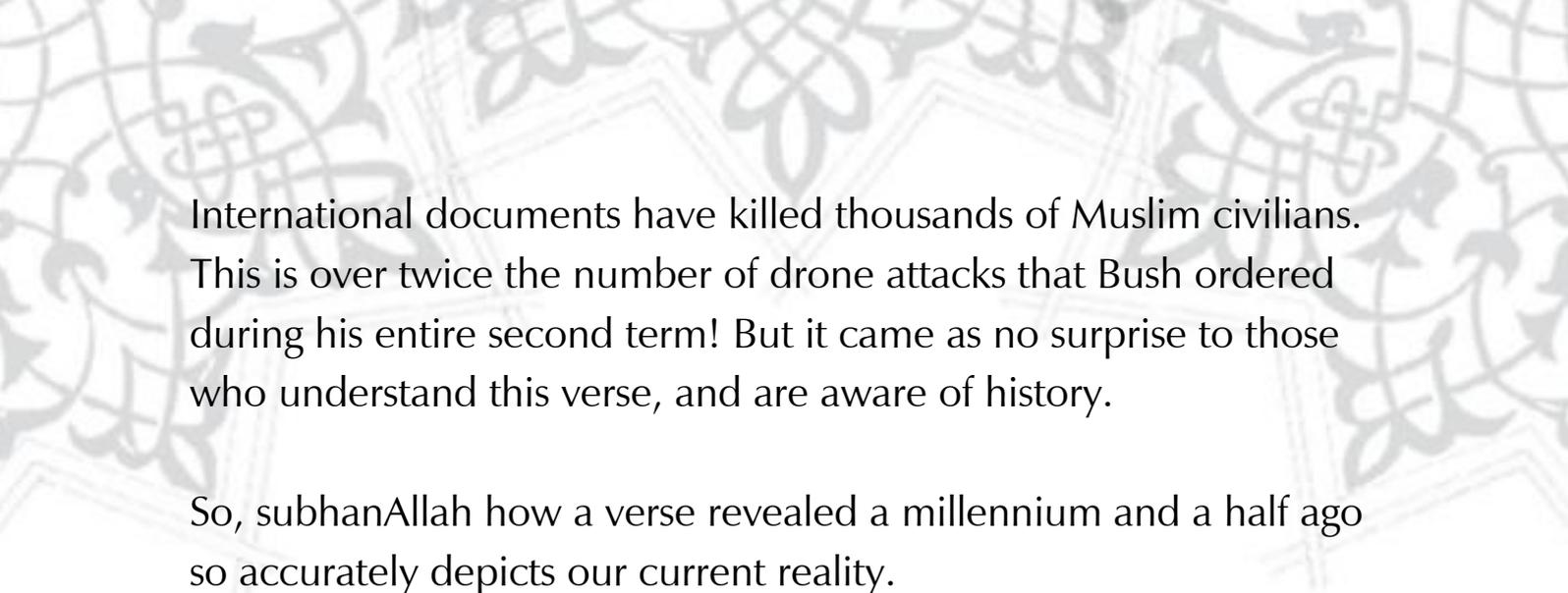
*{“Here! You are the ones who love them, but they don’t love you. And you believe in all the Scriptures, and when they meet you, they say ‘we believe.’ But when they are alone, they bite the tips of their fingers in rage towards you...”}*

A useful lesson in this verse is to develop a sense of intuition when it comes to dealings with others. It is the case that we live in a world of wolves, such that one must strike the fine balance between giving others the benefit of the doubt and not being naive & gullible, thus avoiding being taken advantage of.

There is one extreme – excessive naivety. The other extreme is to possess constant cynicism, always assuming the worst of humanity and thus exhibiting a paranoia that precludes kindness to others. The Muslim, though, follows the realistic moderate path. A glimpse at the Sirah of the Prophet (saw) shows us that his success as a leader was in part due to his ability to read people and deal with them based on a combination of mercy and practical intuition. He knew who to draw up treaties with & who to declare war on; who to give away piles of wealth to & who to give less wealth to; and so on. He did not always take others’ words at face value because he was aware of the pitfalls of the human personality and was able to deal with it based on its reality as opposed to its illusion. He was a

**realist.** For example, a pagan named Abu 'Azza al-Jumahi was taken prisoner following the Battle of Badr. Because he was a poor man who had a large family to support, the Prophet set him free with the condition that he would never engage in hostilities against the Muslims. However, just one year later, he was captured again helping the pagans fight the Muslims at Uhud, where seventy of the Companions were killed. Abu 'Azza again pleaded to be set free on the condition that he had agreed to after Badr: that he would not engage in hostilities against the Muslims. This time, however, the Prophet's reply was stern: **"The believer is not stung from the same hole twice,"** and az-Zubayr executed him, because despite the outward pleas, Abu 'Azza surely would've repeated his breach of pact and once again helped to fight the Muslims. At the same time, the Prophet had given him a chance after Badr and set him free as a gesture of good will.

