

Section 2

Surah Al-Baqarah, Verses 21-22

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

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

21. "O' mankind! Worship your Lord Who created you, and those before you, so that you may guard yourselves (against evil),"

22. "Who has spread out the earth as a resting place for you, and has made heaven as a canopy, and has sent down water from heaven, wherewith He brings forth fruits for your sustenance; so do not set up rivals with Allah while you know."

Do Worship Allah!

In the former verses, *Allah* describes the statuses of three groups of people (the righteous, the disbelievers, and the hypocrites), by explaining that the righteous are inside the circle of the Divine Guidance and the *Qur'an* guides them; while the hearts of the disbelievers are sealed with ignorance and, because of their own deeds, their eyes are covered with negligence which has taken away their sense of perception. And, the hypocrites are some ill-hearted people whose evil actions increase their sickness.

In the verses under discussion, after that vivid comparison, the path of felicity and salvation is specified

as following the path of the first group, the righteous:

"O' mankind! Worship your Lord Who created you, and those before you, so that you may guard yourselves (against evil),"

What is Servitude and Worship?

The word 'servitude' in lexicon means: 'the condition of subjection, submissiveness and obedience of a slave to a master'. Worship is the utmost aspect of submissiveness to the One Who is at the highest degree of virtue, kindness, benevolence, and magnanimity. That is why He has distinctly commanded:

"...That you worship none but Him,..." (Surah Al-Asra, No.17. verse 23)

The person who has a little understanding can apply his intellect to know himself and his own Lord. When he recognizes himself, the one who has been considered the noblest creature, he will know his own Lord and Cherisher, too.

This is a popular tradition that the person who after knowing himself, would know his Lord and Cherisher by that recognition. Then, as it is said, the key to the recognition of *Allah* is the recognition of one's self.

When he finds himself in his servitude and his Lord in His Divinity, he understands that he should concentrate his obedience, humility, submissiveness and servitude unto the One in Whose hand and Will is his soul and entity; the One from Whom (*s.w.t.*) he takes sustenance constantly.

If the emanation of existence from the Absolute Bountiful Origin ceased from him even for a moment, he would be deprived of the bounty of existence.

Some Explanations

Regarding the above verses, there are some points, here, that should be paid attention to:

1. The phrase / *ya ayyu-han-nas* / '**O' mankind'**, which occurs twenty times in the Holy Qur'an, has a general and collective meaning that envelops all human beings of any race, tribe, or colour.

This clearly shows that the Holy Qur'an does not pertain exclusively to a special group of people, but it invites every single person to its invitation, in general. It persuades everybody to accept Monotheism and refuse any idolatry and deviation from the path of theism.

2. To invoke the sense of people's thankfulness and to concentrate their attention on the worshipping of *Allah*, it begins from the greatest bounty, i.e., the bounty of the creation of all human beings.

It is a bounty that illustrates both the tower of *Allah* and His Knowledge, in addition to His '**General Mercy**' and '**Specific Mercy**', because in the creation of Man, the best creature in the world of existence, the signs of His infinite Knowledge and Power, together with His vastly distributed bounties, are clearly

seen.

The reason that some do not bow before *Allah* and do not worship Him is mostly because they do not contemplate their own creation and the creation of those who came before them. They do not take into consideration that it is not right to attribute this magnificent creation to the blind and deaf causes of nature.

We cannot think of these accurate, reliable and incomparable bounties, which are vividly seen in the body and the spirit of Man, from any origin except *Allah*, Who is the source of all knowledge and power.

Therefore, the remembrance of these bounties is both a reason for theology and a stimulus for thankfulness and worshipping, along the path of *Allah*.

3. The fruit of this worshipping is piety and righteousness:

"...so that you may guard yourselves (against evil),"

Thus, our worshipping and prayers do not add anything to the Dignity and Glory of *Allah*, just as the abandoning of them does not take anything from His Greatness and Beauty. These kinds of practices are some training classes to teach man piety, which is synonymous with having a sense of responsibility, and, the standard of measuring one's personality.

Finally, it is worship that causes man to attain the epithet of being pious, –a good mood in the spirit of man, that comes into being as a result of worship and servitude unto *Allah*.

4. The emphasis on the phrase: ***'Those before you'*** in the verse, may refer to the idea that if you agree with the custom of your ancestors that you should worship idols, *Allah* is the creator of both you and your ancestors. He is the Master and the Cherisher of you and your ancestors both. So, worshipping the idols, either done by you or by your ancestors, is not anything but aberration.

The Sky and the Earth are Bounties

In the next verse, it points to some other great bounties of *Allah* that can serve to motivate men to be thankful. At first, it refers to the creation of the Earth and its Creator:

"Who has spread out the earth as a resting place for you..."

The earth is like a mount that carries you on its back. It continues moving at a wonderful speed in space. It has different movements but you feel no shaking at all. So the earth is one of *Allah's* great bounties.

Another bounty is the gravity of the earth which enables you to walk, rest, build houses and to prepare gardens, fields, and all kinds of vehicles, instruments, etc; for your usage. Have you ever thought that if the gravity of Earth did not exist, because of its rotation, all of us and all of our houses and furniture, or,

in general, everything on the globe would be immediately thrown floating into space?

