

Suratul Baqarah: Verses 47-48

(٤٧) يَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ اذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتِيَ الَّتِي أَنْعَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَأَنِّي فَضَّلْتُكُمْ عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ

(٤٨) وَاتَّقُوا يَوْمًا لَا تَجْزِي نَفْسٌ عَنْ نَفْسٍ شَيْئًا وَلَا يُقْبَلُ مِنْهَا شَفَاعَةٌ وَلَا يُؤْخَذُ مِنْهَا عَدْلٌ وَلَا هُمْ يُنصَرُونَ

O Children of Israel! Call to mind My favour which I bestowed on you and that I made you excel the nation (47).

And be on your guard against the day when one soul shall not avail another in the least; neither shall intercession on its behalf be accepted, nor shall any compensation be taken from it, nor shall they be helped (48).

Commentary

Qur'an: And be on your guard against the day when one soul shall not avail another in the least:

The temporal power and authority, with all its various systems and varying conditions, is based on a necessity of life – the only justification of this institution is that it fulfils this need in the framework of the prevailing factors of the society.

It some times exchanges a commodity for another, gives up a benefit for another, substitutes an order with another – without any hard and fast criterion to regulate such dispensations. The same phenomenon is observed in their judiciary.

Logically, a crime must be recompensed with punishment. Yet some times the judge, because of some extraneous reasons, decides not to punish the criminal. Some times the criminal rouses in the judge an overwhelming feeling of pity by his passionate appeal for mercy. Or he wins him over by bribe which induces him to deliver an unjust judgement.

Or an influential man intercedes with the judge on behalf of the said criminal and the judge cannot ignore that intercession. Or, the said criminal becomes a state witness leading to the conviction of even greater criminals, and is himself, thus, released without any punishment.

Or his tribe or colleagues get him freed from the clutches of the authorities. Whatever the cause may be, it is a well-established custom in the worldly governments and human societies to let the wrong-doers go free at times.

The ancient tribes and the idol-worshippers believed that the life hereafter was an extension of this one; that the customs of this world were valid for that one too, and that the next world was permeated by the same actions and reactions which prevailed in this one.

Thus they offered sacrifices and offerings to their deities seeking forgiveness for their sins or assistance in their needs; the offerings were supposed to intercede on their behalf. Some times a sin was expiated or help was sought by offering even a human sacrifice.

They carried this idea of continuation of the life so far as to bury with a man all types of necessities of life, not forgetting his ornaments and arms, in order that he might use them on his onward journey; some times even his concubines and soldiers were buried alive with him to keep him company.

You may see a lot of such finds in archaeological museums around the world. Some such ideas have persisted even among the Muslims – with all their diverse cultures and languages, albeit in modified forms.

The Qur'an has rejected all such superstitious beliefs and baseless ideas in no uncertain terms:

- . . . ***and the command on that day shall be entirely Allah's (82:19).***
- . . . ***and they see the chastisement and their ties are cut asunder(2:166).***
- ***And certainly you have come to Us alone as We created you at first, and you have left behind your backs the things which We gave you, and We do not see with you your intercessors about whom you asserted that they were (Allah's) associates in respect to you; certainly the ties between you are now cut off and what you asserted is gone from you (6:94).***
- ***There shall every soul become acquainted with what is sent before, and they shall be brought back to Allah, their true Master and what they did fabricate shall escape from them (10:30).***

There are many similar verses; and they show that the life hereafter is cut off from the natural causes which govern this life, and is quite separate from material connections. Once this principle is understood all the above-mentioned myths would automatically be cleared away. But the Qur'an is not content with this general declaration; it refutes each and every myth and superstition described above:

● ***And be on your guard against the day when one soul shall not avail another in the least; neither shall intercession on its behalf be accepted, nor shall any compensation be taken from it, nor shall they be helped (12:48).***

● ***. . . before the day comes in which there is no bargaining, neither any friendship nor intercession (2:254).***

● ***The day on which a friend shall not avail (his) friend aught . . . (44:41).***

● ***. . . there shall be no saviour for you from Allah . . . (40:33).***

● ***What is the matter with you that you do not help each other? Nay! on this day they are submissive (37:25- 26).***

● ***And they worship beside Allah what can neither harm them nor profit them, and they say: "These are our intercessors with Allah." Say: "Do you (presume to) inform Allah of what He knows not in the heavens and the earth?" Glory be to Him, and supremely exalted is He above what they set up with Him. (10:18).***

● ***. . . the unjust shall not have any friend nor any intercessors who should be obeyed (40:18).***

● ***So we have no intercessors, nor a true-friend (26:100-101).***

There are many other verses of the same theme, all rejecting the intercession on the Day of Resurrection. On the other hand, the Qur'an does not totally reject the intercession; rather it confirms it to a certain extent. For example, it says:

● ***Allah is He Who created the heavens and the earth and what is between them in six periods and He is firmly established on the throne; you have not besides Him any guardian or any intercessors; will you not then mind? (32:4)***

● ***. . . there is no guardian for them, nor any intercessor besides Him (6:51).***

● ***Say: 'Allah's is the intercession altogether' (39:44).***

● ***. . . whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is His; who is he that can intercede with Him but by His permission? He knows what is before them and what is behind them (2:255).***

● ***Surely your Lord is Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth in six periods; and He is***

firmly established on the throne, regulating the affair; there is no intercessor except after His permission (10:3).

● *And they say: "The Beneficent God had taken to Himself a son." Glory be to Him! Nay! they are honoured servants; they do not precede Him in speech and (only) according to His commandment do they act. He knows what is before them and what is behind them, and they do not intercede except for whom He approves, and for fear of Him they tremble (21:26-28).*

● *And those whom they call upon besides Him have no authority for intercession, but he who bears witness of the truth, and they know (him) (43:86).*

● *They shall have no authority for intercession, save he who has made a covenant with the Beneficent God (19:87).*

● *On that day shall no intercession avail except of him whom the Beneficent God allows and whose word He is pleased with. He knows what is before them and what is behind them, while they do not comprehend Him in knowledge (20:109-110).*

● *And intercession will not avail aught with Him save of him whom He permits (34:23).*

● *And how many an angel is there in the heavens whose intercession does not avail at all except after Allah has given permission to whom He pleases and chooses (53:26).*

Some of these verses (like the first three) say that intercession is reserved for Allah, while the rest declare that others too may intercede with Allah's permission. In any case, all of them confirm the intercession *per se*. How are these verses related to the preceding ones which totally reject intercession?

It is exactly the same relation that exists between the verses that say that the knowledge of unseen is reserved to Allah and those which declare that others too may have that knowledge with the permission of Allah. As Allah says:

● *Say: "No one in the heaven and the earth knows the unseen but Allah" (27:65).*

● *And with Him are the keys of the unseen, does not know it any except He (6:59).*

● *The Knower of the unseen! so He does not reveal His secrets to any, except to him whom He chooses of an apostle (72:27).*

The same is the case with various verses on the subjects of creating, sustaining, giving death, causity, command, authority and similar things. Some verses reserve them for Allah; while some say that others too may do these things. It is a well-known style of the Qur'an: first it rejects the idea that anyone other than Allah has any virtue or perfection; thereafter it confirms the same virtue or perfection for others

depending on the permission and pleasure of Allah.

When read together, the verses show that nobody has any virtue by his own power and right; whatever excellence there may be, he has got it because Allah has given it to him. Allah puts much emphasis to this fact; He attaches the proviso of His will even for those things which are firmly decreed by Him. For example:

So as to those who are unhappy, they shall be in the fire; for them shall be sighing and groaning in it; abiding therein so long as the heavens and the earth endure, except as your Lord please; surely your Lord is the(mighty) doer of what He intends.

And as to those who are made happy, they shall be in the garden, abiding in it as long as the heavens and the earth endure, except as your Lord please; a gift which shall never be cut off (11:106–108).

Note that abiding for ever is made dependent on the pleasure of Allah, even in case of the garden, although it is a gift which shall never be cut off. It emphasizes the fact that even when Allah firmly decrees a thing, it does not pass out of His control or authority;

surely your Lord is (mighty) doer of what He intends (11:107).

When Allah gives a thing, it does not go out of His total possession. When He denies some thing to someone, it is not done to protect Himself against any need or poverty!

In short, the verses that reject intercession – albeit talking about the Day of Resurrection – do so in the context of intercession independent of Allah's authority; while the ones proving it, prove it basically for Allah and then, depending on His pleasure, for others.

Thus the intercession is proved for other than Allah with His permission.

Now we should see what is the meaning of intercession? Who may intercede? On behalf of whom? And when? How is it related to the divine forgiveness?

1. What is the meaning of intercession?

“*ash-Shafa'ah*” (الشَّفَاعَة = intercession) is derived from “*ash-shaf*” (الشَّفَع) which means “even” as opposed to odd – the interceder adds his own recommendation to the plea of the petitioner; in this way the number of pleaders becomes even, and the weak plea of the petitioner is strengthened by the prestige of the intercessor.

We are accustomed in our social and communal life to seek others' intercession and help for fulfilling our needs. We resort to it to get an advantage or to ward off a disadvantage. Here we are not talking about an advantage or a disadvantage, a benefit or a harm that is caused by natural causes, like hunger and

thirst, heat or cold, illness or health; because in such cases we get what we want through its natural remedies, like eating and drinking, wearing clothes, getting treatment and so on.

What we are talking here about is the benefit and harm, punishment and reward resulting from the social laws made by civil authorities. Rising from the very relationship of mastership-and-servitude – and for that matter, between every ruler and ruled – there are some commandments, orders and prohibitions; one who follows and obeys them is praised and rewarded, and the one who disobeys is condemned and punished; that reward or punishment may be either material or spiritual.