So, this verse draws our attention to the importance of developing a sense of intuition when it comes to dealing with those who may openly profess what is contrary to their true intentions, as opposed to unquestionably accepting their words at face value and regretting it later. A modern example that comes to mind is the naive nature of the American Muslims' early support for Obama and the ease with which they fell for the promises of 'change we can believe in,' his speech in Cairo, his quotations of the Qur'an, and so forth (*"... and when they meet you, they say 'we believe, '...'"*), only to watch as he proceeded to exponentially increase what he claimed he would do away with (or rather, what we fooled ourselves into thinking he claimed he would do away with); for example, during his 17 months in office so far, he has personally authorized almost 100 drone strikes that Amnesty



International documents have killed thousands of Muslim civilians. This is over twice the number of drone attacks that Bush ordered during his entire second term! But it came as no surprise to those who understand this verse, and are aware of history.

So, subhanAllah how a verse revealed a millennium and a half ago so accurately depicts our current reality.

In Surat Al 'Imran, v. 120, Allah said:

إِن تَمَسَّكُمْ حَسَنَةٌ تَسُوهُمْ وَإِن تُصِبْكُمْ سَيِّئَةٌ يَفْرَحُوا بِهَا  
وَإِن تَصْبِرُوا وَتَتَّقُوا لَا يَضُرُّكُمْ كَيْدُهُمْ شَيْئًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا  
يَعْمَلُونَ مُحِيطٌ

{“If a good thing befalls you, it grieves them. But if evil overtakes you, they are happy at it. But if you are patient and have taqwa, their plots will not do the least harm to you...”}

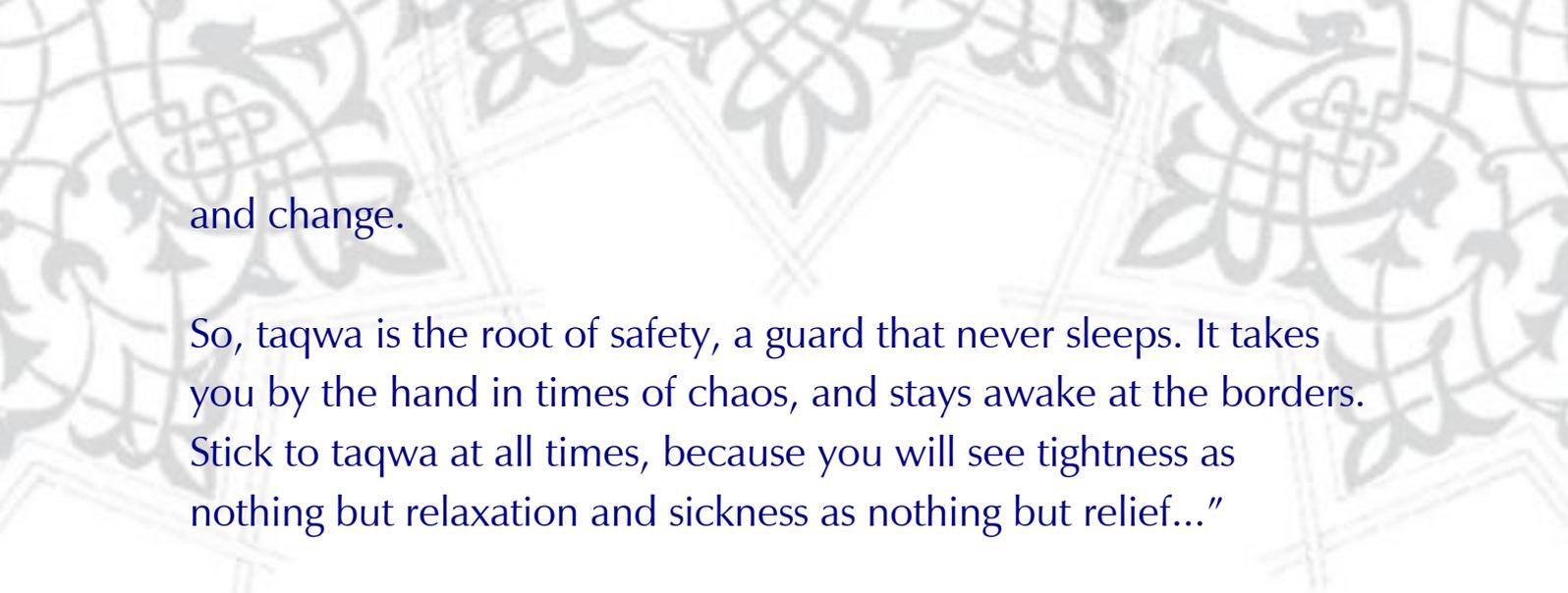
I could think of nothing to add but these words of Ibn al-Jawzi, from ‘Sayd al-Khatir’ (pg.118):