The term / firas / '*a resting place*' not only has the meaning of rest and tranquility, but also contains the concept of being pleasant and warm with a moderate temperature.

It is interesting that, commenting on this verse, Ali ibn al-Husayn, the fourth Imam of the Shi'ah school (as), has clearly explained this meaning, thus:

"Allah has arranged the earth adapted to your nature and appropriate for your bodies. He made it neither very hot so that it roasts you, nor very cold so that it freezes you. He made it neither too aromatic so much so that its odor hurts your brains, nor too foul-smelling to cause your death.

He planned it neither too soft so that you be drowned in it, like in water, nor too rigid and stable to enable you to build houses and make graves to bury the corpses of your men (which cause many disasters when they remain unburied)... Yes, it is for this reason that He has spread out the earth as a resting place for you!" ¹

The word / bana /, considering the term / alaykum/ 'above you', refers to the meaning that the heaven is made up above you like a canopy. This idea is mentioned in another place in the Holy Qur'an, saying:

"And We have made the heaven as a canopy wellguarded...", (Surah Al-Anbiya', No. 21, verse 32)

This statement may seem amazing to some of those who are acquainted with the intrinsic structure of the heaven and earth from the point of modern astronomy. They may ask where and how this canopy is.

Does this idea not call to mind the Ptolemaic Theory which indicated that planets are set over each other in the sky like the layers of an onion? The subject will be made clear when the following explanation is considered.

The term / sama' / has been used in the Qur'an in different places whose common meaning is something alongside the solution to the above problem. One of those meanings is referred to in this verse.

It is the very atmosphere around the earth, that is, the thick aerial distance with a mass of gases that has surrounded the globe whose thickness, according to what specialists have said, is, roughly speaking, hundreds of kilometers, though it is not distributed uniformly in the vertical direction.

If we contemplate the essential and vital function of this mass of air, generally called the atmosphere, which has enveloped the whole earth, we will understand how this strong and stable canopy, or ceiling, is effective in protecting the lives of human beings.

This special amount of air which, as a crystal ceiling, has surrounded us, the inhabitants of the earth, is so strong and resisting that in comparison with a steel dam several meters thick, it is stronger; while it does not hinder the brilliant sunshine, which has a vital, life-giving and pleasant ray, from reaching us.

If this ceiling were not over us, the earth would be continuously beaten with showers of celestial meteorites, wherein human beings would have no peace and calmness. But this several hundred kilometer thick airy ceiling burns almost all the celestial meteorites before they reach the surface of the earth, except a few of them which can sometimes pass through it and fall somewhere on the ground to warn the earthly living creatures as a ring of danger.

This small number of stones has never succeeded to destroy the security of human lives yet; except on those occasions that *Allah* used them to destroy previous generations for their evil deeds.

The atmosphere, a vast and complicated physical system, has a basic environmental influence on plant, animal, and human life.

One of the references which shows that one of meanings of the Arabic word / sama / as **'the atmosphere of the earth'**, is a tradition cited by the sixth Imam, Imam al-Sadiq (as) describing the colour of the sky for one of his followers, Mufaddal.

He said:

"O Mufaddal! Contemplate the colour of the sky which Allah has created so that it seems blue, –a colour that is the most appropriate for the eyes, and looking at it strengthens the vision." 2

We all know today that the blue colour of the sky is nothing but the reflection of sunlight on the intense thick air around the earth. Therefore, the word / sama / 'sky', here, refers to the very 'atmosphere of the earth'. 3

Surah An-Nahl, No. 16, verse 29 says:

"Do they not look at the birds held poised in the midst of (the air and) the sky?"

Then it refers to rain, thus:

"...and has sent down water from heaven..."

But, what water! It is a life-giver, an essential producer of vital energy, and the origin of all inhabited regions containing many material blessings.

The phrase: ***"and has sent down water from heaven"***, confirms the fact, once more, that /sama/, here, means the atmosphere of the earth. And we know that it is clouds that produce rain and clouds are the formation of water vapor floating in the air, above the surface of the earth.

Commenting on the bounty of rain coming down from the sky, Ali ibn al-Husayn, Imam Sajjad (as), has cited an interesting narration which says:

"Allah has sent down rain from the sky to water the peaks of mountains, and hills, ditches and, on the

whole, all sites high or low (saturating them completely).

He planned for it to rain continually and gently, with raindrops being individual and separated from each other; sometimes in the form of drizzles or mist like, and sometimes in the form of rainfall, in order to let it go down in the soil and saturate it. He did not let it fall as a flood which would wash away and destroy the lands, trees, fields and fruits". 4

Then, the Qur'an refers to the kinds of fruits and nutritious foods that are produced because of rain and awarded to men as their sustenance. It says:

"...where with He brings forth fruits for your sustenance;..."

This process of producing fruits is one of the most valuable proofs of His Existence. On one hand, it indicates the vast extent of *Allah's* Mercy unto all human creatures, and on the other hand, it specifies His Power by which, from colourless water, He can create thousands of colours in fruits and grains whose different properties are useful for men, as well as other living creatures. Hence, immediately after that, it adds:

"...so do not set up rivals with Allah while you know".