When a master orders his servant to do or not to do a thing, and the servant obeys him he gets its reward; and if he disobeys he is punished. Whenever a rule is made, the punishment for its infringement is laid down too. This is the foundation which all the authorities are built upon.

When a man wants to get a material or spiritual benefit but is not suitably qualified for it; or when he desires to ward off a harm which is coming to him because of his disobedience, but has no shield to protect himself, then comes the time for intercession.

In other words, when he wants to get a reward without doing his task, or to save himself from punishment without performing his duty, then he looks for someone to intercede on his behalf. But intercession is effective only if the person for whom one intercedes is otherwise qualified to get the reward and has already established a relationship with the authority.

If an ignorant person desires appointment to a prestigious academic post, no intercession can do him any good; nor can it avail in case of a rebellious traitor who shows no remorse for his misdeeds and does not submit to the lawful authorities. It clearly shows that intercession works as a supplement to the cause; it is not an independent cause.

The effect of an intercessor's words depends on one or the other factor which may have some influence upon the concerned authority; in other words, intercession must have a solid ground to stand upon. The intercessor endeavours to find a way to the heart of the authority concerned, in order that the said authority may give the reward to, or waive the punishment of, the person who is the subject of intercession.

An intercessor does not ask the master to nullify his mastership or to release the servant from his servitude; nor does he plead with him to refrain from laying down rules and regulations for his servants or to abrogate his commandments (either generally or especially in that one case), in order to save the wrong-doer from the due consequences; nor does he ask him to discard the canon of reward and punishment, (either generally or in that particular case).

In short, intercession can interfere with neither the institution of mastership and servanthship nor the master's authority to lay down the rules; nor can it effect the system of reward and punishment. These three factors are beyond the jurisdiction of intercession.

What an intercessor does is this: He accepts the inviolability of the above-mentioned three aspects. Then he looks at one or more of the following factors and builds his intercession on that basis:

- a. He appeals to such attributes of the master as give rise to forgiveness, e.g., his nobility, magnanimity and generosity.
- b. He draws attention to such characteristics of the servant as justify mercy and pardon, e.g., his wretchedness, poverty, low status and misery.
- c. He puts at stake his own prestige and honour in the eyes of the master.

Thus, the import of intercession is like this: I cannot and do not say that you should forget your mastership over your servant or abrogate your commandment or nullify the system of reward and punishment.

What I ask of you is to forgive this defaulting servant of yours because you are magnanimous and generous, and because no harm would come to you if you forgive his sins; and/or because your servant is a wretched creature of low status and steeped in misery; and it is befitting of a master like you to ignore the faults of a slave like him; and/or because you have bestowed on me a high prestige, and I implore you to forgive and pardon him in honour of my intercession.

The intercessor, in this way, bestows precedence on the factors of forgiveness and pardon over those of legislation and recompense. He removes the case from the latter's jurisdiction putting it under former's influence. As a result of this shift, the consequences of legislation (reward and punishment) do not remain applicable.

The effect of intercession is, therefore, based on shifting the case from the jurisdiction of reward and punishment to that of pardon and forgiveness; it is not a confrontation between one cause (divine legislation) and the other (intercession).

By now it should have been clear that intercession too is one of the causes; it is the intermediate cause that connects a distant cause to its desired effect.

Allah is the ultimate Cause. This causality shows itself in two ways:

First: In creation. Every cause begins from Him and ends up to Him; He is the first and the final Cause. He is the real Creator and Originator. All other causes are mere channels to carry His boundless mercy and limitless bounty to His creatures.

Second: In legislation. He, in His mercy, established a contact with His creatures; He laid down the religion, sent down His commandments, and prescribed suitable reward and appropriate punishment for His obedient and disobedient servants; He sent prophets and apostles to bring us good tidings and to warn us of the consequences of transgression.

The prophets and apostles conveyed to us His message in the best possible way. Thus His proof over us was complete:

and the word of your Lord has been accomplished with truth and justice, there is none to change His words. . . (6:115).

Both aspects of causality of Allah may be, and in fact are, related to intercession.

1. Intercession in creation: Quite obviously the intermediary causes of creation are the conduits that bring the divine mercy, life, sustenance and other bounties to the creatures; and as such they are intercessors between the Creator and the created. Some Qur'anic verses too are based on this very theme:

whatever, is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is His; who is he that can intercede with Him but by His permission (2:255);

Surely your Lord is Allah, who created the heavens and the earth in six periods, and He is firmly established on throne, regulating the affair; there is no intercessor except after His permission (10:3).

Intercession in the sphere of creation is only the intermediation of causes between the Creator and the created thing and effect, in bringing it into being and regulating its affairs.

2. Intercession in legislation: Intercession, as analysed earlier, is effective in this sphere too. It is in this context that Allah says:

On that day shall no intercession avail except of him whom the Beneficent God allows and whose word He is pleased with (20: 109);

And intercession will not avail aught with Him save of him whom He permits (34:23) ;

And how many an angel is there in the heavens whose intercession does not avail at all except after Allah has given permission to whom He pleases and chooses(53:26);

. . . and they do not intercede except for him whom He approves . . . (21:28) ;

And those whom they call upon besides Him have no authority for intercession, but he who bears witness of the truth and they know(him) (43:86).

These verses clearly affirm intercessory role for various servants of Allah both men and angels – with divine permission and pleasure. It means that Allah has given them some power and authority in this matter, and to Him belongs all the kingdom and all the affairs.

Those intercessors may appeal to Allah's mercy, forgiveness and other relevant attributes to cover and

protect a servant who otherwise would have deserved punishment because of his sins and transgressions.

That intercession would transfer his case from the general law of recompense to the special domain of grace and mercy. (It has already been explained that the effect of intercession is based on shifting a case from the former's to the latter's jurisdiction; it is not a confrontation between one law and the other.) Allah clearly says:

. . . so these are they of whom Allah changes the evil deeds to good ones (25:70).

Allah has the power to change one type of deed into other, in the same way as He may render an act null and void. He says:

And We will proceed to what they have done of deeds, so We shall render them as scattered floating dust (25:23) ;

. . . so He rendered their deeds null (47:9) ;

If you avoid the great sins which you are forbidden, We will expiate from you your (small) sins (4:31);

Surely Allah does not forgive that any thing should be associated with Him, and forgives what is besides that to whomsoever He pleases (4:48) .

The last quoted verse is certainly about the cases other than true belief and repentance, because with belief and repentance even polytheism is forgiven, like any other sin. Also Allah may nurture a small deed to make it greater than the original:

These shall be granted their reward twice (28:54);

Whoever brings a good deed, he shall have ten like it (6: 160).

Likewise, He may treat a nonexistent deed as existing:

And (as for) those who believe and their offspring follow them in faith, We will unite with them their offspring and We will not diminish to them aught of their work; every man is responsible for what he has done (52:21).

To make a long story short, Allah does what He please, and decrees as He wills. Of course, He does so pursuant to His servants' interest, and in accordance with an intermediary cause – and intercession of the intercessors (e.g., the prophets, the friends of Allah and those who are nearer to Him) is one of those causes, and certainly no rashness or injustice is entailed therein.

It should have been clear by now that intercession, in its true sense, belongs to Allah only; all His

attributes are intermediaries between Him and His creatures and are the channels through which His grace, mercy and decrees pass to the creatures; He is the real and all-encompassing intercessor:

Say: "Allah's is the intercession altogether" (39:44);

. . . you have not besides Him any guardian or any intercessor (32:4);

. . . there is no guardian for them nor any intercessor besides Him (6:51).

The intercessors, other than Allah, get that right by His permission, by His authority.

In short, intercession with Him is a confirmed reality – in cases where it does not go against the divine glory and honour.

2. The Objections Against Intercession

Intercession, as explained above, is a confirmed reality – not in every case but in approved ones. The Qur'an and the Tradition do not prove more than this. A little meditation on the meaning of intercession is enough to lead to this conclusion. Intercession is mediation in causality and effectiveness. Obviously causality cannot be limitless and unconditional.

No cause can be a cause of every effect, nor can an effect be governed by every cause – otherwise it would render the system of cause and effect null and void. Those who do not believe in intercession have fallen in this very trap – they thought that we affirm the intercession in its totality without any condition or limit. All their objections emanates from this very misunderstanding:

First Objection

Allah has threatened to punish the wrongdoer; now supposedly He waives the punishment on the Day of Judgement. The question is whether this waiver is justice or injustice. If it is justice, then the original promise of punishment would be injustice, quite unworthy of divine majesty; and if it is injustice, then the intercession of the prophets, for example, would be a plea for injustice, and it is a folly that should not be attributed to the prophets.

Reply

First: What will they say about those orders that are given only to test the loyalty of a servant and are changed at the last moment, like the order to Ibrahim to kill Isma'il? Surely its waiver too like the original order was based on justice. Such orders are given only to test the hidden quality of the servant concerned.

Likewise, it may be said that salvation is written for all the believers. The laws of the *shari`ah* were ordained with punishments prescribed for transgressors – in order that the disbelievers should perish because of their disbelief.

As for the obedient believers their rank would be enhanced by their good deeds. And as for the disobedient believers, they would be rescued by intercession: that intercession might be effective either totally or partially; in later case, they would have to suffer some of the punishments in al-Barzakh or on the Day of Judgement itself and then they would get deliverance.

Thus the original law with the prescribed punishment for the defaulters is nothing but justice, and, the subsequent waiver of that punishment too is nothing but justice.

Second: The waiver of the prescribed punishment as a result of intercession could be compared with the previous order – in being based on justice or injustice – only if that waiver were a contradiction of the previous order. But we have explained that it is not so.

