MY DIALOGUES WITH THE QURAN

Ahmad Dadouch

TRANSLATION BY BLESSED TREE

Al-Sabeel INTERNATIONAL

شجرة طيبة
Blessed Tree

My Dialogues with
the Quran



In the name of Allah,
the Most Gracious
the Most Merciful

My Dialogues with The Quran

Ahmad Dadouch

Al-Sabeel Publication

My Dialogues with the Quran

Authored by Ahmad Dadouch

Translation by Blessed Tree

https://dub.sh/ajara

شجرة طيبة

Blessed Tree

First Edition

1445 AH – 2024 AD

All Rights Reserved

السبيل

Al-Sabeel Publication

www.al-sabeel.net

Dedication

Dear Reader...

Since you have opened my book
upon this very page,
it shall be dedicated to you.

Disclaimer

English quotations of the Quran are only translations of its meanings.
Quran meanings translation by Dr. Mustafa Khattab, courtesy of quran.com

Table of contents

Introduction ***9***

A Book of Dialogue *10*

The Personal Guidance *12*

A Personal Dialogue *14*

Al-Fatiha... Condensed brevity and unimaginable style overpowering any counterfeiter ***17***

Al-Baqara... A book that begins with trust, challenging, and offering guidance and warning ***25***

Shifting to challenge *30*

A dialogue with everyone. *32*

Al Imran... When the companions mistook ***34***

From defeat to victory *39*

Curriculum reform *41*

Al-An'am... A dialogue that exposes the mindset of ingratitude and the secret of enslaving human beings ***43***

Exploring the message *44*

The Secret behind glorifying inanimate objects *48*

Rituals of Slaughter *52*

Al-A'raf... Satan promises and plans before the story begins ***56***

Who forbade what is permissible? *59*

The rope of salvation *60*

The modern Age *61*

Al-A'raf/ Uncovering the intimate parts is one the first conspiracies of Satan ***63***

Al-A'raf... Our fathers experienced both joy and hardship ***68***

The torment of the Children of Israel *71*

Disbelief after salvation *75*

"Be disgraced apes." *78*

Am I not your Lord? *81*

"When the most wicked of them was roused"... Why was Salih's she-camel's killer the most disobedient of the forefathers? ***84***

Thamud's Story *86*

A she-camel from a rock *88*

Strange ingratitude *92*

Between surah Yunus and Nuh. Why would a prophet invoke upon his people? ***96***

Surah Hud *100*

Surah Nuh *102*

Returning to Yunus *103*

Jacob and Joseph .. Do not relate your vision to your brothers ***107***

The conspiracy of brother and sons *108*

Tribulation for patience *110*

Al-Qasas... Peace be upon you; we seek not the ignorant ***114***

The edge of shipwreck *114*

Illogical ingratitude *115*

Ar-Rum... They only know the worldly affairs of this life ***120***

Priorities in Life *121*

On that Day they will be separated *123*

Fussilat... When Utbah ibn Rabi'ah returned to Quraysh with a different demeanor than he had left with!.....128

Your eloquence has bewitched you, Abu Al-Walid.....130

The Collapse of Negotiations.....139

The Drums of War.....140

Surah Muhammad... a truthful and trustworthy prophet, and sealed hearts.....144

The Enemies of Muhammad.....145

Muhammad's companions.....149

The Mountain and the Star: Between the Rationality of Believing in the Majesty of the Creator and the Folly of Polytheism and Atheism.....151

Surah An-Najm.....154

Essence of the Debate.....155

Satanic myths.....157

Superstitious Beliefs.....159

Ignorance and Foolishness.....161

Al-Mujadila, Al-Hashr and Al-Mumtahanah ... Monotheism first... 164

Surah Al-Hashr.....168

Surah Al-Mumtahanah.....170

Humanity... Between the Illusion of Divinity and the Dignity of Servitude.....173

Researching Revelation.....174

Good or Evil?.....178

The Human" and "Mankind.....181

Key References..... 184

Introduction

Much has been written in the contemplation of this great book. And there is no doubt that the rivers of thought and reflection on the shores of its vast sea, shall never be exhausted, so long as a monotheistic believer remains on earth. Thus Ibn Taymiyyah said that for each verse, he looked at a hundred interpretations, then asked Allah for understanding: *"Teach me, O teacher of Adam and Abraham."* And so he would be given a new interpretation.(1) How then, can we not expect new perspectives from this revelation of indispensable wonder??

Pondering does not necessitate a modernist interpretation of Allah's words, nor is meditation a form of mysticism which rejoices in coding and symbolism. Interpretation is a science that has origins and controls, and doctrine provides definitions that do not accept tampering, and the pursuit of knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim.

The Quran is Allah's word to us, the gift of guidance that He has entrusted to us, it is our remaining inheritance of the miracles of prophecy, its copies are the trace, which we accept, of the realm of the Kingdom we covet. Then, can a Muslim's soul but yearn to reflect on its verses in every retreat? And hope for the blessing of comprehension to descend upon his reality and livelihood?

We do not bear insult from the immorality of the malicious who distort texts, for the demons among mankind and the jinn are fond of falsifying holy revelations, time after time. They can only find means to tamper with the interpretations of meanings according to their whims,

(1) Muhammad Abu Zahra, Ibn Taymiyyah: His Life and Era - His Jurisprudential Opinions, Page 511.

since Allah Almighty has promised to preserve the texts of His last book from any distortion by the hands of the frivolous.

Examples of this are innumerable; those who searched for a container for their socialist ideas claimed that the Quran was a revolutionary book that was revealed to achieve social justice and protect the marginalized, and those who were concerned with following in the footsteps of liberal Western civilization combed the verses for words and derivatives of science, reading, reason and asking questions.

It is no secret to any Muslim that the divine revelation is greater than to be limited to whims, and that religion is to be accepted wholly. Or else, the gift of guidance may become an instrument of deception, invoked by the motivated person to justify his whim, and allowing any opponent to do the same, in an attempt to contradict the former's claims. And so on, and so forth, untill the truth is lost between them.

Let us then conjure in our minds those motives and tendencies, before we put our hearts between the two edges of this book, for the heart has always dominated the mind in way of its own desires, and to seek guidance in the supplication found in the first page of the Quran: {You [alone] we worship and you [alone] we ask for help} [Al-Fatiha:5], as the act of worshiping does not reach its end without asking for Allah's help, and which the worship act is more superior then pondering the words of Allah?

A Book of Dialogue

As I began writing this book, I came across a lovely two-part book entitled *"The Quran and Reasoning"* by the author Abi Zaid Al-Maqroi Al-Idrisi. He preludes to the second part with a chapter that considers dialogue a horizon of the mind and a gateway to comprehend and

contemplate the Quran, for he sees the Quran of a dialogical nature, not merely having an instructional or communicative structure.(1)

The researcher, Muhammad Imrani Hanachi, is then quoted as saying: *"The Noble Quran never makes a claim except that it contains within itself its evidence. It is a self-sufficient book that does not rely on external sources, and it never makes any claim without supporting it with examples, applications, and models."*(2)

The author dwells in the review of the *"openness"* of this great book to dissenting opinions, as the term of speech and its derivatives occurs 1722 times,(3) and many false claims have been immortalized by the Quran, narrating them on the tongues of disbelievers, People of the Book, devils, and hypocrites. Thus fairly allowing the people of falsehood the right to question, before masterfully refuting them..

I warmly accepted this statement, as reflecting on the dialogues in the Quran strengthens my faith in the transcendence of its source and gives me immunity from the feeling of weakness that may occur to the soul when receiving false suspicions.

But how would it feel if I put myself in the position of the interlocutor and *"interrogate the text."* What might be in my mind? Especially if I assume - for argument's sake - that I will read it with a skeptic's eye whose heart has not yet been reassured by faith, what effect will this text leave on me?

Here the relationship with this extraordinary book becomes personal as the dialogue becomes direct. I doubt I'd assume the existence of a greater characteristic than this if I had started reading with the heart of

(1) The Quran and Reason, Page 28
(2) The previous reference, page 29
(3) The previous reference, page 30

an ungrateful doubter, and I doubt a genius human being could create such an efficient book.

The Personal Guidance

In the early 1980s, Dr. Jeffrey Lang, a professor in the Department of Mathematics at the American University of Kansas, decided to forsake atheism for Islam, despite the academic and social difficulties accompanying that move.

In his book *"Even Angels Ask"*, Dr. Lang explained the dimensions of suffering experienced by many new Muslims in America and also explained that the most important motivation for their adherence to this religion, which is strange to their environment, is *"the wonderful feeling they feel when they communicate with the Holy words when they read the Quran."*(1)

He also explains that a new revert to Islam discovers that the basis of his faith is does not result only from his objective reading of the Quran but also from *"his own experience, or let's say the result of his own communication with this holy book."* And he also confirms that it is difficult for the revert to identify an element in the Quran as a reason for his belief, so he reached the conviction that this book is a divine revelation that develops cumulatively after building a unique experience for the contemplator while reading the texts of the Quran.

Perhaps the most wonderful point that the author referred to is the feeling of American reverts during *"recitation."* The Quran responds to their emotional and psychological needs; it even responds to their reactions as if it had been revealed to them personally, astonishing the reader as he discovers that he is having a live dialogue with the text in his hands.

(1) Jeffrey Lang, Even Angels Ask, page 205

It is precisely these intense moments that send shivers down my spine when I ponder the texts of that great revelation, and I think that the prudent reader has preceded me to evoke the noble verse that represents this magnificent situation, as our Lord Almighty says: {Allah has sent down the best statement: a consistent Book wherein is reiteration. The skins shiver there from those who fear their Lord; then their skins and their hearts relax at the remembrance of Allah. That is the guidance of Allah by which He guides whom He wills. And one whom Allah leaves astray - for him there is no guide}. [Az-Zumar:23]

Dr. Lang cites examples of Western intellectuals who feel a sense of prestige and humbleness before the Quranic texts, although not having reverted to Islam, like the British Orientalist Arthur J. Arberry, who said that listening to the Quran is the same as listening to his own heartbeat.(1)

Interestingly enough, Dr. Lang's statement on the sense of awe that engulfs the hearts of his fellow American intellectuals and friends when they read the Quran, is a feeling which arises from the contemplation of the text only, and not a dazzlement by the mastery of the language of this extraordinary book, as they read only a translation of its meanings, and not an eminent, eloquent Arabic text.

Nowadays, the Internet in this era has allowed us the opportunity to discover the positions of young Westerners from the general public, as they interact spiritually with recitations of the Quran for the first time, I even saw one of them crying in reverence while listening to some verses recited in a warm voice, unaware of its meanings, and I doubt he would have reacted the same if he were listening to a melodious mimicry of the recitation. I wondered how he would react if only he could relish in the eloquence of the language, and ponder upon its message.

(1) The previous reference, page 206

One must stop to think here, has humanity in this modern age ever known an ancient book that challenges the fluctuations of time with its text, eloquence and message to remain ever-present like the Quran? No doubt that followers of other religions sanctify their ancient texts, which are older than the Quran, and still sing them in their temples, but does it ever go beyond the realm of ritual practice?