Verily, you know that these idols, or partners, which are the creations of your own fancy, have neither created you nor given you sustenance nor any of your bounties. Then, how do you go after those false gods? Do not adopt any equals for *Allah* and be devoted to Him to translate His Will into a practical life.

Explanation: Idolatry in Different Forms

It is necessary to note that the false gods are not exclusively wooden or stone idols, or, for example, recognizing a man such as Jesus Christ (as) as one of the trinity, but the concept has a broader scope of meaning.

The false gods may be superstitions, self, or even some great or glorious things like rank, position, art, poetry, science, or, kinds of pride which can be the hidden forms of idolatry when they are set up as rivals to *Allah*. So, in general, knowing anything save *Allah*, effective in life is a kind of idolatry.

A Detailed Scientific Meaning of Atmosphere

The Qur'anic term /sama'/ 'sky', wherefrom the rain, for example, comes down, sometimes has the meaning of atmosphere, whose explanation according to some encyclopedias is as follows:

The '**atmosphere**' is the mass of 'air' surrounding the earth to a distance of several hundred kilometers. It appears insubstantial but in reality it has enormous mass. It is not simply a formless mass of gases which can be divided into several layers on the basis of meteorological and electromagnetic considerations, but it consists, roughly, of three major layers which differ widely in their characteristics.

These layers are: the troposphere, the stratosphere, and the ionosphere.

The troposphere is the layer of air that lies next to and immediately above the earth's surface. The height of the troposphere varies from the poles of the earth to the Equator, being about four or five miles at the poles and about 10 miles at the Equator.

Stratosphere was the term formerly applied to the entire atmosphere above the troposphere. Later it was found that the temperature did vary significantly with the height and also that there existed various stratifications.

Some scientists have introduced rather detailed terminology to describe various layers of increasing, decreasing, and constant temperature in the atmosphere and the Ozone layer. But here the distinction will be made between two layers only: the '**stratosphere**' extending upward from the tropopause to the **ionosphere**, and the ionosphere, whose lowest ionized layer is found at a height of 35 to 40 miles.

The standard pressure of the atmosphere (760 millimeters) is very nearly equal to 1000000 dynes per square centimeter and is often referred to as the 'bar'. The 'millibar' is 1/1000 of this quantity, sanctioned by the International Meteorological Conferences as the standard for the expression of barometric pressure.

If the atmosphere were of uniform density at a standard pressure of 760 millimeters of mercury and at a temperature of 0°C, its height could easily be calculated based on the weight of a cubic centimeter of air being 0.0012928 grams.

The height of such a uniform atmosphere is 7.99 kilometers (4.97 miles), and is known as the 'height of homogeneous atmosphere' conveniently useful in certain physical computations.

The actual height of the atmosphere is somewhat difficult to determine since it becomes very tenuous at great heights.

We may, however, infer its extent from three sources: (1) the duration of twilight which depends upon scattered sunlight from high atmospheric particles; (2) the height at which meteors become luminous; and (3) observation of auroral streamers.

Twilight has been observed to exist until the sun is about 18° below the horizon, which, at altitude of 45°, indicates the existence of sufficient atmospheric particles to scatter sunlight at a height of over 60 kilometers (37 miles). Meteors have been observed to become luminous as high as 300 kilometers (186 miles).

Auroral streamers have been seen to stretch upward to a height of 1100 kilometers (680 miles). It is very difficult to assign an upper limit to the earth's atmosphere. Atmospheric gases in an exceedingly tenuous condition probably extend hundreds if not thousands of miles above the earth's surface.

(This piece is extracted, here, from the Encyclopedia Americana, vol. 2, p. 508; and Encyclopedia International, vol. 2, p. 165).

Surah Al-Baqarah, Verses 23-24

مِّن دُونِ اللَّهِ إِن كُنتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

فَإِن لَّمْ تَفْعَلُوا وَلَن تَفْعَلُوا فَاتَّقُوا النَّارَ الَّتِي وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ أُعِدَّتْ
لِلْكَافِرِينَ

23. "And if you are in doubt of what We have sent down to Our (faithful) Servant (Muhammad), then bring forth one Surah the like thereof, and call your witnesses other than Allah, if you are truthful."

24. "And if you do not do so, and you will never do it, then fear the Fire whose fuel is People and Stones, prepared for the infidels."

After *Allah* (s.w.t.) explains the state of the hypocrite and disbelievers, and, through the creation of the heaven and the earth, sending down rain and growing plants on the ground, proves the existence of the Creator and Cherisher of the universe, He begins to validate the rightfulness of the Holy Qur'an and the truthfulness of His Messenger.

In order to show everyone the miraculous ness of the Qur'an with clear evidence, according to one's portion of wit and understanding, that the Qur'an will be an argument for all, *Allah* confirms the prophet hood of Prophet Muhammad (S) and the authenticity of the Holy Qur'an by suggesting a challenge, a direct confrontation, not only to all the contemporaries of the Prophet (S) but also to men in all ages.

"And if you are in doubt of what We have sent down to Our (faithful) Servant (Muhammad)..."

It addresses all the rejectors, with a concrete test, saying that if you imagine that the Qur'an, which has been sent down from Pure Holiness to the chosen servant of *Allah* in the form of statements and with the combination of ordinary alphabetical letters, is not from Him and it is the word of a human, then since outwardly you are in the same state from the point of being a human as the Prophet of Islam (S) is, you should be able to produce a Surah like that of the Qur'an and call your own witnesses that are like you, the disbelievers of the Qur'an.