Intercession is not a contradiction of, or confrontation between one cause (divine legislation) and the other (intercession); it is in fact shifting his case from one jurisdiction (reward and punishment) to the other (mercy and forgiveness).

Second Objection

It is the established practice of Allah, that His actions are always safe from contradiction and conflict. Whatever He decrees and orders, without any exception, runs on an established pattern. And this is the foundation which the system of cause and effect has been built upon. Allah says:

This is a straight path with Me, Surely, as regards My servants, thou hast no authority over them except those who follow thee of the deviators. And surely Hell is the promised place of them all (15:41-43);

And (know) that this is My path, the straight one, therefore, follow it, and follow not (other) ways, for they will scatter you away from His way (6:153);

For you shall not find any alteration in the course of Allah; and you shall not find any change in the course of Allah (35:43).

And intercession, if effective, would certainly create conflict and contradiction in the actions of Allah: If intercession caused waiver of punishment from all the sinners, of all their sins, then it would defeat the very purpose of the *sharʿah* and would turn the whole system into a joke.

And if only some of the sinners or only some of their sins were forgiven, then there would occur contradiction in divine actions and change and alteration in Allah's established course. Certainly, all the sinners are transgressors and every sin is disobedience of divine command. Therefore, forgiving only some of them or only some of their sins, because of intercession, would be impossible.

Intercession is used in this life of ours, where people are influenced by their desires or social connections. It cannot work in the affairs of the *sharʿah* nor can it influence the divine judgement in any

way.

Reply

No one doubts that the path of Allah is straight and His course without any change or conflict. But it should not be forgotten that this one and unchanged course is based on all His relevant attributes, not on only one or two of them. Allah is the One Who bestows on every creature diverse things like life, death, sustenance, bounty and so on.

These are the decrees that are contradictory or unrelated to each other; they do not have the same connection with the issuing authority i.e. God. Otherwise the relationship of cause and effect would become null and void.

For example, Allah does not restore a sick man to health by virtue of His death-giving power; rather He does so because He is Merciful, Benevolent, Giver of health and Bestower of bounties. Likewise, He does not destroy an arrogant tyrant by His mercy and beneficence, but because He is the Avenger, the Omnipotent and the Subduer.

The Qur'an is the best witness of this fact: Whenever it ascribes an event or affair to Him, it invariably always mentions the appropriate attribute by which that affair or event was decreed and managed.

You may say that every affair and every thing is decreed by Allah because of its underlying benefit and good. And He does whatever He does by His all relevant attributes, and not by only one or some of them.

There is always action and reaction between benefits and good of various courses of a certain affair; and Allah issues His decree as a result of His knowledge that encompasses all those aspects; His vision is not limited to one or two sides only.

Had there been one fixed cause or attribute, there would have been no change or difference between a believer and a non-believer, between a pious person and a debauchee; but there are numerous causes and attributes, and their sum-total often has effects quite different from the effect of its individual parts.

Therefore, intercession, and the consequent waiver of punishment – based on sum-total of numerous causes like mercy, pardon, judgement, and giving everyone his due right – does not entail any change in the established course, nor any deviation from the right path.

Third Objection

Intercession, according to common understanding, prevails upon the authority to do against his original will. In other words, the original will is abrogated and changed because of the intercessor.

A just judge would never accept an intercession unless his knowledge is changed, e.g., his original

judgement was wrong, and then he was made to realize that justice demanded a course opposite to his original plan.

An unjust judge would accept intercession of his friends knowing fully well that the course suggested was wrong; but he values his personal relations more than the demands of justice and equity. Obviously, both these alternatives are impossible so far as Allah is concerned; His will is related to His knowledge, and His knowledge is eternal and unchangeable.

Reply

Intercession has nothing to do with change of will or knowledge. What actually changes is the thing willed about or known. Allah knows that a certain man will pass through various stages in his life; for a time his condition will be excellent – and Allah wills about him a certain will; and He knows that later his condition will change – and He wills about him another will; and every day He is in a (new) state (of glory).

And He has said:

Allah effaces what He pleases and establishes (likewise), and with Him is the basis of the Book (13:39);

Nay, both His hands are spread out, He expends as He pleases (6:64).

The same happens with our knowledge and will. We know that soon night will come and we will not be able to see in darkness, but a few hours later the sun will rise dispelling the darkness. When night comes our will is directed to light a lamp, and later when the morning comes the will is directed to extinguish that lamp. In this case, there was no change at all in our knowledge and will; what changed was the objects of that knowledge and will.

And consequently they ceased to be governed by that knowledge and that will. After all, not every knowledge is related to every known object, nor every will is connected to every purpose.

What is impossible for Allah is disagreement of His knowledge with the thing known, or of His will with its object – while that thing or object remains unchanged. In other words, it is impossible for Him to be mistaken in His knowledge or for His will to be ineffective.

We see an apparition far away and take it to be a man; on coming nearer we find that it was a horse. In this case, our “knowledge” did not agree with its object; it was a mistake. Likewise, we intend to do a certain work, then we realize that it would be wrong to do so; here our “will” was cancelled and became ineffective.

But in these cases the objects of our knowledge and will had not changed. Such “disagreement” is certainly impossible for Allah. But as we have seen, intercession and the subsequent waiver of

punishment does not come into this category.

Fourth Objection

Had Allah promised intercession, or had His prophets brought this message to their nations, the people would have been emboldened to disobey the commandments of Allah, and to transgress the limits of the *shar`ah*.

It would have defeated the whole purpose behind the institutions of prophethood and religion. If we are to avoid this inherent difficulty, we shall have to interpret the relevant Qur'anic verses and Tradition in a way that does not collide with this basic concept.

Reply

First: What will they say about the verses showing that Allah's mercy and forgiveness is all-encompassing? For example:

Surely Allah does not forgive that any thing should be associated with Him, and forgives what is besides that to whomsoever He pleases (4:48).

This verse, as explained earlier, covers the cases other than repentance, as the exception of polytheism shows – because in cases of repentance even polytheism may be forgiven.

Second: The promise or message of intercession could incite people to disregard the rules of the *shar`ah*, if it were accompanied by one of the following factors:

1. If it had pin-pointed either the sinner – by name or description – who was to be forgiven through intercession; or the particular sin that was to be wiped off – unconditionally, definitely and without any ambiguity.
2. Or, if intercession were effective against all types of punishment and at all times.

Read the following sentences to understand what the above conditions mean: “All men, or a named group of men, will never be held responsible for any sins they commit; nor will they ever be punished for their transgressions.” “A particularly named sin will never be punished for.”

Obviously, such declarations would defeat the basic purpose of the *shar`ah*. But Allah has kept both things vague. He has never said what sins or which sinners might benefit from intercession, nor has He said whether all or only some of the punishment would be waived; nor has He made it clear whether or not the intercession would be effective in every condition and at all times.

As all these things have been kept vague, no one could be sure of getting the benefit of intercession. In view of this uncertainty, he cannot feel bold to trespass the limits of Allah. On the other hand the

possibility of intercession would save him from losing the hope of divine mercy, will keep him away from despair and despondency, from pessimism and hopelessness.

Then there is the verse:

If you avoid great sins which you are forbidden, We will expiate from you your (small) sins . . . (4:31).

It clearly says that Allah will forgive small sins and waive the punishment, provided the servant shuns great sins. If Allah can say, “If you avoid great-sins, I shall forgive the small ones”, He can as easily say, “If you keep your belief pure until you come to Me with unpolluted faith, I shall accept the intercession of intercessors on your behalf.”

The important thing is to keep the faith strong; the sins weaken the faith, harden the heart and lead to polytheism. Allah has said: But none feels secure from Allah's plan except the people who shall perish (7:99);

Nay! rather what they used to do has become like rust upon their hearts (83:14);

Then evil was the end of those who did evil, because they rejected the signs of Allah . . . (30 :10).

The hope of divine mercy (generated by the belief of intercession), in many cases, leads to repentance, piety and good deeds – and often the servant reaches a stage where intercession is not needed after all. It is in fact the most important benefit of this belief.

Likewise, if it were mentioned who would benefit from intercession or which sins were likely to be interceded about, but it was declared that it would nevertheless entail some types of punishment upto a certain period, the man could not feel bold to commit sins.

And the fact is that the Qur'an has nowhere pin-pointed the sin or the sinner likely to benefit from intercession. On the contrary, it speaks only of averting the punishment from some people. And no objection can be levelled against such a vague expression.

Fifth Objection

Utmost that reason may prove is the possibility, and not the actuality, of intercession – in fact, it does not prove even that much. So far as the Qur'an is concerned, it does not show that intercession will actually take place.

Some verses refute the idea of intercession altogether, e.g.

. . . the day comes in which there is no bargaining, neither any friendship nor intercession (2:254).

Other verses say that intercession shall be of no avail, e.g.,

So the intercession of intercessors shall not avail them (74:48).

Still others, after refuting the actuality of intercession, add the proviso like,

but by His permission (2:255),

except after His permission(10:3),

except for him whom He approves (21:28) .

This style (a negative followed by exception of divine permission or approval) is used in the Qur'an invariably always to emphasize the negative statement; for example, it says:

We will make you recite so you shall not forget, except what Allah pleases (87:6-7);

Abiding therein so long as the heavens and the earth endure, except as your Lord pleases (11:107) .

Obviously, there is no definite declaration in the Qur'an proving the actuality of intercession. As for the Tradition, those giving its details are not reliable; and the reliable ones do not say more than the Qur'an does.

Reply

As for the verses refuting the intercession we have already explained that what they reject is the intercession without the permission of Allah. The verse 74:48, which says that “the intercession of intercessors shall not avail them”, is not a proof against intercession; on the contrary it proves its actuality.