“Know that not all days are the same... Sometimes you are poor, sometimes you are rich. Sometimes you are honoured, sometimes you are humiliated. Sometimes you experience the happiness of your friends, and sometimes you experience the rejoicing of your enemies.

The happy one is he who sticks to a single principle throughout all of this, and that is to have taqwa (consciousness) of Allah.

If he is rich, it will beautify him. If he is poor, it will open for him the doors of patience.

If he is in a state of ease, it will complete the blessings he has. If he is in a state of hardship, it will beautify him, and it won't matter to him if the days go up or down with him, if he is clothed or not, if he is hungry or not, because all of these conditions can disappear



and change.

So, taqwa is the root of safety, a guard that never sleeps. It takes you by the hand in times of chaos, and stays awake at the borders. Stick to taqwa at all times, because you will see tightness as nothing but relaxation and sickness as nothing but relief...”

Allah said in Surat Al 'Imran, v. 121:

وَإِذْ غَدَوْتَ مِنْ أَهْلِكَ تُبَوِّئُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ مَقْعَدَ لِلْقِتَالِ وَاللَّهُ  
سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ



*{“And remember when you left your household in the morning to post the believers at their battle stations...”}*

This is the first of approximately sixty verses in the Qur’an that relate to the Battle of Uhud, and describes how the Prophet (saw) chose the morning time of day to go out and organize Mujahidin at Mt. Uhud. The point to notice is the specific mention of the morning.

The morning, the earliest part of the day, is the best time to get things done. Sakhr bin Wada’ah al-Ghamidi related that the Prophet said: *“O Allah! Bless my Ummah in its early-risers!”* and whenever the Prophet would send out an expedition or army, he would do so at the beginning of the day. Sakhr himself was a trader, and would send out his caravans at the beginning of the day, and as a result, his wealth was abundant.

And indeed, looking through the Qur’an, one finds many references to significant events occurring in the early hours of the day. It was the morning that Allah chose to be the time for the destruction of the People of Lot, as mentioned in v. 81 of Surat Hud: *{“... Indeed, morning is their appointed time. Is not the morning near?”}* and v. 66 of Surat al-Hijr: *{“And We made to him this decree that their root would be cut off in the early morning.”}* and v.38 of Surat al-Qamar: *{“And indeed, an abiding*

*torment seized them in the early morning.*”} And in v. 60-66, in Surat ash-Shu’ara’, we see that it was at sunrise that Prophet Moses split the sea after being chased down by Pharoah and his army.

And it is the two optional rak’at before the morning prayer that the Prophet described as being *“more beloved to me than the world and what is in it,”* such that he would never neglect them. And it is the morning prayer itself that, when prayed in jama’ah, the Prophet said *“places one under the protection of Allah.”*

If you look at your own days, you cannot deny that the days that you start your activity early after Fajr time are far more productive than the days where you sleep for a few hours after praying. Whether it’s going into work early, taking a morning jog, studying for a class early in the morning, memorizing Qur’an early in the day, travelling from the morning, even eating breakfast in the morning as opposed to delaying the first meal of the day, and so forth – think to yourself how such days compare in their productivity to those days when you do nothing in the morning. The difference should naturally be clear, and this is why it was a Sunnah of the Prophet and his Companions to start the day early, even when it came to something as physically demanding as battle.