You would compare your evidence with one of the Suras of the Qur'an, even if it be a small one such as Surah Kauthar and the like. If those two were similar in comparison in all their qualities, merits and

privileges, you could rightfully reject the legitimacy of the Qur'an.

The disbelievers and pagan Arabs, who were the masters of literature and eloquence, refrained from accepting this challenge despite their pride and haughtiness in eloquence and avoided the competition.

Therefore, inevitably, they turned the literary contest into a bloody battle. Thus, getting killed was easier for them than being disgraced and defeated in a literary contest. The Arab literature became helpless and meagre against the challenge of the Qur'an.

Neither those who lived at the time of the Qur'an's revelation, nor the people born in the centuries after that could bring anything like this Holy Book, or could do anything against it, in spite of trying with their utmost strength. They were thus forced to retreat after exerting utmost efforts.

Why is the Holy Qur'an a Miracle and How?

Being complete true revelation, the Qur'an is itself a miracle. As it is authentically known and also was mentioned in the above, at the time of the Qur'an's revelation the literary talent and eloquence of Arabs were at their peak, yet the miraculousness of the Qur'an is not confined to its inimitable literary excellence and eloquence.

It stands on its own innumerable different merits some of which are beyond the reach of the complete conception of the literary geniuses of the Arab world. It has such a rhetorical capacity and linguistic excellence that is able to express different views and knowledge in a manner that is understood and appreciated by every rational human being of any standard and accomplishment of all the ages.

Then everybody in any time, once provided with the opportunity to become acquainted with the Holy Qur'an, which offers information by which all of his/her arguments will be completed, he/she can find himself or herself convinced by it.

Such extensive knowledge and such power of expression are beyond the limitations of human ability. Even of the literate Arab people, as were previously referred to, especially at the time of the Qur'an's revelation when the literature of the Arabic language had reached its climax, none dared to bring a Surah similar to even its shortest one. **This very single point is the smallest miraculous aspect of the Qur'an.**

There is no doubt that if the Qur'an were the word of a human and the Prophet (S), himself, who was known to the world as an illiterate one, had produced it, they would bring many Qur'ans like it and would prove that this is not the word of *Allah* revealed to him (S).

In that condition, the enemies of Islam would maintain their works which would be available everywhere and in any ages so that they could publish and distribute them, even now, to defame the one genuine Qur'an, but there is none.

Apart from the inimitable literary excellence, the Holy Qur'an with its other names such as '*Furqan*' and '*Tibyan*' referring to the abilities it has, presents to the human world, definite prophecies fulfilled and yet to be fulfilled, and long after.

It contains some facts about endowments in nature which the human knowledge of science as it progresses will have to understand, for its further advancement. The perfect ness of such nature naturally will be the last word with regard to the ideas, religious and social laws, sciences, and many, many other things that it contains and will remain forever, until the Hereafter.

This universality of the truth expressed in the idea and beauty and the attractive force of the language is so divine that, as we said before, it is beyond the reach of the expressive power of any limited being. It is in this regard that the Holy Qur'an claims to be not only the word of *Allah*, inimitable, but the Final Word in respect to truth and justice – the better or even the like of it is impossible to be produced by anyone.

However, it is true to say simply and shortly that the Holy Qur'an is a miracle with respect to its contents which is the source of all knowledge and science, as it itself says:

"Say: If the sea were ink (wherewith to write out) for the words of my Lord, the sea would surely be consumed before the words of my Lord are exhausted, though We were to bring the like of that (sea) to add thereto for its aid", (Surah Al-Kahf, No. 18. verse 109).

Thus, this verse, by itself, is a vital piece of evidence regarding the Correctness of the above said claim.

5

Why do Prophets Need Miracles?

We know that the Divine mission of prophethood is a great rank endowed upon some of the purified distinguished members of the human race. Since the purpose of prophethood is the comprehensive guidance ruling over the body and spirit of individuals, and society, toward perfection and the laying down of a legal system and social order for mankind, the assumption of responsibility involved is necessarily heavy and taxing.

So, it requires great capacity and energy. *Allah*, therefore, bestows the position of prophethood on those who have the ability and capacity to receive and follow through the light of revelation. This unique privilege and specialty of prophets is also shown in their miracles, which all of them had.

And, to prevent some false, deceitful impostors from claiming the position, it is necessary that, besides the revelation, the real ones should have sufficient evidence to bear testimony to the truth of their declaration and prove the claim that they are sent by *Allah*.

That is, a prophet should utter such words and exhibit such deeds which could not be uttered or performed by any natural means within the power of a finite being, such as: restoring the dead to life again, communicating with animals and inanimate bodies, and the likes of them. These supernatural

events are termed as miracles.

The prophet who has a miracle should introduce it to people and invite them to challenge with it. If they can produce none similar to that, thus, by the means of his miracle, he proves the truthfulness of his declaration.

The Holy Qur'an, The Everlasting Miracle of the Prophet of Islam (S)!