The verse is in the Chapter, “The Clothed One” and speaks about “them”, i.e., a particular group of wrong-doers mentioned in verses 41 to 47; it is they who shall not benefit from the intercession of intercessors; it does not speak about all the sinners. Moreover, it uses the phrase, “the intercession of intercessors”.

There is a difference between saying, “Intercession shall not avail them”, and saying, “Intercession of intercessors shall not avail them”. When an infinitive verb or verbal noun is used in genitive or possessive case, it proves its actual existence, as ash-Shaykh `Abdu '1-Qahir has clearly written in *Dala'ilul 'I-jaz*.

Therefore, the expression, “intercession of intercessors” proves that some intercession shall definitely take place on that day, although that particular group shall not be able to benefit from it. Also, the plural, “intercessors” points to the presence of a group of intercessors.

Look for example at the phrases:

she was of those who remained behind (7:83);

and he was one of the unbelievers (2:34);

so he is of those who go astray (7:175);

My covenant does not include the unjust ones (2:124).

The plurals in all these phrases would have been irrelevant if they did not mean existence of more than two persons having the attributes mentioned. Likewise, the verse: *So the intercession of intercessors shall not avail them*, instead of refuting the intercession, clearly proves the existence of intercessors and, therefore, intercession.

As for the verses that contain the exceptions, “but by His permission”, “except after His permission”, they clearly prove the actuality of intercession, especially as the infinitive verb “permission” is used in genitive case (*His permission*). No one having a taste of Arabic literature can entertain any doubt about it.

It is childish to say that the two phrases, “but by His permission” and “except for him whom He approves” mean the same thing, i.e., the divine will. Moreover, the Qur'an has used various phrases of exception in various places, e.g., “but by His permission”, “except after His permission”, “except for him whom He approves” and “but he who bears witness of the truth and they know (him)”.

Even if we accept that the divine permission and divine approval mean the same thing, i.e., divine will, can it be said that the last-mentioned phrase (***but he who bears witness of the truth . . .***) too implies the same? Such interpretation implies such inexactness and laxity in talk as even an ordinary Arab would not like attributed to him, let alone an eloquent one.

Can we accuse the most eloquent divine speech, i.e., the Qur'an, of such inarticulateness? As for the Tradition, we shall show later that they too follow the line adopted by the Qur'an.

Sixth Objection

The verses do not say clearly that on the Day of Judgement, the punishment would be averted from the wrong-doers, after the sin has been proved and the sentence pronounced. The intercession attributed to the prophets means that they were the intermediaries between the Lord and His servant, they received revelation from their Lord and conveyed it to the people and guided them to the right path, leading them to spiritual and ethical perfection. In this sense, they are the intercessors for the believers in this world as well as in the hereafter.

Reply

No doubt, it is one of the aspects of intercession; but intercession is not limited to this much. The prophets called their people to the true faith and repentance, and this is the intercession mentioned by the objector. Now let us look again at the verse:

Surely Allah does not forgive that any thing should be associated with Him, and forgives what is besides that to whomsoever He pleases (4:48).

As described earlier, this verse covers the cases other than the true faith and repentance. (True faith and repentance would wipe out the polytheism too.) The exception of polytheism shows that here the talk is about other things – and intercession, in the meaning explained by us, is one of those cases.

Seventh Objection: Reason does not prove that intercession really exists; and the Qur'anic verses on this subject are ambiguous – in one place they prove it, at others refute it; sometimes they add some proviso, at the other they speak unconditionally. Therefore, the ethics of religion demands that we should believe in all of them and leave their meaning to Allah.

Reply: The ambiguous verses, when referred to the decisive ones, become decisive themselves. It is an easy process which is not beyond our ability and power. We shall explain this subject when writing about the verse:

of it there are some verses decisive, they are the basis of the Book, and others are ambiguous . . . (3:7).

3. Who will benefit from intercession?

As explained earlier, it was not in the best interest of religious guidance to pin-point who should benefit from intercession on the Day of Judgement. But vague hints and ambiguous statements can do no harm, and the Qur'an has used them to give us a general idea.

Allah says:

Every soul is held in pledge for what it has earned, except the people of the right hand, in gardens; they shall ask each other about the guilty: "What has brought you into hell?" They shall say:

"We were not of those who prayed; and we used not to feed the poor; and we used to enter (into vain discourse) with those who entered (into vain discourse); and we used to call the Day of Judgement a lie, till death overtook us." So the intercession of intercessors shall not avail them (74:38–48).

The verses declare that every soul shall remain mortgaged on the Day of Judgement for the sins it has

earned, held responsible for the wrongs done in this life. The only exception is of the people of the right hand – they shall be released from that pledge, and shall settle in the gardens.

They shall see the wrong-doers who shall be held captive of their sins, and herded into hell; they shall ask them for the reason of their entering into hell, and the guilty shall reply by enumerating four sins as the cause of their disgrace and punishment. And because of those sins, they shall lose the benefit of the intercession of intercessors.

It implies that the people of the right hand would be free from those sins which deprive a man of the benefit of intercession. Allah shall release them from the fetters of sins and wrongs; and this release shall be as a result of the intercession of intercessors.

The verses are a part of the Chapter 74, (The Clothed One); it was revealed at Mecca at the beginning of the Call, as its contents amply prove. At that time the prayer and *zakat* as known to us were not promulgated.

In this context the prayer, mentioned in the verse, “We were not of those who prayed”, could only mean turning one's face towards Allah with humility and submission; likewise, the verse, “and we used not to feed the poor”, could only refer to general spending on the poor in the way of Allah. *al-Khawd* (الخوض = translated here as entering into vain discourse) literally means to wade into water, to plunge or rush into something.

The verse, “we used to enter (into vain discourse). . .”, implies entanglement in the vain things of this life, which distract a man from remembrance of the hereafter; it may also mean vilification of the verses which remind one of the Day of Reckoning.

Those wrong-doers, therefore, shall be guilty of four sins:

(1) Not turning their faces towards Allah with humility and submission; (2) not spending in the way of Allah; (3) vilification of divine revelations; and (4) calling the Day of Judgement a lie.

These four evils destroy the foundation of religion. Religion demands following the purified guides, setting one's face towards Allah, turning away from the worldly distractions, setting one's eyes on the Day of Judgement.

If a man succeeds in it, he will be free from the third and the fourth sins, i.e., vilification of divine revelation and calling the Day of Judgement a lie. When, in this way, his fundamental belief is secured, he shall feel the urge to turn towards Allah and to help fellow human beings.

These two factors are represented in these verses by prayer and spending in the way of Allah. Faith and deed all would thus combine to build the structure of religion. Other elements, like belief in Oneness of God and the prophethood, would naturally follow.

The people of the right hand are the ones who shall benefit from the intercession; and they are the ones whose religion and faith Allah is pleased with. They may come on the Day of Judgement with perfect deeds – and in that case there will be no need for any intercession; or they may come burdened with some sins – and it is they who shall benefit from the intercession. Therefore, the intercession shall be for those people of the right hand who may have committed some sins.

Allah says:

If you avoid the great sins which you are forbidden, We will expiate from you your (small) sins (4:31).

Therefore, anybody coming on the Day of Judgement with an unexpiated sin shall certainly be guilty of a great sin – had it been a small one it would have been expiated long ago. We have to conclude from this verse that the intercession shall be for those people of the right hand who shall be guilty of great sins. The Prophet has said: “Verily my intercession is for those of my *ummah* who shall have committed great sins; as for the good-doers, there shall be no difficulty for them . . .”

The designation, “the people of the right hand”, is the opposite of “the people of the left hand”. These Qur'anic terms are based on the fact that man, on the Day of Judgement, shall be given his book of deeds either in his right hand or in the left.

Allah says:

(Remember) the day when We will call every people with their Imam; then whoever is given his book in his right hand, these shall read their book; and they shall not be dealt with a whit unjustly. And whoever is blind in this, he shall (also) be blind in the hereafter; and more erring from the way (17:71-72).

We shall describe, when writing about this verse, that getting the book in the right hand is synonymous with following the rightful Imam; likewise getting the book in the left hand means following a misguiding leader or Imam. Allah says about Pharaoh:

He shall lead his people on the resurrection day, and bring them down to the fire (11:98).

It means that not only the required four qualities but even the nomenclature, “the people of the right hand”, is based on the fact that they followed an approved religion, that Allah was pleased with them.

Allah says in another place:

and they do not intercede except for him whom He approves (21:28).

This approval is general and without any condition or qualification. It is not like the one mentioned in verse:

. . . **except of him whom the Beneficent God allows and whose word He is pleased with (20:109),**

where approval or pleasure is related to a servant's word. In the verse under discussion the pleasure or approval is related to them, not to their deed; in other words, "whom He approves" means "whose religion he approves". Accordingly this verse too has the same import as the previous ones.

Again Allah says:

The day on which We will gather the pious ones to the Beneficent God as the guests of honour, and We will drive the guilty to hell like (thirsty) herd (to the watering place). They shall own not any intercession, save he who has made a covenant with the Beneficent God (19:85-87).

The one who has made a covenant with Allah shall be given possession of intercession. It should not be forgotten that not every guilty servant is an unbeliever. Allah says:

Whoever comes to his Lord (being) guilty, for him is surely hell; he shall not die therein nor shall he live; and whoever comes to Him a believer (and) he has done good deeds indeed, these it is who shall have the high ranks (20:74-75).

According to these verses, anyone who is not a good-doing believer is guilty, no matter whether he is an unbeliever or a wrong-doing believer. The latter group, i.e., those who have true belief but have also committed sins, is the one that has made a covenant with God. Allah says: **Did I not enjoin you (make a covenant with you),**

O children of Adam! that you should not worship the Satan? Surely he is your open enemy, and that you should worship Me; this is the straight path (36:60-61).