So, try to avoid laziness and inactivity following the Fajr prayer, and instead use this time to get a headstart in your daily tasks, and be from among those the prophet was referring to in his supplication: *“O Allah! Bless my Ummah in its early-risers!”* And know that the most refreshing, rewarding, and useful activity to engage in in the morning hours is the remembrance of Allah, as the Prophet said of himself: *“For me to sit with a group remembering*

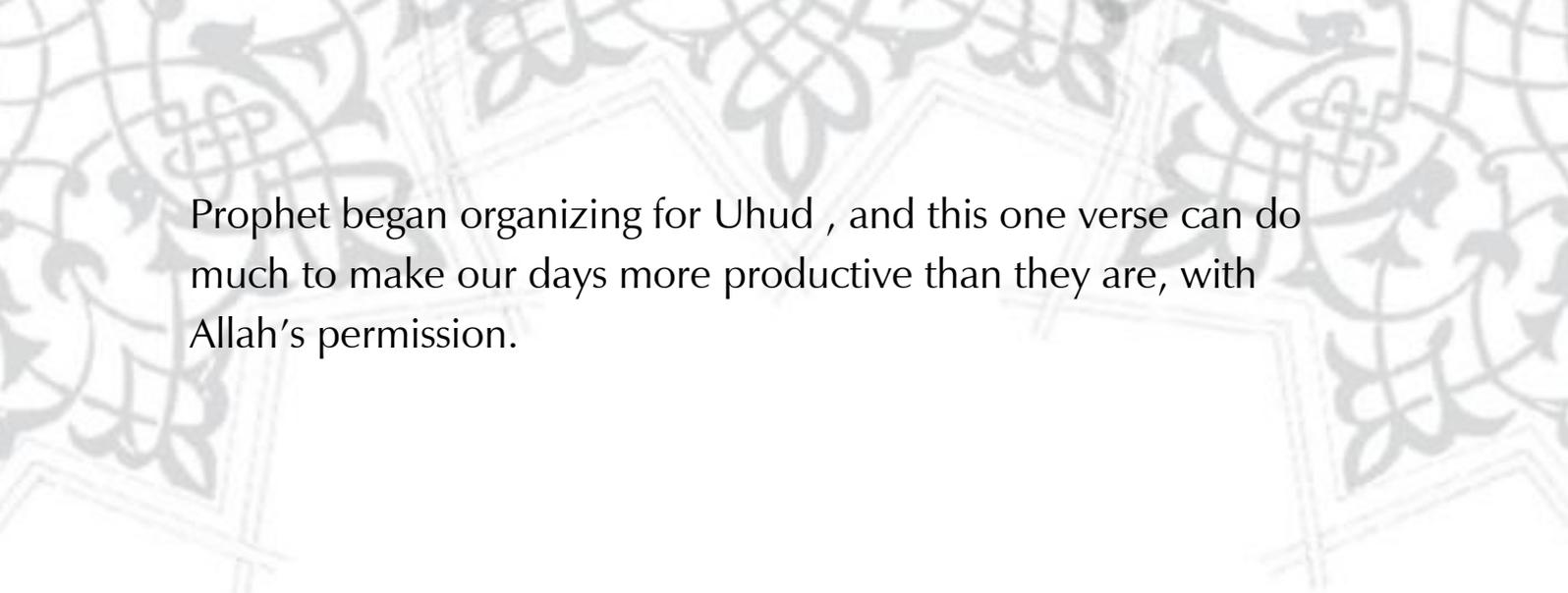
*Allah from dawn to sunrise is more beloved to me than freeing four slaves of the descendents of Isma'il."*

One last point remains to be mentioned, and that is that many of us realize the blessing in this time of day and would love to take full advantage of it, but cannot escape the grogginess and lack of energy that characterize our mornings. There are many such as myself who are simply not morning people. So, how can we change that and have the energy to utilize our days to the fullest extent possible?

First, we have to accustom ourselves to limiting our activity after praying 'Isha', and sleep early. It is reported in an authentic hadith that the Prophet strongly discouraged useless conversation after praying 'Isha', and disliked sleeping before it. This is because avoiding these two practices would facilitate a good, early sleep that would leave one feeling fresh upon waking up.