Amongst the miracles issued by the Prophet of Islam (S), the *Qur'an* is the best remaining evidence of his rightfulness. We know, of course, that, according to what the leading scholars of Islam have said, he (S) had about 4440 miracles. But the *Qur'an* is a Book beyond the thoughts and mind of a mortal being. None has been able to bring one similar to it yet. It is a great heavenly miracle.

The reason that amongst all the miracles of the Messenger of *Allah* (S) the *Qur'an* has been chosen as the greatest remaining evidence of legitimacy of the Prophet of Islam (S) is that it is a miracle which is '**expressive**', '**everlasting**', '**world-wide**', and '**spiritual**'.

Each of the former prophets (as) had to accompany his miracle to prove its inimitability when he used to invite his opponents for challenging and bringing the like of it. In fact, his miracle or miracles could not express themselves and it was the explanations of the prophet that would complete them. This statement is also true for all the miracles of the Prophet of Islam (S) except the Holy *Qur'an*.

The *Qur'an* is a clear miracle which need not be introduced. It invites others to itself, demands the rejecters to challenge it while it defeats them, condemns them and it always stands victorious. That is why it, after passing centuries, viz., since the departure of the Prophet (S) up to the present, has been continuing its invitation the same as it did during his lifetime. It is both religion and miracle; law, and the document of the law.

The Holy Qur'an, Global and Eternal

The reputation of the Holy Qur'an cleft the bonds of time and distance and influenced beyond them. The miracles of the prophets before the Prophet of Islam (S), and even his own miracles save the *Qur'an*, happened in a special period of time, at a definite place and for a specific group of people.

For example: the utterances of the holy little child of Virgin Mary, and raising the dead by Jesus (as) were done at some definite times and places before the eyes of some particular people. And we know that regarding the things that depend on time and place, the farther we move away from them correlatively the weaker they become. This is one of the properties of affairs related to time.

But, the Holy Qur'an does not depend on time and place. Its brilliance and authority that illuminated the darkness of Arabia fourteen centuries ago continues unwaveringly to shine with its original splendor.

Besides that, the passing of time, the advancement of science and the development of information have

made it possible for us to understand it and take its advantages even more than the nations of former ages did.

It is evident that what time and place cannot influence will continue to be everywhere in the world for eternity. It is also clear that a world-wide everlasting religion should have a world-wide everlasting document of legitimacy in its possession. Then we can discuss the Holy Qur'an:

- From the point of modern science;
- And the scientific explorations;
- And the rotation of the Earth;
- And reproduction in the plant kingdom;
- And general reproduction in all the particles of the world;
- And general gravity;
- And the surrendering of the Sun and the Moon;
- And the secrets of the creation of mountains;
- And the advent of the world;
- And the existence of life on other planets;
- And the winds, the pollinator of plants;
- And the question of the roundness of the Earth; 6
- And many other scientific facts and knowledge about the world can be found in the Holy Qur'an, too.

Surah Al-Baqarah, Verse 25

وَبَشِّرِ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ
كُلَّمَا رُزِقُوا مِنْهَا مِنْ ثَمَرَةٍ رِزْقًا قَالُوا هَذَا الَّذِي رُزِقْنَا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَأُتُوا بِهِ مُتَشَابِهًا
وَلَهُمْ فِيهَا أَزْوَاجٌ مُطَهَّرَةٌ وَهُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

25. "And (O' Muhammad) give glad tidings to those who have Faith and do good deeds that for them are gardens beneath which rivers flow. Every time they are provided with fruits there from, they shall say: This is what we were provided with before! and they shall be given the like

thereof, and there for them shall be spouses purified dwelling therein forever. "

The Specialties of the Bounties in Heaven

In the aforementioned verse, the infidels and the rejecters of the Qur'an were severely threatened with a grave chastisement. Now, in this verse, to make the fact clear, by comparing the destinies of the two contradictory groups, as the style of the Qur'an is, the destiny of the true believers is referred to as the antithesis to the painful fate of the disbelievers.

First, it says:

"And (O' Muhammad) give glad tidings to those who have Faith and do good deeds that for them are gardens beneath which rivers flow..."

We know that those gardens that have not a permanent source of water and need to be occasionally irrigated are not so bountiful and pleasant because of frequent difficulties concerning their up keeping. The complete freshness is of those gardens which always have enough water easily available and within their reach.

The water that belongs to them, making them self-sufficient, will never end. Then drought and shortage of water will never threaten them. The gardens of Heaven have such a condition. Then to point out the numerous kinds of fruit in those gardens, it says:

"...Every time they are provided with fruits there from, they shall say: 'This is what we were provided with before!'"

The commentators have cited some rather different commentaries concerning this statement:

Some of them have said that the objective meaning of this statement is that these blessings are for the good deeds they did formerly in the world. It was those deeds that were previously sent before them and the path was paved for them in the Hereafter.

Some others have asserted that when the Heavenly fruits are brought for them for the second time, they say that these fruits are the same as they had before, but when they eat them they sense a new taste and a fresh pleasure in them.

Or, for example, when we eat grapes and apples in this world, every time we eat them or drink their juices they have basically the same tastes; but the fruits in Heaven will have a different taste every time they will be tasted, although they are apparently alike. This is one of the privileges of that world being as if there is no monotony in it!