The phrase, "and that you should worship Me", is a covenant in the meaning of order, enjoinder; and the sentence, "this is the straight path", is also a covenant by implication because the straight path leads to felicity and safety. However, such believers shall enter the hell because of sins they had committed, then they shall be rescued by intercession.

It is to this covenant that the verse 2:80 alludes:

(The Jews) say: "Fire shall not touch us but for a few days." Say: "Have you received a promise (covenant) from Allah?"

These verses too, therefore, lead us to the same conclusion, namely, the group that shall benefit from intercession on the Day of Judgement is that of the believers who would have committed great sins; it is they whose religion and belief Allah is pleased with and has approved.

4. Who are the intercessors?

It has been described that intercession takes place in two spheres: in creation and in legislation. So far as the intercession in creation is concerned, all intermediary causes are intercessors because they are placed between the Creator and the created.

As for the intercessors in the sphere of legislation and judgement, they may be divided into two categories: (1) intercessors in this life, and (2) those in the hereafter.

Intercessors in This Life

All the things that bring a man nearer to Allah and make him eligible for divine forgiveness. The following come into this category:

a. Repentance: Allah says:

Say: "O my servants! who have acted extravagantly against their own souls, do not despair of the mercy of Allah; surely Allah forgives the faults altogether; surely He is the Forgiving, the Merciful. And return to your Lord. . . " (39:53 - 54).

It covers all the sins, even polytheism; if one repents from it and believes in One God, one's previous polytheism is wiped out and forgiven.

b. True faith: Allah says:

O you who believe! fear Allah and believe in His Apostle: He will give you two portions of His mercy, and make for you a light with which you will walk, and forgive you . . . (57:28).

c. Good deed:

Allah has promised those who believe and do good deeds (that there is) for them pardon and great recompense (5:9) ;

O you who believe! fear Allah and seek an approach (medium) to Him . . . (5:35).

There are many verses of this theme.

d. The Qur'an:

Indeed has come to you from Allah a light and a manifest Book whereby Allah guides him who follows His pleasure, into the ways of peace, and takes them out from darkness towards the light by His will and guides them to the straight path (5:16) .

e. Any thing related to a good deed, like the mosques, holy places and auspicious days.

f. The prophets and the apostles, as they seek forgiveness for their people. Allah says:

and had they, when they were unjust to themselves, come to you and asked forgiveness of Allah, and the Apostle had (also) asked forgiveness for them, they would have found Allah oft-returning (to mercy), Merciful (4:64) .

g. The angels, as they too ask forgiveness for the believers. Allah says:

Those who bear the throne and those around it celebrate the praise of their Lord and believe in Him and ask forgiveness for those who believe (40:7);

. . . and the angels celebrate the praise of their Lord and ask forgiveness for those on earth . . . (42:5).

h. The believers themselves, as they seek pardon for their believer brothers and for themselves. Allah quotes them as saying:

and pardon us, and forgive us, and have mercy on us, Thou art our Guardian . . . (2:286).

Intercessors in the Hereafter

We use the term, intercessor, in the meaning explained in the beginning. The following come into this category:

a. The prophets and the apostles: Allah says:

And they say: "The Beneficent God has taken to Himself a son." Glory be to Him. Nay! they are honoured servants; they do not precede Him in speech and (only) according to His commandment do they act. He knows what is before them and what is behind them, and they do not intercede except for him whom He approves. (21:26-28).

Those who were called 'son' of God, are in fact His honoured servants and they do intercede for him whom He approves. Among them is `Isa, son of Maryam, and he was a prophet. It means that the prophets do intercede for approved persons.

Again Allah says:

And those whom they call upon besides Him have no authority for (or, do not own) intercession, but he who bears witness of the truth and they know (him) (43:86).

b. The angels: The preceding two verses prove that the angels too may intercede, because they too were called daughters of Allah. Moreover, Allah says:

And how many an angel is there in the heavens whose intercession does not avail at all except after Allah has given permission to whom He pleases and chooses (53:26);

On that day shall no intercession avail except of him whom the Beneficent God allows and whose word He is pleased with. He knows what is before them and what is behind them . . . (20: 109–110).

c. The witnesses: Allah says:

And those whom they call upon besides Him have no authority for (or, do not own) intercession, but he who bears witness of truth and they know (him) (43:86).

This verse shows that those who bear witness of the truth do own (or, have authority for) intercession.

The witness mentioned here does not mean the one killed in the battlefield. It refers to the witness for the deeds, as was described in the Chapter of the Opening, and will be further explained under the verse:

And thus we have made you a medium (i.e. just) nation that you may be witnesses over the people and (that) the Apostle may be a witness over you . . . (2:143).

d. The believers: They shall be joined to the witnesses on the Day of Judgement; it follows that they too may intercede like the witnesses. Allah says:

And (as for) those who believe in Allah and His apostles, these it is that are the truthful and the witnesses with their Lord . . . (57: 19).

5. Intercession: about what?

The intercession in creation is related to every cause in this world of the cause and effect.

As for the intercession in matters of legislation and judgement, some of them wipe out every sin and its punishment, right from polytheism to the smallest one. For example, repentance done, and true faith acquired, before the Day of Resurrection.

Some wipe out effects of some particular sins, like some specified good deeds. As for the issue under discussion, i.e., the intercession of the prophets and other believers on the Day of Judgement, we have already explained that it shall avail those believers who might have committed big sins, but whose faith Allah is pleased with.

6. When will intercession be effected?

We are talking here too about the intercession on the Day of Judgement to waive off the punishment of sins. We have earlier quoted the verses of the Chapter 42 (The Clothed One):

Every soul is held in pledge for what it has earned, except the people of the right hand, in gardens they shall ask each other about the guilty (74:38–41) .

As explained earlier, the verses clearly say who would benefit from the intercession, and who wont. They also imply that the intercession will get the wrong-doing believers released from fetters of their sins, and protect them from abiding for ever in the hell.

But there is nothing to show that intercession might avail against the turmoils of the Day of Resurrection. Rather, the verse proves that it will be effective only for rescuing the guilty believers from the hell, or preventing them from entering into it.

It may be inferred from the verses that this talk will take place after the people of the garden have settled in the gardens, and the people of the hell in the hell; and that the intercessors shall then intercede for a group of the guilty ones and rescue them from the hell.

The phrase, "in gardens", implies it, as does the question, "What has brought you into hell?" Both phrases imply a more or less permanent abode. Likewise, the comment, "so the intercession . . . avails them not", denotes something occurring in present time i.e. after both groups have settled in their abodes.

As for al-Barzakh (البرزخ = the period between death and the Day of Resurrection) and presence of the Prophet and the Imams of the *Ahlu '1-bayt* (a.s.) at the time of death and at the questioning in the grave and the help given by them to the believer to overcome those difficulties (as will be described under the verse:

And there shall not be any one of the people of the book but he must certainly believe in him before his death (4: 159),

these things have nothing to do with intercession. It is rather exercising the authority given to them by Allah over the creation.

Allah says:

. . . and on the most elevated places there shall be men who know all by their marks, and they shall call out to the dwellers of the garden: "Peace be on you; they shall not have yet entered it, though they hope". .

And the dwellers of the most elevated places shall call out to men whom they will recognize by their marks, saying: "Of no avail were to you your amassings and your behaving haughtily. Are these they about whom you swore that Allah will not bestow mercy on them?" "Enter the garden; you shall have no fear nor shall you grieve" (7:46-49).

It gives a glimpse of the authority or rule vested in them by the permission of Allah. If we look at the verse 17:71 from this angle, it too throws light on this aspect:

(Remember) the day when We will call every people with their Imam; then whoever is given his

book in his right hand . . .

The intermediary position of the Imam in calling every people and giving them their books is a sort of authority and rule vested in him by Allah.

To make a long story short, intercession shall happen at the very last stage on the Day of Judgement; it shall bring the divine forgiveness to the guilty believers, prevent them from entering into hell and take those out who would have entered into it; it shall be by extension of mercy and/or manifestation of benevolence and magnanimity.

Tradition

Al-Husayn ibn Khalid narrates from ar-Rida (a.s.), who narrated through his forefathers from the Leader of the faithful (a.s.) that he said: "The Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.a.) said:

'Whoever does not believe in my reservoir, may Allah not bring him to my reservoir, and whoever does not believe in my intercession, may Allah not extend to him my intercession.' Then he (s.a.w.a.) said: 'Verily, my intercession is for those of my *ummah* who shall have committed great sins; as for the good-doers, there shall be no difficulty for them.'

al-Husayn ibn Khalid said: "I asked ar-Rida (a.s.): 'O son of the Messenger of Allah! What is then the meaning of the words of Allah, Mighty and Great is He: ***and they do not intercede except for him whom He approves?***' He (a.s.) said: 'They do not intercede except for him whose religion Allah is pleased with.'"¹

The author says: The tradition of the Prophet, "Verily my intercession is . . .", has been narrated by both sects with numerous chains; and we have shown earlier that it is based on the theme of Qur'anic verses.

Suma'ah ibn Mihran narrates from Abū Ibrāhīm (a.s.) that he said about the words of Allah: ***may be your Lord will raise you to a praised position***: "The people, on the Day of Resurrection, will remain standing for forty years; and the sun will be ordered so that it will ride over their heads and they will be bridled by sweat – and the earth will be told not to accept any of their sweat.

So, they shall approach Adam to intercede for them, and he will direct them to Nūh, and Nūh will direct them to Ibrāhīm, and Ibrāhīm will direct them to Mūsā, and Mūsā will direct them to 'Isa, and 'Isa will direct them saying:

'You should seek help of Muhammad, the last prophet.' Thereupon, Muhammad (s.a.w.a.) will say: 'I'll do it;' and will proceed until, arriving at the door of the garden, he will knock at it. It will be asked, 'Who is it?' (while Allah knows better!), and he will say: 'Muhammad.'