The Quran alone has stayed alive, not because it is recited in devotion and celebrated at ceremonies, but because it is the only text whose presence has not diminished in studies of high academia over the centuries, being ever-present in curricula, linguistic testimony and intellectual reflections for those who seek their salvation in it.

Is this singularity not striking? Does any other sacred text hold such a bold presence in academia without being subjected to the scalpels of criticism and wounding, scientifically, historically and intellectually? Cataclysms alone are enough to contradict the sanctity of the Holy Scripture among the Jews and Christians today, yet its inconsistencies are still interpreted and justified.

A Personal Dialogue

Some years ago, on a blessed day in Ramadan, an urgent question pierced my mind as I sat reading Surah Yusuf after the dawn prayer: Why did Prophet Jacob -*peace be upon him*- remain patiently silent while his sons claimed that Joseph had been eaten by the wolf? Though the evidence indicates his knowledge of their lies. Such questions soon arose during my reading, and the breakthroughs unfolded on their own. I was in awe of my enlightened stance, for I was conducting a lively dialogue with the Book of Allah and receiving answers that seemed as if they were allocated to me.

As soon as the sun rose, and I returned from the mosque, I noted down all those thoughts, only to find they had matured into an article worthy of publishing.

The article, thank Allah, spread like a wildfire. I found it circulating on smartphones with the name of a noble sheik affixed to it, and I do not know if he plagiarized it or if it was inadvertently attributed to him. Some readers then wrote to me asking for more, and some brothers urged me to continue pondering in that way. So whenever similar questions came to my mind, I would begin a dialogue with the text and draw answers from it.

Soon I found another pleasure in receiving personal lessons from this holy revelation. For if the text is fixed, unchanging, and if the multiplicity of its interpretations is limited to the specific occasion for revelation and the meanings of words, then the lessons, morals and benefits are as numerous as the readers, contemplators and interlocutors of the text. I may seek enlightenment from one verse today and reap its benefits according to my specific disposition, and presence of mind, only to find another beneficial meaning in the same verse on another day.(1)

During Ramadan, when the season of reflection is renewed, I would revisit my old files to add something new to my notes, hoping that one day, these drafts will come to light. But, as is the habit of procrastination, my vigor would wither away before I could release them. Until I came to the realization that the benefits of the Quran will never cease to exist, and I remembered the saying of Judge Abdul Rahim Al-Bisani, *"I believe that no one has completed a book today unless he says of it tomorrow: It would have been better to amend this, or it would have been better to add that, or it would have been better to bring this to the fore, and it would have been*

(1) Therefore, it is narrated in a weak hadith that 'scholars are never satiated with the Quran, and its wonders are inexhaustible' [Narrated by Al-Tirmidhi (2906), and he said: Its chain is unknown].

better to omit this. This is one of the greatest lessons, and it is proof of the shortcomings of the human race."(1)

I have thus decided to strive to publish this book as it is without delay, in the hope that readers will find something to urge them to reflect, for the sooner the better. In the coming days, I hope for another opportunity to extend it, and all our hope is in the grace of Allah and His light.

"O Teacher of Adam and Abraham, teach me."

Ahmad Dadouch
Ramadan 1443



(1) The commonly attributed source for this is Al-Imam Al-Asfahani.

Al-Fatiha... Condensed brevity and unimaginable style overpowering any counterfeiter

Scholars would pause for a long time at each word of this opening chapter, not only because the author's enthusiasm is at its highest when starting to compose huge books, but also because it is the opening of the book that the Prophet -*peace be upon him*- recognized as the most important part of the whole book..

Anas -*may Allah be pleased with him*- narrated: the Prophet -*peace be upon him*- while on a journey dismounted, so he walked and a man among his companions walked beside him, so he turned towards the man and said *"Shall I not tell you of the best of the Quran?" "Alhamdu lillahi Rabb Alalamin"* (All praise be to Allah, Lord of all worlds).(1)

If you want to pinpoint what is surprising and astonishing about the enthusiasm of previous nations, and what can be deduced from the benefits of this great surah, then let us read the beginning of the interpretation of the *"keys of the unseen"* (Mafatih Alghaib) by Fakhr al-Din al-Razi: *"I know that it passed on my tongue at times that ten thousand matters can be deduced from this surah's benefits and valuables, and the envious, ignorant and stubborn dismissed this. Yet when I began to classify this book, I presented this introduction to notify that what we have mentioned is possible,(2) and obtainable."* He proceeded to completely fill the first volume by enumerating issues, evoking all of his knowledge of language, logic, speech and interpretation. Although the mobilization of all these benefits is an exaggeration required by the aforementioned challenge,

(1) Al-Nasa'i (8011), and Ibn Hibban (774).
(2) Tafsir al-Razi, Vol. 1, p. 21.

for he -*may Allah have mercy on him*- would elaborate extensively on the rooting and explanation of the rules of various sciences without being bound by the subject of interpretation, yet he would not have found the premises that allow him to elaborate so, except in this miraculous surah .

If you want a contemporary example, I refer you to the book *"Islam in Seven Verses... Al-Fatiha Is a Curriculum for Life"*, the first volume in a series that Dr. Abdul Salam Al-Majidi dedicated his life to, as the journey of insight over the seven verses extended to cover about 350 pages, which later forced him to issue another smaller book, a marketable summary among fans of speed reading, and he called it *"Keys of Al-Fatiha"*, and I have filmed interviews with the noble sheikh, which are published online.

In order to not fall into the trap of redundancy, let us set a starting point at the question that came to my mind about the feeling of some Western people that I have heard about in the media whose hearts were, without permission, conquered by faith because they merely read the Quran. Even though many of them were browsing it at first to discover its *"mistakes"*, only to be captivated by it from the first page.

No doubt, to each their own reading and experience, and my purpose now is not to review their experiences, but what would my personal experience be if I tried to reread the opening of the book with the eyes of a young atheist or skeptic?

Perhaps most of us do not feel the astonishment we would hope for, as we read Fatiha at least seventeen times a day in prayer, and many of us may fail to reflect on it just as we may fail to ponder most of our prayers.

I will not be long in reminding you, dear reader, of a more general problem in our societies, for we are also accustomed to memorizing parts of the Holy Quran from a young age without understanding. I too was one of those who memorized half of it in my childhood while unaware of its meanings, as it was not common to ask our sheikh, who instructed us in

memorizing the Quran, about the meaning of any word, the interpretation of any verse, or the reason for descension and revelation of a surah.

I will assume this is my first time opening the Quran since reaching the age of maturity without believing in the existence of Allah, and without having listened to the discourse of Islam before. Most likely, my preconceived idea must be that this book is composed by a human being. Thus when I learned that its owner claims that the book is nothing but the words of Allah Himself, without distortion and without change, I rushed with great enthusiasm to discover the features that support or undermine this theory.

The first thing I see when I open the book is two beautifully decorated pages. There is no introduction explaining the circumstances of the book's descent and record, nor any pages dedicated to its readers. Well, I expect it to begin with a divine call, addressing human beings in a condescending tone, calling on them to listen, for example: *"O children of Adam, I am Allah, the Sender of this book, so listen to what I say to you all so that you may all have salvation..."*

I admit that the example does not include appropriate rhetoric, and perhaps my creativity would bring forth a more splendid text if I wished. However, I mean here to envisage a book authored by man while claiming to be from Allah, and I doubt any gifted litterateur would depart from this framework.

Take, for instance, the letters of the Prophet *-peace be upon him-* to the kings who he invited to Islam, and notice how he began each letter directly, by identifying himself, then directly calling them to embrace his invitation. Although he did not claim in those letters that it was an inspired text, I draw your attention here to the human style, uttered by one who carries a message for guidance, even while having reached the pinnacle of eloquence.

In his letter to Negus, we read the following: *"In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful, from Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, to Negus, king of Abyssinia, peace be upon those who follow guidance. Furthermore, I praise Allah besides whom there is no God but He, the Sovereign, the Holy, and I testify that Jesus, the son of Mary, the Spirit of Allah, and His word was delivered to Mary, the virgin, the good, the chaste, she became pregnant with Jesus from a breath of His soul just as Adam was created with His hand, and I invite you to worship Allah alone, without associating a partner with Him and to pay loyalty to Him and to follow me and believe in what was revealed to me, for I am the Messenger of Allah, and I invite you and your soldiers to the call of Allah Almighty. I have notified you and advised you, so accept my advice, and peace be upon those who follow guidance."*

As for his letters to the rest of the kings, their prefaces were similar, here is one of them: *"In the name of Allah, the most gracious, the Most Merciful, from Muhammad son of Abdullah and the Messenger of Allah to Heraclius emperor of Rum (Byzantium), peace be upon those who follow guidance. Furthermore, I invite you with the invitation of Islam. Accept Islam, and receive salvation and Allah shall reward you twofold..."*(1)

Let us now return to the Noble Quran and recite Al-Fatiha: {In the Name of Allah—the Most Compassionate, Most Merciful. All praise is for Allah—Lord of all worlds, the Most Compassionate, Most Merciful, Master of the Day of Judgment. You ˹alone˺ we worship and You ˹alone˺ we ask for help. Guide us along the Straight Path, the Path of those You have blessed—not those You are displeased with, or those who are astray} [Fatiha:1- 7]. What a quick introduction, made up of one interconnected mass which I could not disassemble or even stop at some of its parts until I finished reading it at once.

(1) Al-Bukhari (7), Muslim (1773).

To return for meditation is inevitable. The first thing that caught my attention - as I read with the eyes of a critical doubter - in these short arranged phrases, is that they come in the form of prayer. Although they are a prelude to Allah's speech to us, He does not introduce Himself to us as the speaker, but He began to praise Himself, and He praised with a prayer on our tongue as if He is teaching us words to address Him by.

That is really amazing! What amazes me more is that I learned this from an atheist who, like myself, discovered it for the first time before accepting Islam. I mentioned him in my introduction: Dr. Jeffrey Lang. He says in his book that there is a subtle shift from the first four verses that glorify the Creator to the other three that ask for guidance, *"such that we do not notice this change, nor do we realize that we were invoking involuntarily, in a state of semi-consciousness until we finished reading Al-Fatiha. It almost seems that we have been tricked into reading it before we have a chance to resist..."*(1)

Well, his talk of deception may sound provocative to you, my faithful brother, but you should excuse him, as he is still reading with the eyes of the skeptical atheist, for he adds that although he did not intend to utter this prayer, he has reached his goal, and he is about to be met with a response.(2)

So, the opening begins with gentle exaltation and praise, then with a prayer by the reader himself. Whether you call it a clever invention or a miracle, we must acknowledge that it is an unfamiliar introduction, worthy of reflection and admiration, and that it will leave a mark on you to continue reading this remarkable book.

Before proceeding, let me describe to you Lang's opinion on this surah. He is a skeptical type who does not cease to ask questions, until he makes the angels' question to Allah Almighty: {... They asked ⌜Allah⌝, "Will

(1) Even the Angels Ask, p. 43
(2) The previous reference, p43.