Some have also said that it means that when they see the fruits of Heaven, they find them like the fruits in this world in order not to be odd and curious for them, but when they eat them they sense the flavor

quite newly-tasting and excellent.

There is no controversy that the above statement refers to all these meanings and even to some other interpretations beyond them, because the words of the Qur'an sometimes bear several meanings.

Then it adds:

"...and they shall be given the like thereof,.."

"That is, from the point of beauty and wholesomeness, all of the various Heavenly fruits are alike and they are at such a high standard that none of them can be preferred over others. They are not like the fruits in this world that some may be too ripe or aromatic while some others are, for example, too green or tasteless.

The fruits in the gardens of Heaven, likening them with those of this world, are all pleasantly fragrant, delicious, wholesome, and beautifully interesting.

And finally, the last bounty, which is referred to in this verse, is ***'purified spouses'***, where it says:

"...and there for them shall be spouses purified..."

The spouses are purified and are free from all the dirt and taints, bodily and spiritually, which they may have in this world.

One of the problems that man is confronted with, concerning the bounties in this world, is that at the same time that he possesses a bounty he thinks of its perdition and is worried about the time he is going to be in lack of it.

For this very reason, the bounties in this world can never produce real tranquility for him. But the bounties in Heaven are eternal. They have no end and no perdition or discontinuation. They are full, complete, soothing and calming. So, to confirm this meaning, at the end of the verse, it says about the believers:

"...dwelling therein forever.."

Occasion of Revelation

On the occasion of the revelation of this verse, the leading commentators have narrated from Ibn-Abbas as saying: ***"This verse has been revealed on the virtue of Hadrat Ali-ibn Abitalib (as) and the true believers"***, 7 (since they have both 'Faith' and 'good deeds').

Explanations

1. Faith and Deeds

In many of the verses in the Qur'an, 'Faith' and 'good deeds' are mentioned to be so closely together that they seem to be inseparable. True, it is so because Faith and practice are complementary to each other.

If Faith influences the depths of man's soul, its radiance will certainly reflect in his acts and cause his deeds to become 'good deeds'. It is like a room wherein a bright light is kindled whose beams radiate outside through all the doors and windows. The same is the bright light of the lamp of Faith when it is glowing inside a man's enlightened heart.

If this occurs, the light of that brilliant lamp of Faith radiates from his eyes, ears, tongue, hands and feet.

Surah At-Talaq, No. 65, verse 11 says:

"...And those who believe in Allah and work righteousness, He will admit to Gardens beneath which rivers flow, to dwell therein for ever..."

Also, Surah An-Nur, No.24 verse 55 says:

"Allah has promised, to those among you who believe and work righteous deeds, that He will, of a surety, grant them in the land, inheritance (of power)..."

Fundamentally, 'Faith' is as the root of a plant, and 'good deeds' are its fruit. The existence of pleasant sweet fruit shows evidence to the soundness of the root which causes that useful fruit to be produced.

Some unbelieving persons may occasionally do some good deeds but that act will surely not be performed continuously. What is noble and certain to bring forth good deeds is the Faith that has penetrated the depths of man's soul and causes him/her to have a feeling of responsibility.

2. The Purified Spouses

It is interesting that the only epithet that is mentioned in this verse to qualify the Heavenly spouses is the attribute of 'purified'. This is an indication to the idea that the first and the most important status of a spouse is 'purity', and all good qualities other than that are totally out shown by its radiance.

The well-known tradition that is narrated from the holy Prophet (S) makes this fact even clearer. He has said: ***"Avoid the green plants grown over dunghill"***. The Messenger of Allah (S) was asked what he meant by 'the green plants grown over dunghill', and he answered:

"It is the beautiful women who have grown up among filthy family members." 8

The word /azw-aj / in the plural means mates –or wives –which in the case of the female sex means husbands. This may mean the faithful wives of the faithful husbands i.e., women who had been true and faithful believers in the truth and who had been the wives of the men who were also believers.

However, the women in Heaven, whether they are 'houris' (angels) or 'human creatures', are purified and clean both from the point of outward dirt such as: blood, urine, feces, semen, menstruation, postpartal bleeding, excessive menstruation, dirtiness, and the like; and from the point of inward dirt such as: bad qualities of character, evil dispositions like: rancour, grudges, envy, habitual frowning, and the like of them; and also from the point of some hideous behaviours like: adultery, fornication, and all kinds of similar vices.

They, having the total aspects and conditions of purification, are clean from all sorts of corruption and possess purity in its entirety.

Sa'id-ibn-' Amir has narrated a tradition from the holy Prophet (S) which says:

"If one of the women of Heaven looks once towards the earth the whole world will be full of perfume of musk and the radiance of her light will prevail over the light of the sun and the moon". 9

3. The Material and Spiritual Blessings in Heaven

In many of the verses of the Qur'an the words are about the blessings of Heaven, bounties such as: gardens beneath which rivers flow, castles, purified spouses, numerous fruits, loyal and faithful companions, etc.

But, besides these bounties, some other excellent blessings are also mentioned whose splendour and magnificence is impossible to be estimated with the worldly criteria that we have.

For example, **Surah At-Taubah. No.9. verse 72** says:

"Allah has promised to Believers, men and women, Gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein, and beautiful mansions in Gardens of everlasting bliss. But the greatest bliss is the Good Pleasure of Allah: that is the supreme felicity."