Then it will be said: 'Open for him.' When the door will be opened he will turn to his Lord, falling in

sajdah. He will not raise his head until he is told: 'Speak up and ask, you shall be given; and intercede, your intercession shall be granted.'

He will raise his head and turning to his Lord will fall (again) *insajdah*. Then he will be promised as before; then he will raise his head. (Thereupon, he shall intercede) until he will intercede even for him who would have been burnt in the fire.

Therefore, on the Day of Resurrection, no one among all the nations will be more eminent than Muhammad (s.a.w.a.); and it is (the meaning of) the words of Allah: ***May be your Lord will raise you to a praised position.*** ”²

The author says: This meaning is narrated by both sects in great number, in detail as well as in short, with numerous chains; and it proves that the “praised position” means the position of intercession. This tradition is not in conflict with intercession of other prophets, because probably their intercession will be an offshoot of our Prophet's, and it will begin on his hand.

ʿUbayd ibn Zurarah said: “Abu ʿAbdillah (a.s.) was asked whether a believer would have the right of intercession. He said: ʿYes.’ Then someone said: ʿWill even a believer need the intercession of Muhammad (s.a.w.a.) on that day?’ He said:

ʿYes. The believers too will come with wrongs and sins; and there will be none but he shall need the intercession of Muhammad on that day.’ ” (ʿUbayd) said: “And someone asked him about the words of the Messenger of Allah:

ʿI am the Chief of the children of Adam, and I say this without boasting.’ He said: ʿYes.’ (Then) he said: ʿHe will hold the chain-link of the door of the garden and open it; then he will fall in *sajdah*, and Allah will tell him: ʿRaise your head, do intercede, your intercession shall be granted; ask, you shall be given.’

So he will raise his head and again will fall in *sajdah*; then Allah will (again) say to him: ʿRaise your head, do intercede, your intercession shall be granted, and ask, you shall be given.’ Thereupon he will raise his head and intercede – and his intercession will be accepted; and he will ask and be given.”³

Muhammad ibn al-Qasim narrates through his chains from Bishr ibn Shurayh al-Basrī that he said: “I said to Muhammad ibn ʿAlf (a.s.): ʿWhich verse in the Book of Allah is the most hope-inspiring?’ He said: ʿAnd what do your people say (about it)?’ I said:

ʿThey say, (it is the verse,) ***Say: “O my servants! who have acted extravagantly against their own souls, do not despair of the mercy of Allah.*** ” ’¹

He said: ʿBut we, the people of the house, do not say so.’ I said: ʿThen what do you say about it?’ He said: ʿWe say (it is the verse,) ***And soon will your Lord give you so that you shall be well pleased.*** (It means) the intercession, by Allah the intercession, by Allah the intercession.’ ”⁴

The author says: The words of Allah, ***may be your Lord will. raise you to a praised position***, refers to the Prophet's glorious position of intercession, as the numerous Tradition of the Prophet himself prove.

Moreover, the wording of the verse too supports it: “will raise you” shows that it is a position which he will attain in future, i.e. on the Day of Judgement; “praised” is general and unconditional, and implies that he shall be praised by all men, past and present.

Al-Hamd (الحمد) means to praise someone for a good done to you intentionally. This definition shows that the Prophet will do something by his own will and power which will benefit all of them and in return everyone will praise him. That is why the Imam said in the tradition of `Ubayd ibn Zurarah, “and there will be no one but he shall need the intercession of Muhammad on that day.”

We shall later explain it further.

Now about the declaration that the verse, “and soon will your Lord give you so that you shall be well pleased,” is the most hope–inspiring one in the Qur'an – especially when compared to the verse,

Say: “O my servants! who have acted extravagantly against their own souls, do not despair of the mercy of Allah; surely Allah forgives the faults altogether; surely He is the Forgiving, the Merciful. And return to your Lord and submit to Him before there comes to you the punishment. . and follow the best that has been revealed to you. . .” (39:53–55).

Al-Qunut (القنوط = to lose hope, to despair) has been mentioned several times in the Qur'an. Allah quotes Ibrahīm (a.s.) as saying:

And who despairs of the mercy of his Lord but the erring ones (15:56).

Also He quotes Ya'qūb (a.s.):

surely none despairs of Allah's mercy except the unbelieving ones (12:87).

But the context in both places shows it as referring to losing hope of divine mercy in matters of creation. As for the verse under discussion the context shows that it admonishes against losing hope of divine mercy in matters of legislation and judgement; look for instance at the words, *who have acted extravagantly against their own souls*.

They clearly say that one who has committed sins should not despair of the mercy of Allah. Also Allah has promised forgiveness for the *faults altogether* without any exception. But this promise is followed by admonition to repent (*turn to your Lord*) and submit to Allah and follow the divine commandments.

The text on the whole demonstrates that a man who might have committed sins need not despair of the mercy of Allah as long as he is in a position to turn to Allah, to submit to Him, and to follow His commandments.

In short, this mercy is conditional. And there is a vast difference between this conditional mercy and the all-encompassing, unconditional mercy and unrestricted granting and pleasing which Allah has promised His Apostle, who himself was a mercy for all the mankind.

It is that promise which will make the Apostle of Allah (s.a.w.a.) well pleased: ***and soon will your Lord give you, so that you shall be well pleased.***

This last-mentioned verse occurs in a context where Allah mentions His grace and bounties to the Prophet; it is a unique promise never made to anyone else. The phrase, “will give you,” is unconditional and unrestricted. A promise, somewhat similar, has been made to a group of the people of the garden:

they shall have what they please with their Lord (42:22);

They have therein what they wish and with Us is more yet (50:35).

These verses show that those people shall be given more than they wish for –and man by nature desires all that he can think of happiness, good and felicity. It means that they shall be given more than they can think of, as Allah says:

So no soul knows what is hidden for them of the joy of the eyes (32:17).

Now this is what Allah has promised those who believe and do good; and even this is beyond human imagination. Surely, what He shall give to His Prophet as His special grace, must be far greater than this.

This much about the grace of Allah. Now let us reflect upon “you shall be well pleased”. Obviously this pleasure has no relation whatsoever to the pleasure a man should have for whatever Allah gives Him and decrees for him. Allah is the Master and the servant has nothing of his own except the inherent need and poverty.

He must always be happy and grateful for whatever his Master gives him, no matter whether it is more or less, big or small; he must always be pleased with whatever Allah decrees for him, whether it looks comforting or distressing.

This is what is expected of every good believer; surely the Prophet knows this ideal better, and acts upon it more perfectly, than anyone else; in short, he likes for himself only that which Allah wills for him.

Therefore, it would have been superfluous and irrelevant to say that he would be pleased after he was given something. It follows that this promised pleasure refers to something else. It refers to that happiness or satisfaction which a needy person experiences when his need is fully met.

A similar promise was given to some of His virtuous servants:

(As for) those who believe and do good, surely they are the best of men. Their reward with their

Lord is gardens of perpetuity beneath which rivers flow, abiding therein for ever; Allah is well pleased with them and they are well pleased with Him; that is for him who fears his Lord (98:7-8).

Its context shows that this too is to show some special divine favour for them, and hence it must be a very exclusive and comprehensive pleasure. At this juncture, it should be mentioned that Allah has praised His Apostle in these words:

to the believers (he is) compassionate, merciful (9: 128).

Keeping all these things in view, ponder on this question:

Can the Prophet be pleased to enjoy the bounties of the garden, or can he be happy with the pleasures of the paradise, when some believers are imprisoned inside the hell?

Remember that they are the people who believed in Allah as the One God, in the Prophet as the true prophet, and in what he brought with him as the true revelation; but they were overcome by their indiscretion and Satan twisted them between his fingers as a toy, and so they committed errors and sins – without any thought of revolting against God, of any arrogance before Him.

Even we, when we remember what mistakes we committed in past, what chances of spiritual perfection we missed before, we start blaming ourselves for all the shortcomings; then if we see some inexperienced youth indulging in youthful frolics, we are reluctant to condemn them; we feel compassion for them.

But this mercy of ours is a manifestation of the imperfect compassion put in our nature by the Creator. How can we understand the mercy of the Lord of the worlds, in a place where the magnanimity of the compassionate, merciful Prophet and the mercy of the Most Merciful of all have to decide about the indiscretions of a powerless human being? Especially so when he had undergone all the torments of *al-barzakh* in proportion to his misdeeds?

al-Qummī narrates a tradition in his *at-Tafsīr*, under the verse:

And intercession will not avail aught with Him save of him whom He permits (34:23),

that Abu '1-`Abbas al-Mukabbar said: “A servant of a wife of `Alī ibn al-Husayn (a.s.), named Abū Ayman, came (to the fifth Imam – a.s.) and said:

‘O Abū Ja’far! You mislead the people, saying, intercession of Muhammad, intercession of Muhammad.’ (Hearing this) Abu Ja’far became so angry that his face took a glowering expression; then he said:

‘Woe unto you! O Abū Ayman! Are you deluded by chastity of your stomach and genitals? Why, when you will see the terrors of the resurrection, you shall certainly be in need of intercession of Muhammad. Fie on you!

Would he intercede except for him who would have been sentenced to the fire?' (Then) he said: 'There is no one from the early people to the later ones but he will need the intercession of Muhammad (s.a.w.a.) on the Day of Resurrection.'

Then again Abū Ja'far said: 'Certainly the Messenger of Allah has (authority of) intercession for his *ummah*, and we have (authority of) intercession for our Shā'ahs, and our Shā'ahs have (authority of) intercession for their families.'