You place in it someone who will spread corruption…} [Al-Baqara:30] a virtue that allows him to proceed with the questioning, and then attempts to answer on his own accord, and we disapprove of such haste because he does not have the minimum qualifications of jurisprudence. It is enough to know this about him to picture him as a rebel, questioning Al-Fatiha after spending ten years lost in the maze of atheism.

My attention was drawn to his distress from the fact that the surah reminded him of the Day of Judgment in the third verse, wherein it awakened an anxiety about reckoning, even though it followed a reminder of Allah's mercy, as he had hoped that this phrase would be postponed so that he may rest with the Quran and not feel alienated.

Although Lang does not disclose his psychological problem, I see it clearly. It lurks in the soul of every Western atheist who is alienated from the Jewish-Christian religion because it is not balanced in providing divine mercy over divine anger or loathing. We are not going to delve now into the horrible idea of inheriting the *"Original sin"* from Adam to his offspring, until *"God"* was forced to send his *"son"* to earth in order to face his fate for the salvation of the rest of mankind. Allah Almighty is Exalted above what they say. Let me read what Lang has written so that you may understand what I mean: *"Emphasizing Allah's mercy, kindness, tenderness and love has never alienated us from religion, but what we have been alienated from is the threat of the Day of Resurrection and the eternal curse that we would never have reconciled between it and mercy and kindness."*(1)

I can almost smell the scent of European heresy from this text, or even the scent of humanism if you will, which appeared on the ruins of religion in Europe after the installation of secularism with iron and fire. Starting from the French Revolution and so forth, mankind has become

(1) The previous reference, p42.

the center of the universe, rejecting any form of condescending rhetoric, even from Allah Himself, if He existed, even from Allah if He existed.

Let us put this all aside and read the text again with a naked eye. I do not doubt that you will notice, as I did, that the first verse *"Basmala"* started with the name of Allah, Who is the same speaker, and then with two of His names: the Merciful and the Gracious. The first indicates the breadth of His mercy, and His characteristic, and the second indicates the permanence of His mercy, and its attachment to those deserving of His mercy, as if the first thing that Allah ascribes to Himself is the greatness of His mercy quantitatively and chronologically, and its descent on His creation.

After the verse of praising, He repeated the same two names in a third independent verse, before reminding the reader that Allah is the owner of the Day of Reckoning, excluding any threat of punishment, or even associating it with the words and qualities of dominance and ability that do not leave Him at all anyway. So why would He not begin His message to humankind with: In the name of Allah the Mighty and Great? Or let us say that He began with the 'Gracious; the Merciful' in the first Basmala and then followed it in the third verse with descriptions of His greatness to invoke in the soul a kind of balance between hope and fear, but He did not do so. Rather, He only reminded us of the purpose of our existence, and that there is a day of reckoning, eventually.

Despite Dr. Lang's dissatisfaction, he found in the small leap towards supplication something that reassures his heart, and I find in reading it something that astounds me again, and I do not claim that this would never occur to any literary genius trying to fabricate a book and falsely attribute it to Allah, for the text moves from praise and gratitude to Allah and seeking His help, to a direct supplication asking for His guidance, as if He is forcing the ungrateful skeptical researcher to kneel in supplication to Him verbally and physically, before his soul precedes him with cause

for rebellion. The surah utters the words of supplication on his tongue directly without urging him with the word *"Say"*, although he is aware in advance that he did not open a book of supplications and invocations.

Al-Fatiha treats divinity and deism as axioms, and does not discuss them, nor at the same time does it coerce the reader into a forced faith. It is precisely the finest example of what divine discourse would be if I imagined it without prejudice; Allah speaks to me in understandable words, in known letters, and then I see His discourse exuding attributes of divinity in every letter, leaving me obliged to pay attention and listen.

It is no wonder then, that the Prophet -*peace be upon him*- said about this surah: *"By Him in Whose hand is my soul, nothing has been revealed in the Torah, nor in the Bible, nor in the Zabur, nor in the Furqan (Quran) like it. It is the Oft-Repeated Seven Verses, and the great Quran which I have been given"*.(1)

(1) Narrated by al-Tirmidhi, and he said: *"This is a hadith that is deemed good and authentic."*

Al-Baqara... A book that begins with trust, challenging, and offering guidance and warning

If you also sensed - dear reader - the feeling of amazement that has taken over me while reading the opening of the book, then follow along with me for the same experience on the next page and imagine that we are opening this book for the first time, and that we will read it with the eye of a skeptic and interrogate it with the mind of an impartial researcher.

Having completed our contemplation of those seven underlined phrases in the middle of a carefully decorated page, our eyes automatically move to the opposite page, in the middle of which we will see five verses that begin with Basmala.

I will automatically conclude that Basmala is an opening sentence repeated in the rest of the surahs, but I will pause a while for the name. Why is the very next surah called *"Al-Baqara"* (The Cow)? And I will discover later that it is the longest surah within the entire Quran, and that there are Hadiths and traditions which narrate its virtues.

It is remarkable that in the Quran, long surahs include a number of elements, combining Islamic rulings, stories and teachings about creed. If the author of this speech was a human, he would have rushed to choose a comprehensive title, which may seem impossible before this diversity of elements of each surah.

Each of us may strive to suggest a reason behind the name of each surah, and we may find it likely that names of surahs deliberately immortalize the names of prophets, or an event, or to direct attention

towards that very word in the surah, even if it is not the axis around which the rest of the elements revolve.

If I were to read this surah before the first one, it would occur to me that surah Al-Baqara that the mention of the cow in the surah is deserving of pause, and I would be eager to discover it later, but for now I will stop at the beginning of the surah that I find facing Al-Fatiha.

Beginning with three incomprehensible letters: {Alif Lam Mim}, and no matter how hard I scan through books of tafsir (interpretation), I will not find a definitive interpretation, yet I would find a probable one: It is a challenge that reoccurs in the beginnings of other surahs, to remind me that if this book was written using letters used by humans, they still remain unable to imitate it.

It must be recognized that this is a new mode of challenge; I do not think that it will occur to any creative writer either, thus I will continue to read with the mind of one who accepts the challenge: {This is the book! There is no doubt about it - a guide for those mindful of Allah} [Al-Baqara:2], I think: Is it not strange that the text directly strikes my skeptical heart - arguably - to shake it, saying: This book is a divine revelation in which there is no doubt?!

Set aside belief and disbelief for now, and let us contemplate the directness of the speech, how it naturally touches the conscience, as if it already knows where the illness is, reaching out with its cure.

I also feel that the speech is addressed primarily to Jews and Christians, who are people of books they take pride in, with all the flaws they acknowledge in the recording process. Their books are not preserved from distortion, imperfection or forgetfulness, and the shovels of historical and scientific criticism still dig at their structures, yet the second page of the Quran declares with confidence: *"That book is unquestionable,"* as if it initiates the critic with the a challenge.

What is also surprising is that the same verse describes this book as a guide, as it is not only a book of science, literature, and history, but mainly to guide. The question is: guide who? And the answer is: For the pious exclusively, a piety *"Taqwa"* is a condition for receiving guidance. As for one who comes with an unsound, mischievous heart, looking between the letters for what corresponds to his whim, will only find bashing. And for one seeking literary pleasure, linguistic or historical information, he will find what he seeks within the book, but leave without drawing from the light of its guidance.

Well, if I am a beginner and I have not gained piety yet, how do I give myself to this unique book? The answer to this question lists the required qualities: {who believe in the unseen, establish prayer, and donate from what We have provided for them, and who believe in what has been revealed to you ⌜O Prophet⌝ and what was revealed before you, and have sure faith in the Hereafter. It is they who are ⌜truly⌝ guided by their Lord, and it is they who will be successful} [Al-Baqara:3-5].

The five verses in the middle of the ornate page have quickly ended, and I still have not moved on from my initial amazement.

I will re-read carefully, so the soul may calm down a little as I discover that the message is addressed here to the Prophet, -*peace be upon him*-: *"what has been revealed to you,"* as if it is a message conveyed to me through the Prophet, -*peace be upon him*-. I then reflect on the first characteristic of the pious: *"They believe in the unseen."*

It is inevitable that this phrase will knock my heart. The physical world in which I live has made the denial of the unseen the foremost condition to enter the *"science club"*, and hardly any intellectual today dares to suggest that there are metaphysical reasons for explaining the emergence of the universe and life without first being expelled, then fought. And here is this book, calling me to open up to faith in the unseen

above all else, at the beginning of my journey. Or else I will never join the club of the pious.

Then come the practical conditions: prayer and spending in goodness. Then, the requirement of faith is repeated; faith in the validity of the revelation before me. Next comes what was previously revealed to former prophets, even if their heritage was distorted or lost. This is followed by the certainty that resurrection is coming for all to be subjected to judgement, and whoever adheres to this all is not only amongst the pious ones, whom the text has reiterated as guided, but will also be among the successful, that is, the survivors.

I will consider it an important promise of guidance and survival while I am still at the beginning of my journey, and I will turn the page to read: {As for those who persist in disbelief, it is the same whether you warn them or not—they will never believe. Allah has sealed their hearts and their hearing, and their sight is covered. They will suffer a tremendous punishment} [Al-Baqara:6-7]. It is such speech that uproots the heart, and it is addressed to the Prophet -*peace be upon him*- in the form of address, *"whether you warn them,"* entertaining him after he was faced with denial and accused of lying, but it also puts me - and I am reading with the eyes of the skeptic - in an embarrassing position, as there is a class of disbelievers with whom the warning is ineffective, and the verse threatens them with closing the door to guidance permanently in their faces, and subsequently with a great punishment.

Set aside the eloquence and articulation, and let us again try to absorb the message. As this book does not pacify nor does it compromise. If its author was a human being claiming prophecy, he would have already appealed to his followers and promised them, starting with victory, empowerment and control of civilization and wealth, or perhaps he would have given them - at least - personal promises of psychological stability and reconciliation with the universe and society, as do the *"prophets"* of

the false New Age movement[1] in this era. But the message here begins with identifying the features of the two groups, whoever wants guidance must abide by its conditions, and whoever disbelieves will not benefit from warning and receiving the message after the heart is sealed.

This sharp speech sparks my jealousy, for if I still read as a skeptic, I will hasten to assume I am excluded from the description: *"Allah has sealed their hearts, their hearings, and their sights,"* and I will subconsciously claim that I am open-minded and accepting of any claim, as long as it does not contradict reason.