And, in **Surah Al-Bayyinah No. 98 verse 8** after mentioning some material blessings in Heaven, it says:

"..Allah is well-pleased with them and they are well-pleased with Him..."

And truly, if a person reaches the position that he feels his Lord; pleased with him and he is also pleased with Him, he will dismiss all other pleasures. He will attach only to Him and will think of none else. This is a spiritual pleasure that cannot be described with any words nor in any language.

Finally, since the Resurrection has both 'spiritual' and 'physical' aspects, the bounties in bliss have both of those aspects, too, in order that their comprehensiveness be established and everyone, according to his/her worthiness and eligibility, will enjoy them.

Surah Al-Baqarah, Verse 26

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَسْتَحْيِي أَنْ يَضْرِبَ مَثَلًا مَّا بَعُوضَةً فَمَا فَوْقَهَا فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا فَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَيَقُولُونَ مَاذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِهَذَا مَثَلًا يُضِلُّ بِهِ كَثِيرًا وَيَهْدِي بِهِ كَثِيرًا وَمَا يُضِلُّ بِهِ إِلَّا الْفَاسِقِينَ

26. "Allah does not disdain to set forth the parable even of a gnat, or anything greater than that. As for those who have Faith, they know that it is the truth from their Lord. And for those who reject Faith, they ask: 'What does Allah mean by this parable?' Thereby He leads many astray and guides many, and He leads none astray save the transgressors".

The purpose of a parable is to make the meaning of an abstract idea more clear and explicit with the help of a material thing in order to assist the mind in catching the idea through consideration. The more man's wisdom is dependent on his base understanding, the less vigorous strength he has to conceive the spirit and reality of things when his imagination interferes.

That is why that in the Divine Book and in the words of the wise and men of letters, the essence of meanings are stated in the form of parables to make complicated concepts plain, hence through a logical thing find a way to the philosophical.

A 'gnat' is a small insect which is perceptible by the naked eye. Gnat is mentioned in this verse, perhaps, to show that striking a similitude between small things or beyond it is not inappropriate for the Glorious Dignity of the Essence of *Allah*, but to confirm that the proportion of His Sovereignty is the same over big or small, high or low and, in general, all are encompassed by His Power and are benefited by His endless Mercy and Grace.

Furthermore, if we observe carefully, we will see that all the creatures, whether complex or simple, like a chain, are linked to one another. They are so interrelated and perform their duties with such surprising harmony and regularity that it is as if they have formed a single unit to take part in a general service.

The term 'gnat', in this verse, may refer to the greatness and fairness that is used in the creation of a gnat, this very small creature.

Concerning this meaning, there is a tradition from Imam al-Sadiq (as) who said:

"Verily, Allah (s.w.t.) has set forth a parable of a gnat because He has created 'gnat', with that small size it has, consisting of all that He has created in {an elephant' with that bigness it possesses, and He has added two other limbs (for gnat) in order to stimulate (the attention of) the believers to notice the delicacy and frailness of His creation and His wonderful production. " 10

In another occurrence in the Qur'an, He (s.w.t.) has said:

"Do they not look at camels, how they are created?" (Surah Al-Qashiyah. No. 88. verse 17).

Upon the importance of the intriguing creation of living creatures, Amir-ul-Mu'mineen Ali (as) in one of his sermons has said: *"...How could it be? Even if all the animals of the earth whether birds or beasts, stabled cattle or pasturing ones, of different origins and species, dull people and sagacious men –all jointly try to create (even) 'a gnat' they are not able to bring it into being and do not understand what is the way to its creation.*

Their wits are bewildered and wandering. Their powers fall short and fail, and they return disappointed and tired, knowing that they are defeated and admitting their inability to produce it, also realizing that they are too weak (even) to destroy it..." 11

The verse continues saying:

"...As for those who have Faith, they know that it is the truth from their Lord..."

Those who have believed in Islam and accepted the Word of *Allah* know that these miraculous statements are issued from the Origin of revelation. They know quite well that these parables are vivid and appropriate and are revealed from their Lord.

They conceive the fact in this way because their hearts are empty of envy, grudges and pride and their souls are the site of the light of illumination and knowledge.

"...And for those who reject Faith, they ask: 'What does Allah mean by this parable?'"

Those who have disbelieved and covered the light of Faith with the curtain of infidelity have ultimately blinded their own insight. They have made their ears, which were able to hearken to the Divine Words, deaf. They, ignorantly or mockingly, inquire that what was *Allah's* aim by giving this for a similitude that He causes many to err by it and many He leads aright.

In Tafsir-ut- Tibyan, vol. 1, page 19, Shaykh Tusi says: " It is like that a speaker asks what Allah means by this parable that thereby some may be led astray and some be guided. In answer to this question, Allah says that none will be led astray save the transgressors; but the way is open to the believers to reach the climax of understanding and conception with knowledge and true Faith."

Occasion of the Revelation

When the previous verses, i.e., the verses that say: **"The likeness of them is as the likeness of a man who kindled a fire..."** and **"Or (their) likeness is as a rainstorm from the heaven..."**, (2:17,19) were revealed, the hypocrites said that *Allah* is much exalted to bring forth these parables. So, to refuse their guise and statements, it says:

"Allah does not disdain to set forth the parable even of a gnat or anything greater than that."