Secondly, waking up a bit before dawn to engage in some worship has a direct effect on your mood for the early part of the day. Both al-Bukhari and Muslim report that the Prophet said: *"Satan ties three knots on the back of your neck when you go to bed, saying over each knot: 'The night is long, so rest.' So, if you wake up and remember Allah, one knot is untied. If you make wudu', another knot is loosened. If you then pray, the last knot is untied, and you wake up energetic and in a good mood. Otherwise, you wake up in a bad mood and lazy."*

Taking all of this into account, then, it is no wonder that Allah would make specific mention in this verse of the time of day that

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Prophet began organizing for Uhud , and this one verse can do much to make our days more productive than they are, with Allah's permission.

Allah said in Surat Al 'Imran, v.135:

وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا فَعَلُوا فَحِشَةً أَوْ ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ ذَكَرُوا اللَّهَ  
فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا الذُّنُوبَ مِنْهُمْ وَمَنْ يَغْفِرِ اللَّهُ لَنْ يَكُونَ  
عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلُوا وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٣٥﴾

*{ "And those who remember Allah and ask for forgiveness for their sins when they commit sins or wrong themselves – and who forgives sins but Allah...?" }*

The acts of tawbah & istighfar are traditionally accompanied by emotions of sadness and regret. Indeed, regretting the sin that one is repenting from is a pillar, a key condition of that repentance being accepted by Allah. And reading the books of Ibn al-Jawzi in particular, you come across frequent mention of *"the tears of repentance,"* and *"cleansing your sins with the tears of regret."* It goes without saying that one should be saddened at the disobedience of Allah, whether on the part of himself or others.

But I would like to point out that once you realize that you've committed a sin, feel regretful over it, and then progress to the point of seeking Allah's forgiveness, the sadness should be replaced by happiness. Yes, a believer should feel sad at the realization that he/she has disobeyed Allah. But committing a sin is like locking yourself in a cage. Repenting from that sin and asking Allah's forgiveness is like the key to unlock that cage and free yourself. Imagine yourself being freed from that cage – the natural emotions you will feel are none other than happiness, joy, optimism. You will not feel sadness while you are being freed. Likewise,

repentance should be associated with these positive emotions, rather than the sadness that should accompany the sin itself.

In fact, your repentance is an occasion of joy for none other than Allah, Himself. Anas reported that the Prophet (saw) said: *"Allah is happier when you repent to Him than you would be if you were riding in a desert, your animal escaped from you carrying all of your food & drink, you lost hope in ever finding it, you found a tree and lay in its shade, and suddenly found the animal standing in front of you..."* So, if Allah – the One forgiving you – is happy when you repent, it only makes sense that you – the one being forgiven – would feel nothing but joy upon repenting.

So, tawbah & istighfar are occasions to look forward to, and should be performed with a sense of joy.

Allah said in Surat Al 'Imran, v.139:

وَلَا تَهِنُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَأَنْتُمْ الْأَعْلَوْنَ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٣٩﴾

{*"And do not be weakened or sad, and you are uppermost so long as you are believers."*}

This verse should be the slogan for our times.

I would be annoyed when I would hear certain Western du'at going around delivering lectures about Hdaybiyah, the Makkan period, etc. that seemed almost to justify our state of weakness. One such da'i gave a speech at an ICNA convention not too many years back where he alluded to some controversial topic in Islam, and commented: *"Well, those were the old days when we were allowed to talk about these things,"* and he and the crowd burst into laughter. I remember sitting in the audience and slowly shaking my head, saying to myself: 'How is it funny that you now censor certain subjects from your lectures? How can it be anything but sad that you are subjugated?' And I would think of this verse.

Why this particular verse? Because it was revealed at Uhud – a moment when the Prophet & the Companions were beaten, bloodied, and some were demoralized. It addressed two natural feelings they were experiencing – weakness and fear – and forbade them from exhibiting either. It taught them that because they had held tight to their beliefs, their Iman, they had actually won despite their military loss, and therefore had no grounds to feel either weak or sad. It is as of the verse is being revealed to use anew today. It is teaching us that despite our state of disarray and external weakness, we should not think of ourselves as truly weak.