It is remarkable that the following verses describe the situation of another group, that is, the hypocrites, as if informing us that discourse is fruitless with such people, as they are not ignorants in need of education, since the message has reached them, and the argument was made against them, but they do not want to believe; the verses describe them as *"deceiving Allah,"* and *"in their hearts is a disease,"* and that they are *"corruptors"* and *"fools."*

Truly amazing is the fact that each description has a counterpart, if they think that they are deceiving Allah, then there is this verse: {yet they only deceive themselves, but they fail to perceive it} [Al-Baqara:9], and if there is sickness in their hearts: {and Allah ˹only˺ lets their sickness increase} [Al-Baqara:10]. And if they see the believers as fools and spoilers, then the response is decisive: {Indeed, it is they who are the corruptors, but they fail to perceive it} [Al-Baqara:13], and if they are mocking the believers, then striking is the answer: {Allah will throw

(1) The New Age movement is a broad spectrum intellectual trend that encompasses various philosophies and religions. It emerged in the mid-twentieth century as an extension of ancient esoteric (Gnostic) doctrines and religions. Its traces can be found in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism. It presents itself independently from established religions within the framework of practices such as yoga, macrobiotics, and other rituals and philosophies that touch upon people's daily lives. For more, see the article *"New Age Movement"* in Al-Sabeel Encyclopedia on the website al-sabeel.net.

their mockery back at them, leaving them to continue wandering blindly in their defiance} [Al-Baqara:15]. The page thus ends with an inclusive verse {They are the ones who trade guidance for misguidance. But this trade is profitless, and they are not ⌜rightly⌝ guided} [Al-Baqara:16].

Catch your breath after this torrent of responses and let us reflect on the wondrous shift from descriptions of the successfully guided on the ornate front page to this frightening speech, which closes the second page with a threat to withhold guidance.

Shifting to challenge

Perhaps we share the passion of discovery, and we will find examples made of those who disbelieve on the next page, followed by a general appeal to mankind: {O humanity! Worship your Lord, Who created you and those before you, so that you may become mindful ⌜of Him⌝} [Al-Baqara:21], followed by a verse reminding of the blessings of this Lord: {⌜He is the One⌝ Who has made the earth a place of settlement for you and the sky a canopy; and sends down rain from the sky, causing fruits to grow as a provision for you. So do not knowingly set up equals to Allah ⌜in worship⌝} [Al-Baqara:22].

If we wonder - while we read with a skeptical mind - what comes after this call and reminder of the blessings that we have not yet believed in? It is this challenge: {And if you are in doubt about what We have revealed to Our servant, then produce a surah like it and call your helpers other than Allah, if what you say is true} [Al-Baqara:23]

Thus, the possibility of doubt and skepticism exists, and the answer is practical and logical, it is even humble enough to open the dialogue, as it acknowledges that this book in our hands is revealed to a *"servant of God,"* denying deification of the messenger, so that the source of miracles is limited to the Lord who speaks this word alone, and it is He who

challenges us to mobilize whoever we can to create a single text to rival this one.

Before we plan to, the text precedes us with a clear and fair result: {But if you are unable to do so—and you will never be able to do so—then fear the Fire fueled with people and stones, which is prepared for the disbelievers} [Al-Baqara:24]. Do you see absolute confidence? The text asserts our inability, defies and declares in advance that it will triumph, and then soothes by warning of the consequence it places before us: *"Fear the Fire."*

Before our arrogance precedes us, the corresponding promise occurs: {Give good news ˹O Prophet˺ to those who believe and do good that they will have Gardens under which rivers flow} [Al-Baqara:25]. The argument has now been made: We must bring a surah like it, and if we do not, let us avoid the Fire, and aspire to Paradise.

Does that not sound like a fair offer? If I were truly skeptical, I doubt that I would have attempted, knowing that I do not have the tools of challenge, but I would comb ancient and modern references for those who preceded me in this challenge, supposedly masters of poetry and literature, and then verify what they created, and with my eyes and ears, bare of any professional criticism tools, compare the two texts: the Quranic surah and the human text. I would not only cross-match the rhetoric, photography and musical rhythm of the text with its counterpart in the other text. I would also not stop at attempts to reproduce stories and lessons, but I would stand at length at each word of the Quranic surah when I sense the truth of its issuance from a non-human source, and I will search deep within myself for any similar feeling when reading all the words of the counter-text.

Speech is the attribute of the speaker, and what is bred in the bone will come out in the flesh; a genius may be lucky in their attempt to create a perfect text, but it will not exceed his human status, no matter how

visionary he may be and his imagination will not penetrate the diameters of the heavens and the earth, or reach the greatness of Allah's Kingdom.

If I do not take all these steps, detached from all the tendencies of defiance and superiority, I would be nothing but an arrogant fiddler.

A dialogue with everyone.

Do you recall my initial stance at the beginning of the surah when we wondered why it was called Al Baqara (The Cow)? Perhaps you will be surprised to know that it was not mentioned before the sixty-seventh verse, only after this miraculous text presented its promise to the unbelievers and hypocrites, it began to tell the story of Adam and the devil, the basis the story of *"Takleef"* (the imposing of obligation by Allah over humans): {˹Remember˺ when your Lord said to the angels, *"I am going to place a successive ˹human˺ authority on earth."*} [Al-Baqara:30]. Directly after this, He addresses the people of Israel: {O people of Israel! Remember My favors upon you. Fulfill your covenant and I will fulfill Mine, and stand in awe of Me ˹alone˺} [Al-Baqara:40] Thus, when He enumerates His blessings over them, He reminds them of the story of the cow; they were ordered by Moses, their prophet, to slaughter a cow to uncover the real killer in one of the crimes that shook their society about 3000 years ago.

The story has interesting details, lessons and morals. And the choice of that particular cow, has another story mentioned in the prophetic biography and not in the Quran, yet the whole surah was called 'the cow', seemingly to commemorate that dazzling miracle, and perhaps to attract the reader's attention towards the story of the children of Israel, as the main subject of the surah is dialogue with the Jews and the Christians.

Nevertheless, when I read it with the eyes of an atheist, who disbelieves in the unseen - and I do not say the Jew or the Christian - I find that it converses with me as I converse with it, making a very strong argument against me.

Truly, *"there is no doubt about it!"* Only belief requires objectivity.



Al Imran... When the companions mistook

Perhaps none among the followers of the sunnah, even among the common folk, disagree that the companions are fallible human beings, prone to mistakes just like the Muslims who came after them. Nevertheless, today we are divided over differing attitudes towards the companions, even among Sunnis themselves, as well as the other sects.

Ibn Taymiyyah says: *"The companions made mistakes, and committed sins, and they are not infallible, but they do not deliberately lie, and no one would have deliberately lied to the Prophet -peace be upon him- or else Allah would have exposed him."*(1)

In light of this, I wanted to read and to have a dialogue with surah Al-Imran, specifically the part which Allah sent from His high place to those companions who returned from the battle of Uhud, exhausted both physically and mentally. And I invite you, dear reader, to experience it with me.

It was reported that Ibn Masoud -*may Allah be pleased with him*- said: *"On the day of Uhud, women were behind the Muslims, finishing off those wounded from the disbelievers. If I had sworn on that day, I would have hoped to swear that none of us wants this world, until Allah sent down: {Whoever wants this world and whoever of you wants the Hereafter, then He will drive you away from them to test you} [Al-Imran:152]"*(2)

(1) Ibn Taymiyyah, *"Minhaj al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah"*, Vol. 1, p. 306.

(2) Musnad Imam Ahmad (4414), and Ibn Kathir mentioned in the fourth volume of Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah that the narration in it is weak.

When Abdullah bin Masoud saw the Muslims embrace jihad on that difficult day, to the extent that women also engaged in the battle to finish off the wounded on the battlefield, not in captivity, he thought that they had reached the peak of sincerity, and he almost swore to that. However, he was surprised that the battle had turned in favor of the disbelievers, to later reveal the severe mistake committed by the archers who descended from the mountain that they were stationed on, about whom Allah Almighty says: *"Among you are some who desire this world."*

You may think, dear reader, that the reproach here is directed to the hypocrites, but the truth is otherwise. The same verse pardons them: {He denied you victory over them as a test, yet He has pardoned you, and Allah is gracious to the believers} [Al-Imran:152], so the companions are the believers, and they have received pardon after their grave mistake.

Historians narrate that after dividing his army, the prophet - *peace be upon him* - stationed fifty archers on Mount Aynan, opposite Mount Uhud, with Abdullah Ibn Jubayr as their leader, and said to them: *"If you see us snatched by birds, do not leave this place until I send for you, and if you see us defeating the enemy and grounding them, do not leave until I send for you."*(1) That is, they were not to leave that sensitive site until they were certain that the battle was over: their role was to protect the army on the battlefield.

The story is well-known. When the archers saw signs of defeat among the disbelievers, three quarters of them - as narrated in some accounts - abandoned their positions and descended in a hurry to collect the spoils. Their leader Abdullah bin Jubayr shouted at them: 'Have you forgotten what the Messenger of Allah said to you?' A tragedy followed: The disbelievers turned on them from behind and killed whoever remained steadfast atop the mount, and they did the same to the Muslims, killing seventy martyrs, until the situation had reached its climax, and only

(1) Sahih al-Bukhari (2874)

twelve[1] endured with the prophet - *peace be upon him* - as narrated by Bukhari, or seven Ansar and two Muhajireen (emigrators) as narrated by Muslim.[2] The battle came to a painful end when Abu Sufyan, leader of the disbelievers then, shouted: *"Our victory today is a counterbalance to your victory at Badr and we fight one another in war with alternate success."*

There is no doubt that this is a painful, shocking story, as the orders of the Prophet -*peace be upon him*- to the archers, were very clear, and their leader Ibn Jubayr did not fail to remind them of those strict orders, yet most disobeyed him, descending in hope for some wreckage of worldly life!

Indeed, fear prompted others to flee as well; only a small number remained with the Prophet while he called *"who will turn them away from us and have Paradise?"*, so seven were killed before him. He -*peace be upon him*- said: *"Our companions did not treat us with justice."*[3] What a gentle reproach despite the horror of the situation. He did not accuse them of treason as any military commander would, he only described them as unfair.

I could not resist the urgency of the questions I had about the reason for this betrayal, and I could not find a more convincing justification than the weakness of the human soul, as many of these companions -*may Allah be pleased with them*- were still new to Islam, and faith was not so deeply ingrained in their hearts to abide by such a strict military order, and the weakness of others in the face of death was exposed when the battle turned to favor their enemy.

Perhaps what favours this opinion of mine is that some began to question after the battle: *"How would this befall us though Allah has*

(1) The same reference.
(2) Sahih Muslim (3447).
(3) The same reference.

promised us victory?"[1] And those that asked this were not hypocrites either, for the answer given by revelation later reveals that the speech is directed to the esteemed companions, or at least a group of them.

Here came the beginning of the divine answer: {Indeed, Allah fulfilled His promise to you when you ⌜initially⌝ swept them away by His Will, then your courage weakened and you disputed about the command and disobeyed, after Allah had brought victory within your reach. Some of you were after worldly gain while others desired a heavenly reward. He denied you victory over them as a test, yet He has pardoned you. And Allah is Gracious to the believers} [Al-Imran:152]. Thus, Allah did not break His promise to them, as they were closing on the disbelievers at the outset of the battle, only when they disputed and disobeyed the command of the Messenger did they fail.

Notice that the matter is not limited to defeat, as the same verse says: {…Then Allah saved you all from them from being killed to later test them with another test, yet He has pardoned you. And Allah is Gracious to the believer} [Al-Imran:152]. Allah rescued them from being killed to test them again with a test of faith, patience and learning, for He had pardoned them with forgiveness, even though they deserve more than what they received.[2] This all suffices to show the human shortcomings of the companions, and still, they are the best of all generations, may Allah be pleased with them.