Explanation

Some commentators have cited their ideas about the verse under discussion as follows:

The Arabic term / yudillu / means: 'misleading'. Wherever this word is used in the Qur'an, relating to *Allah*, it means the withdrawal of His Grace and allowing the individual to have the way of his own choice as a punishment, consequent to the individual's rejecting the Divine Guidance voluntarily offered to him.

The Holy Qur'an presents the justification to the frequent metaphorical expressions in the form of parables, to stimulate the human mind and heart. The result is obvious: that a healthy mind grasps the Truth whereas the perverted mind increases its doubts as to what *Allah* meant by the parable. Thus the one and the same expression has two opposite effects.

The right impression is 'guidance' / hidayat / which is assigned to 'the pious' /muttaqin/, and the wrong impression is /dalalat / 'going astray' which is allotted to the wrong-doers, and pointed out in the next verse.

The two important characteristics of the wrong-doers are: the breach of the Covenant of *Allah*, after it has been confirmed and /qata'a ma amarallah / i.e., the severing of the relation or the connection with what *Allah* has commanded man to establish, and doing things subversive and harmful to the harmonious life on earth.

Surah Al-Baqarah, Verse 27

الَّذِينَ يَنْقُضُونَ عَهْدَ اللَّهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ مِيثَاقِهِ وَيَقْطَعُونَ مَا أَمَرَ اللَّهُ بِهِ أَنْ يُوصَلَ
وَيُفْسِدُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ

27. "Those who break the covenant of Allah after its confirmation and cut asunder what Allah has commanded to be joined, and they make corruption on the Earth; - they are the losers".

The Real Losers!

In the aforementioned verse, the subject was partly based on the wrong-doers and their mischievous deeds. In this verse, these people are introduced clearly by three qualities:

Referring to the first quality it says:

"Those who break the covenant of Allah after its confirmation..."

Then, it refers to their second quality, saying:

"...and cut asunder what Allah has commanded to be joined,..."

Many of the commentators have pointed out that this verse refers especially to the desertion of kinsfolk and breaking off ties of relationship. But careful attention to the concept of the verse leads us to a broader and more general meaning, in which the desertion of kinsfolk is one of its examples.

The evidence that supports the above idea is that the verse indicates that the makers of corruption cut the ties that *Allah* has commanded to remain fixed and firm. These joining ties cover the union of kindred, meeting of friends, social relationships, connections with the divine leaders, and relation with *Allah*. Therefore, we should not confine the meaning of the verse to a single idea alone.

In some Islamic narrations, however, the phrase: 'What *Allah* has commanded to be joined' is rendered in connection with Amir-ul- Mu'mineen Imam Ali (as) and the entire Ahlul Bayt, the immaculate, (as).

The third quality of the makers of corruption on the earth, which is lastly referred to in this verse, is:

"...and they make corruption on the Earth..."

It is, of course, evident that they have neglected the path of *Allah* and disobeyed Him. These disbelievers, who do not observe mercy even towards their relatives, certainly treat others with cruelty.

They pursue their own pleasures and personal interests. It does not matter to them where the society may be led. Their central aim is to increase their profit and to obtain their desires. They do not care if they must do any wrong or commit any offense to reach their goals. It is obvious how destructive the result of this kind of thinking and acting may be in the society.

The Qur'an, at the end of this verse, says:

"...they are the losers."

Truly, it is so. What a greater loss than this that a man spends his entire physical and spiritual capital on the way to the destruction and disaster of his own life!

What fate can they have save this dreadful one when some people step out of the circle of obedience to *Allah's* Command to the extent of the meaning of the term / fisq / ' mischief'?

Mischief, in Islam, is one the most abhorred crimes, as the Qur'an says: "***Mischief is more grievous than murder***", (2:217). This is one of the many indications that Islam stands for peace on earth and never tolerates anything which disturbs it.

2. Tauhid-i-Mufaddal (Theism), p. 1, (Persian version).
3. Other meanings of the sky will be dealt with when discussing verse 29 of the current Surah. Explanation about the atmosphere, when commenting on verse 22, is helpful, too.
4. Nur-uth- Thaqaalayn, vol. 1, p. 41
5. O' dear respected reader of this book! Have you ever thought that when more than two-thirds of the globe is covered with sea water and if we consider it twice as much when we use it entirely as ink in order to write out the science and secrets of the Qur'an, i.e. the word of Allah, sooner would the doubled oceans of the globe be exhausted than would the words of Allah, the science and secrets of the Qur'an? Then be careful when considering how magnificent the Glorious Qur'an is !
6. For details, refer to: 'The Holy Qur'an and the Last Prophet (S)', pg 147, (Persian version)
7. Tafsir-us-Safi: vol. 1, p. 89, & Tafsir-i-Burhan, vol. 1, p. 70
8. Wasa'il-ush-Shi'ah, vol. 14, p. 19
9. Manhaj-us-Sadiqeen, vol. 1, p. 199
10. Nur-uth-Thaqaalayn- vol. 1, p. 46, Tradition 65
11. Nahjul-Balagha, Sermon 186

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