The true battlefield is that of the heart & mind, and so long as there are enough among us who maintain their beliefs pure and unadulterated, we are not weak, regardless of our external physical condition. If an individual, community, nation, or ummah as a whole is physically safe and prosperous while having abandoned its beliefs & convictions, its outward prosperity is useless. If that outward safety and prosperity is absent but beliefs and convictions are not compromised on, then, once again, outward prosperity is irrelevant. That is why they say that empires often collapse the moment they contradict their own values, and this is why Allah described the militarily defeated Muslims at Uhud as "uppermost," and this is why the most crucial battle being fought against the Muslims today is the ideological battle, or the battle for hearts & minds. It is therefore imperative that we Muslims in the West work to pinpoint the infiltration points through which our enemies are fighting us on this battlefield, through which they work day & night to sap us of our true manifestation of strength = our beliefs, unfiltered by mental colonialism. It is these unfiltered beliefs that made the Companions "uppermost" even while in a state of physical weakness, and it is these unfiltered beliefs that will do the same for us, today.

And through this verse, Allah is embedding in your mind that if you succeed in identifying these infiltration points of mental colonialism, and protect your heart & mind from pollution, you will always be the uppermost, having no justification for exhibiting a feeling of weakness or sadness. And in fact, once you have identified these infiltration points, it is very easy to win this crucial battle. I once had an inmate a few cells down from me, a drug baron named Joe. Joe told me his story of being on the run for

years while continuing to run his narcotics business, until the authorities finally caught up to him. He ended his story by sadly exclaiming:

*"So, the government can basically do whatever it wants to us."*

So, I said to him: *"Joe, let me ask you: do you love your wife?"*

He replied, *"Of course I love her!"*

I asked: *"Let's say the authorities got ahold of you and applied enough physical pressure. Could they get you to just mouth the words 'I hate my wife'?"*

He replied: *"Maybe, yeah."*

I then asked, *"OK. Let's say they tear you limb from limb. Could they in any way affect the love you feel for her deep in your heart?"*

Joe replied, *"Never."*

I concluded the conversation: *"Therefore, they can't do whatever they want to you, because your heart is off limits."*

So, it is quite easy to win this battle and maintain the upperhand at all times despite external weaknesses. If only our du'at in the West would orient their approach toward tapping into this strength to remind us that we are "uppermost" as opposed to emphasizing the 'Makkan period' & 'Hudaybiyah' comparisons that encourage us to complacently be "weak" and "sad." As I said, this verse should be our slogan today. We need to do away with this mentality of weakness.

Suggested reading:

- The chapter titled '*The Faith Triumphant*' from Sayyid Qutb's book '*Milestones*' [Read it here: [Milestones - Sayyid Qutb](#)]
- '*Civil Democratic Islam*' by the RAND Corporation  
[[Amazon.com: Civil Democratic Islam: Partners, Resources, and Strategies...](#)]

In Surat Al 'Imran, v.144, Allah said:

وَمَا مُحَمَّدٌ إِلَّا رَسُولٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ الرُّسُلُ أَفَإِنْ مَاتَ أَوْ  
قُتِلَ أُنْقَلَبْتُمْ عَلَىٰ أَعْقَابِكُمْ وَمَنْ يَنْقَلِبْ عَلَىٰ عَقْبَيْهِ فَلَنْ يَضُرَّ  
اللَّهَ شَيْئًا وَسَيَجْزِي اللَّهُ الشَّاكِرِينَ ﴿١٤٤﴾

*{“And Muhammad is no more than a Messenger. Many Messengers passed before him. If he dies or is killed, will you then turn back on your heels?”}*

There are a handful of verses in the Qur'an where the words in the verse were actually spoken by a Companion prior to being officially revealed and incorporated into the Qur'an by Allah. This is one of those verses. As Mus'ab bin 'Umayr stood on the day of Uhud surrounded by pagans, and as he looked over and saw that the Prophet himself was surrounded and in danger, he said to himself: "Muhammad is only a Messenger. Many Messengers passed before him." Mus'ab was then killed by the pagans, and the rumor spread that it was the Prophet who had been killed, rather than Mus'ab. Upon hearing this false report, the Companions became divided into three groups: Some were so sad & demoralized that they simply gave up; some went and joined the hypocrites; some said: "If Allah's Messenger has died, then let us fight for what he died for," and they stayed firm as they were. And later, these words that Mus'ab had uttered in the face of a siege by the pagans were completed and revealed by Allah as this verse from the Qur'an in order to confirm a crucial point for those who follow this da'wah...