The next verse seems to address the other party with severe censure, those who fled from the battlefield after victory turned into defeat: {Remember⌝ when you were running far away ⌜in panic⌝—not looking at anyone—while the Messenger was calling to you from behind! So Allah rewarded your disobedience with distress upon distress} [Al-Imran:153].

(1) Safwat al-Tafasir, p. 199.
(2) The previous reference, p. 200.

Nevertheless, before distress can weigh heavy on hearts from such a severe reproach, as they are people with most delicate hearts, relief comes in the following verse: {Then after distress, He sent down serenity in the form of drowsiness overcoming some of you} [Al-Imran:154]. It is narrated in several hadiths that Allah sent down to them tranquility in the form of sleep while they were on the battlefield to ease their gloom as the ranks dispersed and the dust dissipated. Surprisingly, sleep was sent down only to the believers among them, including the disobedient who caused the defeat, but the hypocrites were deprived of sleep and stayed awake awaiting their punishment: {while others were disturbed by evil thoughts about Allah—the thoughts of ˹pre-Islamic˺ ignorance} [Al-Imran:154].

This again confirms that those who committed that mistake were a group of honored companions, not hypocrites, for their hearts are subject to sedition like us, and Satan may harm them even with the Prophet -*peace be upon him*- still among them. The following verse clearly reveals this: {Indeed, those ˹believers˺ who fled on the day when the two armies met were made to slip by Satan because of their misdeeds} [Al-Imran:155].

Again, a reminder of divine pardon comes at the end of the verse: {But Allah has pardoned them. Surely Allah is All-Forgiving, Most Forbearing}. It is as if the Quran obstructs the path of the hypocrites and the disbelievers at every turn so they do not gloat at the believers for their error, and so that grief does not overbear their hearts, especially when coming out of a painful battle.

A divine command also addresses the Prophet to pardon them. If he were a general in a modern democratic state, he would have immediately arrested them upon their return to the city, establish a military court for them, and sentence them to life imprisonment, and possibly death for high treason. If he were a dictator, he would not have awaited a trial but would have taken revenge after they had failed him on the battlefield,

almost killing him. Yet the signs of prophecy do not part from him even in the darkest of circumstances, so observe how Allah first instilled mercy within him before guiding him towards the required course of action: {It is out of Allah's mercy that you ˹O Prophet˺ have been lenient with them. Had you been cruel or hard-hearted, they would have certainly abandoned you. So pardon them, ask Allah's forgiveness for them, and consult with them in ˹conducting˺ matters} [Al Imran:159].

In another verse, Allah bestows the companions with the mercy of His prophet: {Indeed, Allah has done the believers a ˹great˺ favor by raising a messenger from among them—reciting to them His revelations, purifying them, and teaching them the Book and wisdom. For indeed they had previously been clearly astray} [Al Imran:164]. Most probably they had never seen such a show of his mercy as they did then, for he did not chastise them for their disobedience, and never punished them. On the contrary, he only recited the divine reproach: {Why is it when you suffered casualties ˹at Uḥud˺—although you had made your enemy suffer twice as much ˹at Badr˺—you protested, "How could this be?"? Say, ˹O Prophet,˺ "It is because of your disobedience." Surely Allah is Most Capable of everything} [Al Imran:165].

Imagine - dear reader - the feelings of the companions as they listened to those verses sent down from the sky and recited by their prophet. Imagine the poignant scene of tears and lamentation whenever these verses resonated in their ears or were recited during night prayers.

From defeat to victory.

And before I let you tear up, let me finish the story. The battle was not over yet, and the disbelievers regretted not continuing the battle to fully eliminate the Muslims and eradicate the entire Prophetic Message; they planned to pursue the Muslims to Medina, and attack them in their homes. When this news reached the Prophet -*peace be upon him*- only

one day after the battle, he called on the companions to prepare to fight once more, and only those involved in the previous day's battle were called to come out.

In a way, it was an opportunity to rectify their error and to repent, for the books of Seerah (Prophetic Biography) are filled with the sayings of the companions who rushed to answer the call, despite their deep psychological and physical pain. I will mention one example of an unknown man, who may not be a senior companion. Abu Al-Saib narrated that a man from the companions of the Messenger of Allah, *-peace be upon him-*, a member of Bani Abd Alash-hal, witnessed Uhud, and he said: *"I witnessed Uhud with the Messenger of Allah -peace be upon him- and my brother and I returned wounded, so when the "muezzin"* (caller) of the Messenger of Allah *-peace be upon him-* called us out to meet the enemy, I said to my brother - or he said to me - can we miss an opportunity to go on a foray with the Messenger of Allah, *peace be upon him*? By Allah, we have no animal to ride, and we are both heavily wounded. So we went out with the Messenger of Allah, and I was less wounded, so whenever he weakened, I tried to help him, until we ended up with the rest of the Muslims."(1)

Here, the hypocrites bared their true selves more openly than ever before; they rushed to intimidate the companions from what they would face, and began spreading rumors about the mobilization of tribes of Quraysh to eliminate the Muslims. On the other hand, the strength of the faith of the companions emerged, for after they failed the Quran admonished them, but now the verses praise their heroic position: {As for⌝ those who responded to the call of Allah and His Messenger after their injury, those of them who did good and were mindful ⌜of Allah⌝ will have a great reward. Those who were warned, *"Your enemies have mobilized their forces against you, so fear them,"* the warning only made them grow

(1) Tafsir Ibn Kathir, p. 72. p23

stronger in faith and they replied, "Allah ⌜alone⌝ is sufficient ⌜as an aid⌝ for us and ⌜He⌝ is the best Protector. So, they returned with Allah's favors and grace, suffering no harm. For they sought to please Allah. And surely Allah is ⌜the⌝ Lord of infinite bounty} [172-174]

Notice Allah's consolation to them: *"so they returned with Allah's favour."* Glory be to Allah! How the defeat turned to victory, and how quickly repentance and remorse came to fruition in just one day.

Ibn Kathir says in his interpretation(1) that when Abu Sufyan knew that the Muslims had already begun to seek them out, he sent to the Prophet -*peace be upon him*- saying: *"Our meeting place is at Badr, where you killed our companions,"* for the instinct of revenge filled the hearts of the disbelievers for a long while after their first defeat in Badr. The Prophet -*peace be upon him*- answered with approval, and his army reached Badr indeed. In fact, they went to the market and made some purchases, and stayed a while in wait for the army of Quraysh and its alleged allies, yet fear bound Quraysh to their homes, even though the first battle was in their favor. So Allah's blessing and favor over the repenting, steadfast, patient companions was complete, for they won the second round without shedding a single drop of blood, returning to their city with their heads held high, and Allah was pleased with them and gave them comfort: {So they returned with a mighty favour and a great bounty from Allah, having suffered no harm, and they followed the good pleasure of Allah, and Allah is of infinite bounty} [Al-Imran:174]. And what bounty is greater than this?

Curriculum reform

It is unfortunate that I did not learn this lesson as a child. The story of the battle of Uhud was narrated to us in schools as the first Muslim defeat, and I still remember the psychological distress that this *"defeat"*

(1) The previous reference, p. 73.

caused me, even though it was justified by human error and disobedience of the order of the Prophet, *peace be upon him*. Yet, the complete lesson should have been imparted to us, showcasing the swift transition of the companions from defiance and flight to bravely confronting their wounds and challenging their enemy. Disregarding the discouraging rumors, this transformation stands as the paramount lesson to be gleaned from the entirety of this story.

The companions are human beings as we are, some of them may lust for bounty in a moment of weakness, then wonder about the reason for their defeat, except they soon felt regret, repented and understood their lesson, turning from one state to another, especially when they were new to faith.

Now read the verse in this honorable surah which shifts from the story of Uhud to discussing the people of the book: {You believers will surely be tested in your wealth and yourselves, and you will certainly hear many hurtful words from those who were given the scripture before you and from the disbelievers, But if you are patient and mindful of Allah – surely this is a resolve to aspire to} [Al-Imran:186]. Notice that the promise of affliction comes in the form of firm affirmation, as it is a certain matter, a message that has passed through the centuries in order that we comprehend the lesson and prepare, for the enemy is of great strength, and we are called upon to be resolute.

(Indeed, Allah's merchandise is precious; surely, Allah's merchandise is Paradise).[1]



(1) Narrated by al-Tirmidhi (2450), and he said: *"This is a hadith that is deemed good."*

Al-An'am... A dialogue that exposes the mindset of ingratitude and the secret of enslaving human beings

Perhaps the first thing that springs to the reader's mind who discovers the Quran for the first time is that surah Al-Anaam will mention the provisions of sacrifice, and the zakat of camels, cows, lambs and goats, especially if he reads a translation of the meanings of the Holy Quran in foreign languages. For example, some English translations translate the name of the surah to *"Livestock"*, which means cattle or beasts. However, the surah does not mention sacrifice except in the 118th verse, and beyond, that is, in the last third of the surah.

Surah Al-An'am was revealed in Makkah with some sporadic verses which were revealed in Medina, and is one of the seven longest surahs. Since it was revealed in Makkah, its focus must be on correcting faith and belief, not on Sharia rulings. Thus, the verses related to cattle came to demolish the ignorant pagan concepts in dealing with sacrifices, although it presents lengthy dialogues before this doctrinal correction, aiming to collectively expose the incoherence of the basis on which pre-Islamic legislation of slaughter was built. The reader will not reach this discovery except after the weakness of the minds that believed in them and acted accordingly, is exposed to him.

This statement, which crept into my subconscious while I was contemplating the context of the Quranic dialogue, hinted at the emergence of a *"herd mentality"* in the forefront of consciousness. It felt akin to observing a portrayal critical of absent-mindedness, all under the weighty title of Al-An'am.

I searched the surah for the repetition of the words *"Say"* and found the command repeated forty four times; a striking number indeed. This repetition may be mentioned in one verse of this surah four times, yet the same command, *"Say"* does not occur in the following surah- although it is longer than *"Al-An'am"*- except only eleven times.

As for the phrase, *"they said,"* it is mentioned in this chapter thirteen times, and mostly in the context of narrating the sayings of the disbelievers, before exposing their incoherence.

Exploring the message

Let us begin our journey of discovery from its very beginning, as the surah opens with praise and glory of Allah, then bashes those who disbelieve in their Lord: {Praise be to Allah who created the heavens and the earth and made darkness and light, then those who disbelieve in their Lord set up equals to their lord in worship} [Al-An'am:1]. The meaning of the last word is to associate others with Allah. What we realize from the beginning is that the surah will inform us of the peculiarities of the disbelievers.

Beginning with the fourth verse, these peculiarities descend into a surprising narrative, for we understand from the very start of the argument that their foremost characteristic is ingratitude and rejection: {Whenever a sign comes to them from their Lord, they turn away from it} [Al-An 'am:4], then comes the statement with unparalleled clarity: {If we sent down a book to you in a parchment and they touched it with their hands, those who disbelieved would say that this is nothing but clear magic} [Al-An'am:7]. And there is no declaration so profound, for even the arrogant materialist doctrines of our modern era may reject reasoning with tangible proof, but the disbelievers' indulgence in dealing with magic may actually lead them to this kind of sophistry.