Then he said: 'And surely a believer shall intercede for (very large number of) people like the (tribes of) Rab'ah and Mudar. And surely a believer shall intercede for his servant, saying: "O my Lord! I owe this to him, he was protecting me from heat and cold." ' "

The author says: This tradition refers to a general intercession ("There is no one from the early people to the later ones but he will need the intercession of Muhammad . . .") and a particular one ("Fie on you! Would he intercede except for him who would have been sentenced to the fire?").

We find similar idea in al-`Ayyash's tradition from `Ubayd ibn Zurarah mentioned earlier. There are other Tradition of the same theme narrated by both sects. It is supported also by the verse:

And those whom they call upon besides Him have no authority for intercession, but he who bears witness of the truth and they know (him) (43:86).

This verse shows that the prerequisite of intercession is the witnessing of the truth. The witnesses are the intercessors, the owners of the intercession. And we shall describe under verse 2:143

(And thus We have made you a medium [just] nation that you may be witnesses over the people and [that] the Apostle may be a witness over you),

that the prophets are the witnesses and that Muhammad (s.a.w.a.) is the witness over them; so he (s.a.w.a.) is the witness over the witnesses, and thus he is the intercessor for the intercessors; and without the testimony of the witnesses the foundation of the Day of Judgement would crumble.

The (fifth) Imam said about the verse, ***And intercession will not avail aught with Him save him whom He permits:***

"No prophet or apostle may intercede until Allah permits him, except the Apostle of Allah, because Allah has already given him permission before the Day of Resurrection; and intercession is (allowed) to him and to the Imams from his progeny, and after that to the prophets." (at-Tafsir, al-Qummi)

`Alī (a. s.) said: "The Apostle of Allah (s.a.w.a.) said: `Three (groups) shall intercede with Allah and their intercession will be accepted: The prophets, then the (religious) scholars, then the martyrs.' "5

The author says: *ash-Shuhada'* (الشهداء) in the Qur'anic terminology means witnesses of the deeds; but

in the Tradition of the Imams it is generally used for the martyrs who are killed in the way of Allah. And apparently it is in this meaning that the word has been used in this tradition.

The Imam said: “We have the (authority of) intercession; and the people who love us have the (authority of) intercession.”⁶

The author says: Numerous Tradition prove that the Lady of paradise, Fatimah (a.s.) has the power and authority of intercession, as do his descendants other than the Imams. Likewise, a lot of Tradition bestow similar authority on the believers – even to their miscarried foetus.

There is a well-known tradition that the Prophet said: “Marry (and) procreate; for I shall boast of you (i.e. your number) against other nations on the Day of Resurrection – even of miscarried foetus; he shall stand at the door of the garden in a restive mood; he shall be told to enter, but he will say: 'No, until my parents enter it . . . !’”

Abū `Abdillah narrates, through his father and grandfather, from 'Ali (a.s.) that he said: “The garden has eight gates: one for the entry of prophets and the truthful ones, the other for the martyrs and the good ones; and five gates are for the entry of our Shū`ahs and lovers – I shall be standing on the *as-Sirat* (الصراط = the path; the bridge over the hell) praying and saying:

‘My Lord! Save my Shū`ahs and my lovers and my helpers and those who followed me in the (life of the) world.’ Then all of a sudden there will come a voice from inside the throne: ‘Your prayer is granted and your intercession for your Shū`ahs accepted:

‘And every Shū`ah of mine and everyone who loves me, helps me and fights my enemies by (his) deed or word, shall intercede for seventy thousand of his neighbours and relatives – and (there is) a gate from which shall enter all the Muslims who witness that there is no god except Allah and in whose heart there is not an iota of enmity towards us, the people of the house.’⁷

Hafs al-Mu'adhhdhin narrates that Abū `Abdillah (a.s.) wrote, *inter alia*, in a letter to his companions: “And know that none of the creatures of Allah shall avail you against Him, neither an angel who is near to Him, nor an apostle prophet nor any one below them. Whoever likes intercession of intercessors to avail him, should ask Allah to be pleased with him.”⁸

as-Sadiq (a.s.) said: “Jabir told Abū Ja'far (a.s.): 'May I be your ransom, O son of the Apostle of Allah! Narrate to me a tradition about your grandmother, Fatimah.' (Then the tradition continues, mentioning the intercession of Fatimah on the Day of Resurrection, until it says:) Abū Ja'far (a.s.) said:

‘Then, by God, no one among the people will remain (unsaved) except a doubting one or an unbeliever or a hypocrite. When they shall be (put) into (various) ranks of the hell, they shall cry out – as Allah has said:

So we have no intercessors, nor a true friend: But if we could but once return, we would be of the

believers (26: 100–102) .'

Then Abu Ja'far (a.s.) said: `But oh! how preposterous! They shall be denied what they asked for; **and if they were ,sent back they would certainly return to what they were forbidden, and most certainly they are liars (6:28) .'**”⁹

The author says: The Imam has proved by the sentence, “So we have no intercessors”, that intercession will take place on the Day of Judgement. In this light, it is amusing to see our adversaries trying to use it as an argument against intercession! Just as we said about the verse:

So the intercession of intercessors avails them not (74:48),

this verse too shows that intercession will surely take place on that day.

If the Qur'an wanted to negate the intercession altogether, it would have used the singular form (. . . no intercessor nor a true friend). But it has used the plural, “So we have no intercessors”; and it proves that there shall be a group interceding on behalf of some people, but it will not be of any avail to those particular speakers.

Moreover, the following sentence, “But if we could but once return, we would be of the believers,” shows a desire within the frame of grief. Obviously such a desire is related to that thing loss of which has caused the grief.

Therefore, what this sentence implies is this: Would that we could return to the previous life; then we would be of the believers, so that the intercession of intercessors would avail us too, as it has benefited the believers. The verse, therefore, is a good proof for intercession.

Al-Kazim (a.s.) narrated from his father, through his forefathers, from the Prophet that he said: “My intercession is for those of my *ummah* who would have committed big sins; as for the doers of good, there shall be no difficulty for them.”

He was asked: “O son of the Messenger of Allah! How can the intercession be for those who would have committed big sins, while Allah says,

and they do not intercede except for him whom He approves (21:28);

and a committer of big sins cannot be approved?”

He (a.s.) said: “No believer commits a sin but he regrets it and feels ashamed. And the Prophet has said: 'Enough is regret as repentance.' And also he (s.a.w.a.) has said: 'Whoever is pleased by a good deed and displeased by a bad deed, he is a believer.'”

Therefore, if there is someone who does not feel remorse for a sin he has committed, he is not a believer, and intercession will not avail him, and he will be an unjust one. And Allah says:

the unjust shall not have any true friend nor any intercessor who should be obeyed (40:18)."

It was said to him: "O son of the Messenger of Allah! How is it that he who is not sorry of a sin he has committed, he does not remain a believer?" He said: "Anyone who commits a big sin, knowing that he must be punished for it, will certainly feel remorse for what he has done. And as soon as he is sorry, he is repentant, eligible for intercession.

But if he is not sorry, then he is persisting in it, and a persistent (sinner) is not forgiven, because he does not believe in the punishment of what he has done; had he believed in that punishment, he would have been sorry. And the Prophet has said:

'No big sin abides with apologizing, and no small sin remains (small) with persistence.'¹ And as for the words of Allah, ***and they do not intercede except for him whom He approves***, it means that they do not intercede except for him whose religion He approves.

Religion is an acknowledgement that good and bad deeds have to be recompensed. If one's religion were approved, one would feel remorse for the sins one would have committed, because he would know what their result would be on the (day of) resurrection."¹⁰

The author says: The words of the Imam, "and he will be an unjust one": It gives the definition of "unjust" as applicable on the Day of Resurrection. It alludes to the Qur'anic verse,

Then a crier will cry out among them that the curse of Allah is on the unjust, who hinder (people) from Allah's way and seek to make it crooked and they are disbelievers in the hereafter (7:44-45).

Accordingly, unjust is he who does not believe in the Day of Judgement; naturally, such a man would not be sorry if he neglected to do what he was ordered to do, or if he indulged in sins and crimes.

May be, he outright rejects basic truths and teachings of religion; or may be he just does not care, is not worried of punishment of sins on the Day of Reckoning. In later case, his verbal acknowledgement of the Day of Judgement would be but a joke and mockery.

". . . as soon as he is sorry, he is repentant, eligible for intercession": The adjective, repentant, is not used here in its well-known terminological sense – repentance (in the terminological sense) is by itself the best intercessor and saviour.

What the Imam meant here is this: If he feels remorse for the sin committed, he returns to Allah, his religion is thus approved by Him, and therefore he becomes eligible for intercession.

"And the Prophet has said: 'No big sin abides with apologizing . . .'" : The Imam narrated this tradition to prove that persistence in a sin (even a small one) changes it from its original smallness to a far greater transgression – it shows one's disbelief in the Day of Judgement and injustice towards the signs of Allah. And such a thing is not forgiven.

A sin is forgiven if the sinner sincerely repents, or if intercession avails him – and this depends on his religion being approved; and both repentance and approved religion are absent in case of persistence.

A similar theme is found in a tradition quoted in `Ilalulu 'shshara'i' from Abū Ishaq al-Layth that he said: "I said to Abū Ja'far Muhammad ibn `Alī al-Baqir (a.s.): 'O son of the Messenger of Allah! Tell me about a believer, possessing religious understanding when he reaches (a high point in) knowledge and becomes perfect, does he commit fornication?' He said: 'By God! No.' I said: 'Then does he indulge in sodomy?'