A person can be motivated to believe in or follow something for any of a variety of reasons:

- Some simply like to follow the crowd, and will adopt a methodology that their friends accept;
- Some experiment with beliefs & methodologies, such that when they are tired of one, they exchange it for another, as if it's a flavor-of-the-month commodity;
- Some were sucked in in a moment of emotion, while perhaps hearing a moving lecture or presentation;
- Some might believe in or follow a methodology out of attachment to a particular personality.

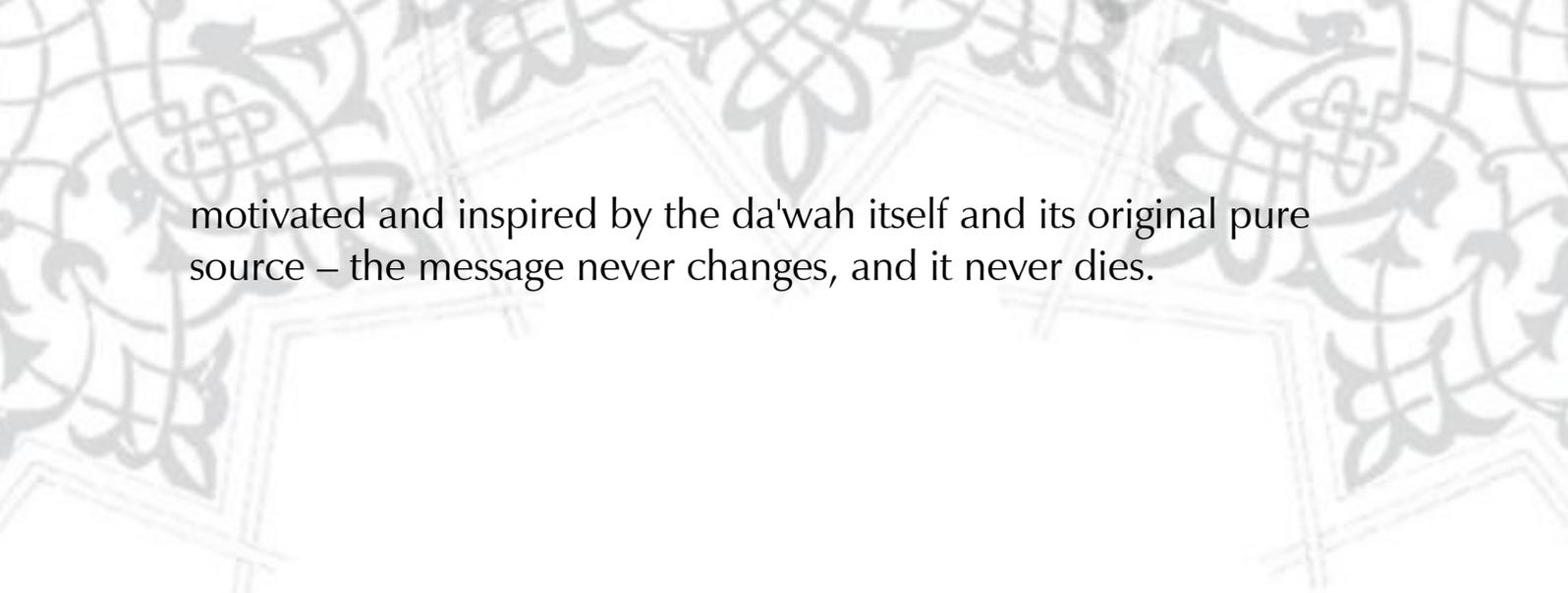
It was due to this phenomenon that the mere rumor of the Prophet's death led to some of the Companions to lose heart and give up. The verse in turn came to address this human inclination and teach that by attaching our hearts to anything but the message itself, we will collapse under the slightest pressure and turn on our heels. Even though the Messenger (**saw**) is loved on account of being the one through whom the Message & methodology are delivered. This is why the Companions who stood firm at Uhud responded to the rumors of the Prophet's death with: *"If he died, then fight for what he died for,"* i.e. 'So what if he died? We followed his message, not him as an individual. He is nothing more than a Messenger.' And this is why on the day that the Prophet actually did die seven years later, Abu Bakr stood and said: "Whoever of you worshipped Muhammad, then Muhammad has died. But whoever of you worshipped Allah, then Allah is Ever-Living and does not die," and he recited the verse in question. This was to emphasize that we are Muslims for Islam itself, and not because of any attachment to personalities.