The surah then begins to list their sayings in the following verse. Let us see what dialogues of sophistry the Quran has immortalized at the very beginning of revelation: {And they said, *"why has no visible angel come with him? ...} [Al-An'am:8]. The response here is not preceded by, "Say"* as will come later, for there is nothing worthy of mention in what the ungrateful require of their Lord, but it is a lightning strike of a proof to declare the status of Majesty: {And if we had sent him down an angel, the matter would have been certainly settled at once, and then they would have never been given more time to repent * and if we had sent an angel, we would have certainly made it <assume the form of> a man - leaving them more confused than they already are} [Al-An'am:8-9]. That is, if their request to send down an angel was fulfilled, whether as a substitute for sending a human prophet or as a support for him, Allah will not indulge them after that and will hasten their destruction if they insist on ingratitude. And the angel will be sent down in human form to be witnessed, and lived with. Still, their confusion will not disappear and the problem will not end; such conditions only increase their confusion.

In face of this stubbornness, the introduction puts the dialogue in its real course; we do not stand before an intellectual debate with philosophers who adhere to the rules of logic, rather we are witness to a habitual mentality upon which the minds of ingratitude have formed for centuries: {Other messengers had already been ridiculed before you ˹O Prophet˺, but those who mocked them were overtaken by what they used to ridicule} [Al-An'am:10] It is ridicule then! And to every context a saying.

Then come the commands to respond with the order *"Say"*: {Say, walk on the earth and then see ...}, {Say to whom what is in the heavens and the earth?}, {Say, O Prophet, Will I take any guardian other than Allah? ... Say, *"I have been commanded to be the first to submit"*}, {Say that I am afraid if I disobey my Lord the torment of a great day}, {Ask, who is the best witness, Say: *"Allah is! He is a witness between me, and you and this Quran*

has been revealed to me to warn you about it and whoever it reaches. Do you pagans testify that there are other gods besides Allah?" Then, I will never testify ⌜to this⌝!" ⌜And⌝ say, *"There is only One God. And I totally reject whatever ⌜idols⌝ you associate with Him."*} [Al-An'am:19].

A succession of orders commanding *"Say"*, concluding with the testimony of Allah Himself: *"Say, Allah is a witness between me and you."* This is followed by a list of their incoherent sayings again, and I will not wait here, but will rather leave the task of discovering it in the Quran to the reader himself. I will, in fact, dive directly into the most serious of the disbelievers' sayings, and I will stand in reverence beside the reader for the consolation the Almighty Lord of all Creation, gives to His Messenger: {We may know that it grieves you what they say. It is not your honesty that they question, but it is Allah's signs that the wrongdoers are denying} [Al-An'am:33]. In these immortal words is a consolation for every preacher and warner, especially if one knows that the infallible Prophet himself was hurt by their repudiation, so he received consolation from the All-Knowing of what resides in the hearts of the deniers.

And this is their practice across all ages: {Indeed, messengers before you were rejected, but patiently endured rejection and persecution until our Help came to them} [Al-An'am:34]. They are not seekers of truth nor seekers of proof; they are only prepared to argue against any proof or verse sent to them: {If you find their denial unbearable, then build—if you can—a tunnel through the earth or stairs to the sky to bring them a ⌜more compelling⌝ sign. Had Allah so willed, He could have guided them all. So do not be one of those ignorant ⌜of this fact⌝} [Al-An'am:35].

You will not find a more eloquent analogy for this type of human being: {Only the attentive will respond ⌜to your call⌝. As for the dead, Allah will raise them up, then to Him they will ⌜all⌝ be returned} [Al-An'am:36]. One category responds because they heed the call, the other category are as good as dead; it is useless to debate them.

Thus, the dialogue goes back to the incapacitating demands of people who have mastered ridicule: {They ask, *"Why has no ˹other˺ sign been sent down to him from his Lord?"* Say, ˹O Prophet,˺ *"Allah certainly has the power to send down a sign"*—though most of them do not know} [Al-An 'am:37], and the response this time will drive the dialogue to the proper arena, after it labels these mindsets of having no knowledge: *"They do not know,"* the dialogue then moves directly to speak of beasts, as if the mind excuses itself for presenting proofs here: {All living beings roaming the earth and winged birds soaring in the sky are communities like yourselves. We have left nothing out of the Record. * Then to their Lord they will be gathered altogether} [Al-An 'am:38].

The previous verse is not out of context. Although it reveals a great secret about animal diversity, which researchers today recognize as variation in animal behaviour and personalities, just as humans vary, it is followed by a stunning statement: {Those who deny Our signs are ˹willfully˺ deaf and dumb—lost in darkness. Allah leaves whoever He wills to stray and guides whomever He wills to the Straight Way} [Al-An 'am:39]. Notice the parallel here? Those who reject obvious signs may possess senses, yet their lack of gratitude places them among the deaf and mute, stumbling in darkness. It is challenging to find a comparison for this category of individuals, except to liken them to beasts!

The surah denies that messengers possess an angelic nature, and ascertains their humanity, which is compatible with the humanity of those to whom they were sent: {We have sent messengers only as deliverers of good news and as cautioners} [Al-An'am:48]. {Say, ˹O Prophet,˺ *"I do not say to you that I possess Allah's treasuries or know the unseen, nor do I claim to be an angel. I only follow what is revealed to me ...} [Al-An'am:50]. Not much thought is required to recognize the soundness of these principles, as for one who disputes them, he is worthy of the previous analogy, almost losing the utility of his senses again: {...Say, "Are those blind ˹to the truth˺ equal to those who can see? Will you not then reflect?"*} [Al-An'am:50].

We read it in a context suited to censuring the polytheists, which is in contrast to other stories wherein his story *-peace be upon him-* is mentioned while addressing the people of the book. Here we read his denial of his father Azar's idolatry: {And when Abraham said to his father Azar, *"Do you take idols as gods? I see you and your people in clear error."* [Al-An 'am:74]. This is followed by the famous dialogue that ends with refuting the divinity of the sun and moon and all other heavenly bodies.

The verses do not delve into another lengthy debate with the sophists; they simply highlight the vast divide between common sense and the worshipping of stars and planets: {And his people argued with him about God, and he respond: Are you arguing with me about Allah while he has guided me?} [Al-An'am:80], and to conclude: {This was the argument We gave Abraham against his people. We elevate in rank whoever We please. Surely your Lord is All-Wise, All-Knowing} [Al-An 'am:83].

The Secret behind glorifying inanimate objects.

The topic of logic alone did not stop me in my tracks throughout this wondrous narrative nor even discovering the commonalities between idol worshipers, planets and beasts, for it is expected to question the reason for this abjectness in ignorance. Why should a people, led by its own elites, believe that inanimate objects possess more miraculous qualities than human consciousness, sense, and ability as well as revere and worship them?

The first flicker of an answer shone before my eyes in the hundredth verse: {Yet they associate the jinn with Allah ⌜in worship⌝, even though He created them, and they falsely attribute to Him sons and daughters out of ignorance. Glorified and Exalted is He above what they claim!} [Al-An'am:100]. The Quran, as usual, encapsulates a summary scholars waste their lives to obtain. This great verse indicates that the disbelievers associated the jinn with Allah in worship, although He is their Creator.

We are then told that they attributed gods and goddesses to Him. In other words, they worshiped not only idols such as Hubal, AL-Lat, AL-Uzza, and others, but also the demons of the jinn, assuming that they shared a divinity with Allah, they further believed that there were gods inferior to his *"sons and daughters"*.

In his interpretation, Al-Qurtubi notes that the revealed verse was about the disbelievers among the Arabs, and he quotes Al-Kalbi as saying it was revealed about the Zanadiqa (heretics), an adjective used to describe the Zoroastrians (Magians) and other followers of Eastern esoteric religions, who said -as in the interpretation of Al-Qurtubi- *"Allah and Iblis are brothers, for Allah is the Creator of man and beasts, and Iblis is the Creator of Jinns, predatory beasts and scorpions. The Magians said, "The world has two creators: an ancient god, and a demon from that ancient god."*(1)

Those who research the history of religions know that this dualistic idolatry has been incorporated into several polytheistic beliefs, and it claims the existence of two peer gods, whose qualities match those of the biblical god and the devil himself, as Al-Kalbi clearly narrates.

If it wasn't departing from the subject of the book, I would have mentioned many examples of mythical beings worshiped by pagans in various civilizations and throughout the continents of the world, as having very similar characteristics, which sometimes combined the qualities of animals and humans, and sometimes manifested themselves in the form of monsters and ogres, or even as spitting images of glamorous women. The ignorants would raise some of these beings to the ranks of the great gods, and others were lowered in rank, all of whom in their sights were

(1) Tafsir al-Qurtubi, Vol. 4, p. 36.

worthy of worship and offerings, and we can see singularities in these beings that perfectly match the qualities of the jinn.(1)

As for the *"sons and daughters"* attributed by the polytheist to Allah Almighty, they are either the Messiah, Uzair, or the angels. The Quran has mentioned this elsewhere: *"Still they have labeled the angels, who are servants of the Most Compassionate, as female. Did they witness their creation? Their statement will be recorded, and they will be questioned!"* [Az-Zukhruf:19].

We also know that some images of gods and female demigods worshiped in various civilizations were similar to angels, and the revisionists of the Torah planted the idea of *"fallen angels"* as a race among the angels, since the Jews and Christians whose books were distorted do not believe that the race of jinn exist at all.

We Muslims know that angels and jinn are two different races; the former is a creature of light, but has no imposed obligation (takleef), and the latter is a creature of fire and has an imposed obligation, just as the children of Adam do.

In surah Saba', the Almighty says about what will occur on Judgment Day: {And ⌜consider⌝ the Day He will gather them all together, and then ask the angels, *"Was it you that these ⌜disbelievers used to worship? They will say, "Glory be to You! Our loyalty is to You, not them. In fact, they ⌜only⌝ followed the ⌜temptations of evil⌝ jinn,* in whom most of them had faith."*} [Saba':40-41]. Even those who believed that they worshiped angels will find that they will disown them in the hereafter, and they would find out that they were in actuality worshiping demons of the jinn who misled them and convinced them that they were angels and gods.

(1) I have detailed the discussion on this matter in the chapter *"Fear of Satan"* in my book *"The Future of Fear,"* published by Dar Maktabat al-Usra al-Arabiya, Istanbul.

Let us continue our contemplation of surah Al-An'am, before we comprehensively view the totality of the verses: {And so We have made for every prophet enemies—devilish humans and jinn—whispering to one another with elegant words of deception. Had it been your Lord's Will, they would not have done such a thing. So leave them and their deceit,} [Al-An'am:112], and what shocking information, the demons of mankind and the jinn - who used to antagonize each prophet - inspire disbelief to one another, and battle the prophets through ornate speech. Thus, the issue is not limited to whispers placed by the jinn in the hearts of their human allies; there is even an exchange between the two parties when they *"whisper to one another,"* and this is what the interpreters narrate in their books.