He said: 'By God! No.' I said: 'Then does he steal?' He said: 'No.' I said: 'Then does he drink intoxicant?' He said: 'No.' I said: 'Then does he commit any of the big sins or indulge in any of these indecencies?' He said:

'No.' I said: 'Then does he commit a sin?' He said: 'Yes, and he is a believer, sinner, submissive.' I said: 'What does submissive mean?' He said: 'The submissive (servant) does not persist in it, does not keep doing it . . .'

ar-Rāda (a.s.) narrated through his forefathers that the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.a.) said: "When the resurrection comes, Allah, Great and Mighty is He, will manifest Himself to His believing servant, and will remind him of his sins one by one; then Allah will forgive him; Allah will not let (even) a near angel or an apostle prophet know of his (sins), and will cover it lest anyone becomes aware of it. Then He will say to his bad deeds: 'Be good deeds.' " 11

Abu Dharr said: "The Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.a.) said: 'A man will be brought on the Day of Resurrection; and it will be said: "Show him his small sins; and keep back from him his big sins." Then it will be said to him:

"You did so and so on such and such a day." And he will go on confessing, while apprehensive of his big sins. Then it will be said: "Give him a good deed in place of every bad deed." Then he will say: "I had done some sins which I do not see (mentioned) here." " Abu Dharr said: "And I saw the Messenger of Allah laughing until his teeth were shown." 12

As-Sadiq (a.s.) said: "When the Day of Resurrection comes, Allah, Glorified and Sublime is He, shall spread His mercy until even Iblīs will hope for His mercy." 13

The author says: The last three Tradition are of general nature. The Tradition about intercession of the Prophet, emanating from the Imams of Ahlu 'l-bayt as well as from the Sunni sources have successively been narrated by so many narrators as to leave no room for any doubt about their authenticity.

Altogether they prove that intercession will take place, and that it will avail the believers who might have committed sins; it will prevent them from entering into hell, or will rescue them from it if already sent therein. It is however certain that the sinning believers shall not be allowed to abide for ever in the hell.

And we have earlier explained that the Qur'an too does not say more than this.

A Philosophical Contemplation

According to Abū `Alī Ibn Sina, intellectual reasoning cannot give us details concerning the resurrection and judgement (as given in the Qur'an and *sunnah*), as it lacks the premises necessary to lead to a conclusion. Nevertheless, it may contemplate the future of man after the soul leaves the body and lives in the form of (Platonic) ideas – how it proceeds on the path of happiness or unhappiness reaching the ultimate station.

Whatever man does in beginning leaves an imprint on his psyche – either of happiness or unhappiness. By “happiness” we mean what is good for him as a man; on the other hand, “unhappiness” denotes what is bad for him as a man. If the action is repeatedly performed the imprint becomes deeper and deeper until it becomes a deep-rooted characteristic, until it reshapes the psyche in its own mould.

If the mould is good, the resulting shape as well as the actions emanating from it are good and agreeable to the man “as a man”, and man is “happy”. If on the contrary the mould is bad, the resulting shape and actions become ugly and disagreeable to the man “as a man”; and although the deformed psyche seemingly enjoys those actions, in reality it remains unhappy “as a man”.

Here we are talking about a man who is happy in his psyche and good in his deed vis-a-vis a man who is unhappy in his psyche and evil in his deeds.

It is the former that is the subject of our discussion here. A man may be good and happy in his person, because he has got correct belief of eternal truth; but his psyche has been polluted by the sins and transgressions committed as a result of weakness of flesh and error of judgement and choice. Consequently, psyche becomes “unhappy”.

But this pollution and unhappiness is a matter of constraint that has been forced on his inherently happy psyche; and we know from intellectual reasoning that constraint does not continue for ever.

That soul will most certainly get rid of that unhappiness, pollution and rust in the fire of chastisement in al-Barzakh or on the Day of Judgement – it depends on its own strength and stage of inner perfection.

The opposite is true for the later group. Whatever the effects of good deeds, they are no more than cosmetics; it is a forced appearance not agreeable to its inner-self; and sooner or later it is bound to disappear.

There remains a fifth category: The soul which could not turn its potentials into achievements – good or bad – in this life. They will remain in suspense, waiting for the divine judgement.

This much could be discerned from intellectual reasoning, concerning the reward and punishment, the

inseparable results of the deeds.

Reasons also prove that existence has various grades of perfection – ideally perfect or less so, stronger or weaker. Consequently, the souls have various ranks in relation to the Creator – nearer to, or further from him.

They are therefore one above the other, the highest being the nearest to the First Cause. They are the most perfect and ideal souls, like those of the prophets (may peace of Allah be on them!). They may become the mediums through which the unnatural pollution and rust may be removed from the weaker souls which are further below. It is this role which we call intercession.

A Social Discourse

Some people say: “Human society cannot continue without some laid rules, nor without an authority to look after its affairs. When all members maintain discipline and obey the rules, social justice is maintained and strengthened.

This system is based on temporal benefits which the society cannot do without, as well as on spiritual and ethical ideals, like truth, sincerity, keeping one's word etc. which the development and good of the society depend upon.

For these rules and regulations to have any force and effect, it was necessary for them to be accompanied by punishment laid down for the transgressors. Only in this way the system could be protected against the willful transgression of some and indifference and negligence of others.

That is why when a government (no matter which ideology it follows) is strong and capable enough to make people obey its edicts, the country marches forward, and society proceeds on the path of development. On the contrary when it is weak, the country is overcome by lawlessness and disorder, and plagued by troubles and turmoil.

“In view of the above, it is essential for the good of society to make people believe that they could not escape the consequences if they transgressed the law. Nothing should be said or done to raise a hope in them that they could avoid the punishment by some means, like intercession, bribe or deception.

“The biggest objection against Christianity is aimed at its belief of atonement: That Christ was crucified in order to atone for the sins of his followers. Now the Christians rely on that atonement to get salvation in the next world, without caring what they do in this life.

Religion, in this way, destroys the very foundation of society, retards civilization and pulls it backwards. Data show that lie and injustice is found in ardent followers of religion to a far greater extent than in those who do not follow any religion. Its only reason is that the former are confident that their sins would certainly be wiped off through intercession.”

This is in short what some “scholars” hold against the belief of intercession: That it weakens the foundation of civilization and social justice. But neither Islam proves intercession, in the meaning they have given it, nor the intercession which Islam speaks of gives the result they have claimed.

Before writing against intercession, as taught by Islam, they should learn what Islam teaches, how it applies its laws to the society, what type of intercession it promises and how, when and to what extent it is to be applied and effected:

First: What the Qur'an confirms of the intercession is this: The believers shall not abide in the hell, on the Day of Resurrection, provided they come to their Lord with approved belief and true faith. Thus, it is a conditional promise. Then it has emphasized that the faith remains in grave danger from sins, especially the big ones, and more particularly if one persists in them.

Such a believer would be tottering on the brink of eternal damnation. When a believer remembers that promise, his hope of deliverance soars high; when he needs this warning, he is overcome by dread of perdition.

His soul remains hovering between hope and fear; he worships his Lord both with love and awe. Thus, he spends his life in a moderate way, on the middle course. He experiences neither discouragement of pessimism, nor the rashness of over-optimism.

Second: Islam has made comprehensive laws for temporal and spiritual upliftment of the society; these laws cover all aspects of life of an individual and a group. It has prescribed suitable punishments for those who violate any of those rules – from monetary compensation to chastisement to firmly fixed punishment – until a stage comes when the offender is deprived of his rights as a member of society and is condemned to eternal shame, or even death.

All this system has been entrusted into the hands of divinely appointed *ulu 'l-amr* (أولو الأمر = people vested with authority). Then each Muslim has been made responsible, for all other Muslims, as he is obliged to enjoin his compatriots, to do good and desist from evil.

To cap it all, the Muslim nation is obliged to call others to the right path, and the way to affect this call is to give them good news of eternal reward if they do good and to warn them of eternal perdition if they indulge in evil.

It is this knowledge of this and the next world which is the foundation of Islam's character-building. The Prophet promulgated this system; and experiment has proved its effectiveness and potency. Its power to mould the society into divine image was proved during the time of the Prophet and continued to do so until Umayyids came into power.

They made the *shar'ah* a toy to play with; put the Islam's penal code in cold storage and behaved as though they were above all law, as if nothing could hinder them in their pursuit of pleasure. The result of

that exercise is before our eyes today. The standard of “freedom” has been raised; western civilization is making inroads in our society. In Islamic countries, Islam exists in name only.

It is this manifest weakening of religion and this retrogressive movement of the Muslims which has caused their fall from heights of justice and virtue, and made them slip down the plane of morality and ethics. It is their debauchery and their wallowing in their base desires and sensualities that has made them bold to transgress every limit, to violate every rule, so much so that even the atheists look down at their debauchery, dishonesty and immorality.

This is the real and only cause of the deterioration of Muslim society. The objector is completely off the mark when he attributes this state of affairs to those sublime religious realities whose only aim, and only effect, was and is the man's felicity and happiness in this world as well as in the hereafter.

The data, mentioned in his argument, are irrelevant here. They have looked at a Muslim society which has got no guardian and no authority to enforce Islamic laws within its jurisdiction, and at an atheist society which has a strong authority to enforce its laws and to keep the people within the limits, with help of education and training of its own choice. Therefore, this comparison is quite clearly unjustified.

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1. al-Amali, as-Sadīq
 2. al-`Ayyashi
 3. al-`Ayyashi
 4. at-Tafsīr, Furat ibn Ibrāhīm
 5. al-Khisal
 6. al-Khisal
 7. al-Khisal
 8. al-Kafī
 9. at-Tafsīr, Furat ibn Ibrāhīm
 10. at-Tawhīd
 11. al-Khisal
 12. Muslim
 13. al-Amalī, as-Sadīq

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