Western society places great emphasis on personality worship, whether it be of music stars, movie stars, and other forms of celebrity. One notices that this phenomenon has afflicted even da'wah organizations in these societies, where there exists a sort of 'Superstar Shaykh' culture that appears to serve as a substitute celebrity culture in place of the jahili version that surrounds us. The

danger in this is two-fold: first, the opinions & words of such celebrities are taken as absolute, undisputable truths that cannot be challenged, even though the truth is not exclusive to one particular group of scholars or instructors; and second, such veneration and undue attachment to any personality will inevitably lead to his blind followers dispersing & turning back on their heels the moment that Shaykh, leader, etc changes his beliefs, is arrested, or dies – just as some of the Companions did at Uhud when they thought the Prophet had died. The solution is to have an open, critical, analytical, and investigative mind that allows you to take the truth from wherever it comes, for the sake of it being the truth, regardless of who it comes from. And as al-Imam Ahmad said: *"From the lack of a person's knowledge is that he believes in something out of blindly following another person."* And perhaps it was for this reason that Imam Ahmad himself would limit his classes to the teaching of ahadith from his 'Musnad' and would strongly discourage that his own opinions be written down. He wanted to emphasize an attachment among his students to his sources – the Qur'an & Sunnah – rather than to his own person and opinions.

It is truly unfortunate that because many initially enthusiastic & energetic Muslims neglect to grasp the theme taught in this verse, they end up becoming manhaj chameleons – one day, they are Salafi, the next day Sufi/Ash'ari, another day they might leave the Din altogether. This all leads back to the fact that their entrance point into the da'wah was one of the fleeting, superficial motivations that I'd outlined early on. Such chameleons change so often because they at one time followed the truth for all reasons but the right one: conviction and deep understanding of the message itself.

So, beware of undue attachment to and veneration of personalities – people change, and they die. Rather, study, love, be sincerely

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motivated and inspired by the da'wah itself and its original pure source – the message never changes, and it never dies.

In Surat Al 'Imran, v.153, Allah said,

﴿ إِذْ تَصْعَدُونَ وَلَا تَكُونُوا عَلَىٰ أَحَدٍ وَالرَّسُولُ  
يَدْعُوكُمْ فِي أَخْرَابِكُمْ فَأَتَيْتَكُمُ غَمًّا بَعِيدًا لِيَكِيلًا  
تَحْزَنُوا عَلَىٰ مَا فَاتَكُمْ وَلَا مَا أَصَابَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ  
خَيْرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴾

*{"Then He gave you one distress after another by way of requital to teach you not to be sad for what you missed or what befell you..."}*

While this verse was revealed regarding the reversal suffered by the Muslims at Uhud, its implications in our lives today are clear, and it is a characteristic of each human being that the more he has, the more he wants, and the more he wants, the more distressed he will be at an inability to get more, as the Prophet (saw) said: *"If the human being had a valley filled with gold, he would want another one like it, and nothing will stuff his mouth but dirt."* So, Allah hits us with periods of deprivation of one luxury or another – food, money, freedom, family, health – to break that insatiable desire for comfort and attachment to this world. When we don't always have things the way we want, and instead are made to experience distress at times, this conditions us to adapt to all circumstances in the future. As the verse says, we will learn to not be sad when what we want misses us, or what we don't want befalls us, since we've been exposed already. That dependence on comfort & ease has been broken.

Another issue contained in the verse is the discouragement from sadness in general. Sadness over good that is missed or evil that is experienced is useless, and brings about no benefit, and will not change reality in the least. Rather, as Ibn al-Qayyim once wrote, sadness causes harm by weakening one's resolve, weakening one's heart, preventing him from doing what will benefit him, and blocking his vision from seeing things as they are. So, when you are feeling sad for one reason or another, immediately replace that sadness with praise of Allah, patience and satisfaction with His Decree, stronger faith in Him, and the phrase '*Qaddar Allah wa ma sha'a fa'al*' (Allah Decreed and He does what He Wills). This is the result of a calamity seen through the lens of Tawhid.

Third, the dunya is not meant to be free of distress. Only Paradise is. For example, the Prophet was once asked what the most beloved thing to him in the world is, and he responded that it was 'A'ishah. Yet, even that most beloved worldly love to the Prophet was not free of blemish, as the story of the false accusation against her attached some level of distress to his love for her. And in this was a subtle message that the distresses we come across in the dunya are meant to detach our hearts from it and reorient them towards the journey to the Hereafter.

مهنا طارق

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