After some verses, the topic of sacrifice begins, starting with the requirement of uttering the name of Allah: {So eat only what is slaughtered in Allah's Name if you truly believe in His revelations} [Al-An'am:118]. Three verses later we receive more details: {Do not eat of what is not slaughtered in Allah's Name. For that would certainly be ˹an act of˺ disobedience. Surely the devils whisper to their ˹human˺ associates to argue with you. * If you were to obey them, then you ˹too˺ would be disbelievers} [Al-An'am:121]. Although the interpretations report narrations that suggest the aforementioned demons are the demons of mankind, i.e. the Magi's and the people of the book who advised their associates from the disbelievers of Quraish, it seems more likely to me that other narrations - including those quoted by Ibn Abbas -*may Allah be pleased with him*- which mention that they are the demons of the jinn, who suggest to their associates from Quraish to protest the Prophet -*peace be upon him*- regarding the rulings on sacrifice, so they would say, *"Don't eat what Allah slaughtered but eat what you slaughtered"*.

The testimony does not end here. If we continue reading, the verses will lead us to the final scene wherein the veil is peeled, and the jinn emerge from the unseen world to the witnessed world, and all will be

gathered on one plane to publicly receive judgement: {⌜Consider⌝ the Day He will gather them ⌜all⌝ together and say, *"O assembly of jinn! You misled humans in great numbers."* And their human associates will say, *"Our Lord! We benefited from each other's company, but now we have reached the term which You appointed for us."* ⌜Then⌝ He will say, *"The Fire is your home, yours to stay in forever, except whoever Allah wills to spare."* Surely your Lord is All-Wise, All-Knowing} [Al-An'am:128]. The verse does not suffice to summarize the final verse: *"The Fire is your abode,"* but it clearly reveals the charge of the demons of the jinn: *"You have misled many of them, and their associates admit their crime:"* Enjoy one another, "that is, there was an exchange of benefits, and the jinn enjoyed dominion over mankind, and even enslaving them.

Rituals of Slaughter

Now, after this clear testimony of the relationship between the demons of the jinn with their human associates, and the danger of jinn not being limited to whisperings, we reach the first mentioning of cattle in this noble surah: {The pagans set aside for Allah a share of the crops and cattle He created, saying, *"This ⌜portion⌝ is for Allah,"* so they claim, "and this ⌜one⌝ for our associate-gods} [Al-An'am:136]. That is, the Arab disbelievers divide their agricultural crops and sacrifices, offering one part to Allah, given to guests and the needy, and the other part they offer to their idols, and perhaps to their guards.

The matter is not limited to idolatry in slaughter and distribution, but the disbelievers adopted special legislation to prohibit some of the cattle on themselves, or on their women only, or to permit them to whomever they wanted exclusively: {They say, *"These cattle and crops are reserved—none may eat them except those we permit,"* so they claim. Some other cattle are exempted from labor and others are not slaughtered in Allah's Name—falsely attributing lies to Him. He will repay them for their lies. They ⌜also⌝ say, *"The offspring of this cattle is reserved for our males and*

forbidden to our females; but if it is stillborn, they may all share it." He will repay them for their falsehood. Surely He is All-Wise, All-Knowing} [Al-An'am:138-139].

I return here to my earlier question: Why has a multitude of people throughout the centuries around the world believed that some stones are worthy of reverence and offerings? In other words, if they chose to disbelieve and rebel against Allah's commands, why did they commit themselves to worshiping alternative gods when they could have escaped the burdens of worship as a whole?

I will add a question which arises from the verses we have just read: Why did these people make the rulings of sacrifice so stringent upon themselves, for they narrowed what was wide, and forbade what could have been permitted?!

The answer is implied in what we have read so far about why these people made the rulings of sacrifice so stringent upon themselves: {I will surely bring his descendants under my sway} [Al-Israa:62]. His prophecy came true: {And you do not find most of them thankful} [Al-A'raf:17], and the demons of the jinn fulfilled the mission and enjoyed it, not for envy of the children of Adam, but also to play the role of the false deity partially or completely.

In additional evidence of the satanic role of enslaving the children of Adam, we also read a verse that mediated the previous verses of Al-An'am: {Likewise, the pagans' evil associates have made it appealing to them to kill their own children—only leading to their destruction as well as confusion in their faith…}. [Al-An'am:137]. The talk here about demons who persuaded many of the disbelievers to commit a crime that is radically incompatible with common sense and not tolerated by even beasts, which is killing their children, whether for fear of poverty, or burying their daughters alive, or even providing children as offerings to the gods as in some civilizations in the Levant and Latin America.

These horrific crimes would not have become widely known without the external intervention of the devil that adorns them to man, justifying them with need at times, or washing off shame at times, pleasing the gods or providing them as offerings to serve as guards against the gods' evil at other times.

And look at the magnitude of loss for the one who foolishly and ignorantly leaves his mind an easy prey to the devils to be possessed: {Lost indeed are those who have murdered their own children foolishly out of ignorance and have forbidden what Allah has provided for them—falsely attributing lies to Allah. They have certainly strayed and are not ⌜rightly⌝ guided} [Al-An'am:140].

After all, Allah makes it clear to us that the path of guidance is not fraught with such foolishness, and does not require sacrificing the loved ones, nor is it tainted with crimes and malice, nor is it lacking in the pleasure of good things: {He is the One Who produces gardens—both cultivated and wild—and palm trees, crops of different flavors, olives, and pomegranates—similar ⌜in shape⌝, but dissimilar ⌜in taste⌝. Eat the fruit they bear and pay the dues at harvest, but do not waste. Surely He does not like the wasteful} [Al-An'am:141].

Then he praises by reminding of the grace of the cattle: {Some cattle are fit for labor, others are too small. Eat of what Allah has provided for you and do not follow Satan's footsteps. Certainly, he is your sworn enemy}[142].

In order that no doubt remains in the heart of the skeptic, the call comes to clarify the difference between the ways of truth and the ways of demons: {Say, ⌜O Prophet, ⌝ *"Come! Let me recite to you what your Lord has forbidden to you: do not associate others with Him ⌜in worship⌝. ⌜Do not fail to⌝ honor your parents. Do not kill your children for fear of poverty. We provide for you and for them. Do not come near indecencies, openly or secretly. Do not take a ⌜human⌝ life—made sacred by Allah—except*

with ˹legal˺ right. This is what He has commanded you, so perhaps you will understand} [Al-An'am:151], and because of the clarity of the truth and its consistency with "Fitra" (the innate nature), the first part of the appeal was concluded by addressing the mind: *"May you be wise"*, as it should be sufficient.

Then He continues: {And do not come near the wealth of the orphan—unless intending to enhance it—until they attain maturity. Give full measure and weigh with justice. We never require any soul more than what it can afford. Whenever you speak, maintain justice—even regarding a close relative. And fulfil your covenant with Allah. This is what He has commanded you, so perhaps you will be mindful. * Indeed, that is My Path—perfectly straight. So follow it and do not follow other ways, for they will lead you away from His Way. This is what He has commanded you, so perhaps you will be conscious ˹of Allah} [Al-An'am 152-153]. Ibn 'Abbas used to say, *"These verses are the ones that are of utmost seal."*.

In conclusion, the holy surah leads to a clear separation: {Say, ˹O Prophet,˺ *"Surely my Lord has guided me to the Straight Path, a perfect way, the faith of Abraham, the upright, who was not one of the disbelievers. * Say, "Surely my prayer, my sacrifice, my life, and my death are all for Allah—Lord of all worlds. * He has no partner. So I am commanded, and so I am the first to submit."*} [Al-An'am:161-163]. The argument is raised, and there is no more but to cling to the true way, and to declare the constitution of Islam, and to pray, and to ascertain everything in this life.



Al-A'raf... Satan promises and plans before the story begins.

After I completed the discovery of the intriguing sequencing of dialogue in surah Al-An'am, and the subsequent identification of the satanic role in the game of misinformation, I noticed that the regularity of the Quranic gems in surah Al-A'raf continued, which is then resolved in the order of the Quran, so the first page almost ended until I found at the end a new beginning to the story of Adam and Eve with Iblis, and it seemed that it would be told from a different angle than the one I knew before in surah Al-Baqara.

After surah Al-A'raf reminds us of Iblis's rejection of the divine command to prostrate to Adam, arguing that he is *"better than him"*, we see in this surah that the order to expel Iblis was issued before the beginning of Adam's trial: {[Allah] said, *"Descend from Paradise, for it is not for you for being arrogant therein. So, get out; indeed, you are of the debased} [Al-A'raf:13]. As we see at this early stage of the story, Iblis asked to delay his end until the day of resurrection: {[Satan] said, "Reprieve me until the Day they are resurrected."*} [Al-A'raf:14], and then his announcement of his plan: {[Satan] said, "He said, "For leaving me to stray I will lie in ambush for them on Your Straight Path * I will approach them from their front, their back, their right, their left, and then You will find most of them ungrateful} [Al-A'raf:16-17].

It is remarkable that Iblis talks about being granted respite until the Day of Resurrection, and promises to ambush Adam and his descendants, despite Adam *-peace be upon him-* not yet being assigned with any obligation, let alone expecting him to forget and err, while his descendants had not come to exist yet.

Does this arrangement of events remind you of anything, dear reader? The Prophet -*peace be upon him*- said, *"Adam and Moses protested, and Moses said to him, 'You are our father, you have disappointed us, you have brought us and yourself out of Paradise.' Adam replied: "Are you blaming me for what Allah planned for me, even before He created me?"* The Prophet (peace and upon him) said, *"Adam predominated Moses in this debate; Adam predominated Moses in this debate."* [Agreed upon - by Al-Bukhari].

That is, Satan got the promise of respite, and even empowerment by whispering, malice and misleading the children of Adam, from the beginning, after the previous verses we read: {And *"O Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in Paradise and eat from wherever you will but do not approach this tree, lest you be among the wrongdoers."*} [Al-A'raf:19], then after the whispering and asking Adam and Eve for forgiveness from *"tasting the tree"*: {[Allah] said, *"Descend, being to one another enemies. And for you on the earth is a place of settlement and enjoyment for a time."*} [Al-A'raf:24]. The command of the descent of Adam, Eve and Satan collectively came later, accompanied by a statement that it was a temporary landing, and that all the civilization, strife, wars, happiness, and misery that the children of Adam knew were only fleeting moments that are about to come to an end.

Although affliction is imposed equally on humans and jinn, we will now read a letter addressed by Allah Almighty to the children of Adam exclusively: {O children of Adam, We have bestowed upon you clothing to conceal your private parts and as adornment. But the clothing of righteousness - that is best. That is from the signs of Allah that perhaps they will remember * O children of Adam, let not Satan tempt you as he removed your parents from Paradise, stripping them of their clothing to show them their private parts. Indeed, he watches you, he and his tribe, from where you do not see them. Indeed, We have made the devils allies to those who do not believe} [Al-A'raf:26-27]. The meaning is clear and does not need explanation, as the beginning of Satan's temptation was to

uncover the bodies of Adam and Eve, and their first reaction was to rush to conceal their *"Awrahs"*(intimate parts of their bodies) with the leaves of the paradise, as if it were an innate act that does not require legislation or education. Since the strife continues, Satan and his soldiers see us from where we do not see them, and they will have associates among us human beings, the speeches are solemn, and the bells must always ring to warn and remind.

In another verse, it is clear that the sons of Adam are differentiated into two groups: {A group [of you] He guided, and a group deserved [to be in] error. Indeed, they had taken the devils as allies instead of Allah while they thought that they were guided} [Al-A'raf:30], so what do the associates of Satan say, who do not admit the existence of error in the first place and *"think that they are guided"*? Here is the answer: {And when they commit an immorality, they say, *"We found our fathers doing it, and Allah has ordered us to do it."* Say, *"Indeed, Allah does not order immorality. How can you attribute about Allah what you do not know?"*} [Al-A'raf:28]. The commentators said: Some Arabs used to circum-ambulate the House (Kaaba) naked in the pre-Islamic era, so if it was said: Why did you do that? They said: We found our fathers doing so and Allah commanded us to do it.

The *"fitnah"* (temptation) here was masked under the guise of religion, while Satan's commands were thought to be a divine order, and his followers thought to be guided!

This was the case of all pagans, indecencies are placed in a religious framework, and when messengers are sent to their people to correct concepts, they are rejected and fought. But innate nature remains in people's inner depths and never vanishes; the Divine response requires nothing more than a reminder: {Say, "Indeed, Allah does not order immorality * Say, [O Muhammad], "My Lord has ordered justice and that you maintain yourselves [in worship of Him] at every place [or time] of

prostration, and invoke Him, sincere to Him in religion. Just as He first brought you into being, you will be brought to life again} [Al-A'raf:28, 29].

And the path of innate nature does not mean deprivation of the needs of the instinct but to enjoy it: {O children of Adam, take your adornment at every masjid, and eat and drink, but do not waste. Indeed, Surely, He does not like the wasteful. * Say, *"Who has forbidden the adornment of Allah which He has produced for His servants and the good [lawful] things of provision?"* Say, "They are for those who believe during the worldly life [but] exclusively for them on the Day of Resurrection. This is how We make Our revelations clear for people of knowledge} [Al-A'raf:31-32]. If the obscenities are specific to the associates of Satan in this world, the adornments of Allah and the good sustenance are available to the believers in this world, and are reserved for them alone in Paradise, when the other party cries for help in Hellfire.

Who forbade what is permissible?

When you contemplate the question: *"Say who has forbidden Allah's adornments and lawful provisions?"* you will find that it is not limited to denunciation of the declaration of permissibility, but carries with it an indication that there is an actual prohibition of some adornments and what is good, as the associates of Satan not only allowed themselves all what is forbidden to satisfy their instincts, but also forbade on themselves some permissible things, and this brings us back to the previous question in our reflection of surah Al-An'am: Why does the infidels deprive themselves of something that was not originally forbidden?

The answer is the same as what we concluded earlier, as the devil is the one who manipulates his associates, introducing them to new legislation, in which there is a lot of permissibility of what should be forbidden, and some restrictions of what should be permissible.

In the Hereafter, the demons of the jinn and mankind and their followers are all thrown into Hell: {Allah will say, *"Enter among nations which had passed on before you of jinn and mankind into the Fire."* Every time a nation enters, it will curse its sister nation until, when they have all overtaken one another therein, the last of them will say about the first of them *"Our Lord, these had misled us, so give them a double punishment of the Fire. He will say, "For each is double, but you do not know."*} [Al-A'raf:38], and when those who were victims of deception protest and demand greater torment on those who were the cause of their delusion, the answer comes: *"For each is double, but you do not know."*

And further humiliation, the answer also comes from those who lead in temptation from Satan and his soldiers, and from the demons of mankind: {And the first of them will say to the last of them, *"Then you had not any favor over us, so taste the punishment for what you used to earn} [Al-A'raf:39]. After all the pleasure they reaped by enslaving followers and dominating them, here they respond to them simply: "You did not have any favor on us"*, in other words: We did not force you to follow us, but you were misled by your ignorance and weakness, so have double the torment just like we do. Just imagine that this conversation takes place inside Hell, and the torment surrounds them all from everywhere. We seek refuge in Allah!

The rope of salvation

On the other hand, it is not enough for the other group to bask in Paradise, and escape torment, but they also gather in love and understanding, even if their chests were full of hatred in their previous lives: {We will remove whatever bitterness they had in their hearts. Rivers will flow under their feet} [Al-A'raf:43].

After the holy surah has previewed some stories of some prophets and some reactions from the ungrateful, it concludes with another warning

of Satan: {And if an evil suggestion comes to you from Satan, then seek refuge in Allah. Indeed, He is Hearing and Knowing} [Al-A'raf:200]. This is showing us the best remedy to prevent his evil, which is seeking refuge in Allah from him, as it is not sufficient to struggle in a raging war forever.

Ibn al-Jawzi says in his wonderful book *"The Devil's Deception"*, that one of the predecessors said to his student: What do you do with the devil if he paves the way for you to sin? He said: I shall struggle against him, he said: What if he returns? He said: I shall struggle against him, he said: And if he returns? He said: I shall struggle against him. The Shaykh then said: That will strain you, imagine you pass by a flock of sheep and the herding dog barks at you or prevents you from crossing, what do you do? He said: I will grapple and do my best to keep it away. The Shaykh said: That will strain you, but seek help from the shepherd and he shall spare you its harm, that is, seek refuge in Allah and seek help from Him.

This is the approach of the pious ones: {Indeed, those who fear Allah - when an impulse touchs them from Satan, they remember [Him] and at once they have insight} [Al-A'raf:201], as soon as one of them remembers and seeks refuge in Allah until He restores his insight and pushes away the evil of Satan, especially since malice is not limited as we said to whispering, but it is an alliance between Satan and his collaborators of the jinn and between the human devils: {But the devils persistently plunge their ˹human˺ associates deeper into wickedness, sparing no effort} [Al-A'raf:202].

The modern Age

A question may arise here: if devils introduced new legislations to their victims in ancient pagan times, what about today? Isn't non-religiosity and atheism common now? There is no pagan legislation that permits and prohibits actions, but every human being in this age of *"Individualistic"* culture has his own legislation.

I say: Yes, we live in the golden age of non-religiosity and atheism, but this does not mean freedom from legislation. If we consider the countries of western Europe as the epicenter of this trend, they are simultaneously governed by political and capitalist alliances that impose on their peoples a set of laws and customs that dominate their beliefs and behaviors, more than what religions had imposed on people in theocratic countries ruled by the alliances between monarchs and temple priests.

The liberal agenda forcibly imposed by the mechanisms of globalization on the whole world is literally adopting Satan's agenda today, where innate nature is obscured, human identity is deformed, sex education curricula are imposed on children, and all forms of perversion and deviation become the rule protected by human rights law, imposed by a spectrum of soft and hard power.

Yes, atheism denies belief in the existence of Satan and his soldiers, but this denial achieves the most effective way to implement his promise: The devil said to Allah: *"I will lie in ambush for them on Your straight path"*. Whoever denies the existence of something absent from his senses will not care about resisting the plot behind it, and the result is: *"And you will not find most of them thankful"*.

Al-A'raf... Uncovering the intimate parts is one the first conspiracies of Satan

Over the years, I have read various forms of arguments by secularists and those influenced by them in the context of challenging the necessity of covering the intimate parts, especially the challenge to the veil of women, revealing as much of women's bodies as possible was and will remain one of the dearest goals of Satan and his party. However, the most absurd of these satanic arguments I have read in a huge book dedicated to women, the best of which is titled, in which its author - immersed in ignorance - said that it is unreasonable for a great god who settled on his throne to reach a level of determining what the sons of Adam should wear, and then the fool set out of this fallacy to tamper the texts of revelations that determined in details the level of covering/veiling of the intimate parts, and obligated Adam and his sons to cover them!

Perhaps this flimsy argument reminds any contemplative ones of the revelation regarding the foolishness of the disbelievers when they said, *"What is wrong with the spider and the flies mentioned in the Book revealed to Muhammad ﷺ?"* The response was clear: {Indeed, Allah is not timid to present an example - that of a mosquito or what is even smaller} [Al-Baqara 26].

But what does that pretender do with the divine call? {O children of Adam, We have bestowed upon you clothing to conceal your private parts and as adornment} [Al-A'raf:26]?!

On the other hand, can another fool accuse Islam of limiting its attention to concealing the intimate parts only, while the verse has completed the wisdom in detail that leaves no room for absurdity: "However, the best clothing is righteousness "? Modesty in the heart is

the complement to the covering garment of the body, and it is the cause of it, without it a person would not have covered his intimate parts.

I paused at that verse in surah Al-A'raf after I mentioned the story of Adam and Eve with Satan, and then I wrapped myself in front of a divine call that includes all the children of Adam: {O children of Adam, let not Satan tempt you as he removed your parents from Paradise, stripping them of their clothing to show them their private parts. Indeed, he sees you, he and his tribe, from where you do not see them…} [Al-A'raf:27]. Covering the intimate parts was not a marginal matter from the beginning of creation, but its disclosure was the first thing that befell our species from the conspiracies of Satan, and then the exit from the paradise was the consequence.

Astonishment does not end with those who take their passion as their god, rejecting revelation and ignoring its arguments: {We have made the devils allies to those who do not believe } [Al-A'raf:27]. Rather, there are those who seek to escalate the ranks of thinkers and then and then claim that revelation did not impose the hijab on women, and that a woman can reveal from her private parts what corresponds to her whims; these thinkers may invoke the adoption of the current norms and culture to make legislations in order to achieve what they want: {And when they commit an immorality, they say, *"We found our fathers doing it…"* [Al-A'raf:28]. Although the command to be clothed in modesty is undebatable. Say, *"Indeed, Allah does not order immorality…"*. No scholar of Islamic law or linguist can fabricate and claim such nonsense. *".....How can you attribute to Allah what you do not know?"*} [Al-A'raf:28].

I paused after that call at Allah's command of justice: {Say, [O Muhammad], "My Lord has ordered justice} [Al-A'raf:29]. Then the command in believing in monotheism and being sincere: {and that you direct yourselves [to the Qiblah] at every place [or time] of prostration, and invoke Him, sincere to Him in religion}. And the separation between

two teams: {A group [of you] He guided, and a group deserved [to be in] error} [Al-A'raf:30]. Particularly that the followers of misguidance {Indeed, they [i.e., the latter] had taken the devils as allies instead of Allah while they thought that they were guided} [Al-A'raf:30], so they were not clothed with misguidance until after they chose to support the demons while claiming that they were right!

The suspicions of the hypocrites may not attract those who now are understanding of the signs of Allah and boundaries He set for them, but the hearts of some of those rightly guided may remain ill, so we find rightly guided women who think that the veil is limited to the headcover and long dress, and tolerate tight and attractive clothes under the pretext that Allah is beautiful and loves beauty, which is also of of Satan's deception!

After the command of justice and Monotheism, the call to all the children of Adam is renewed, warning against deceit under the pretexts of beauty and enjoying God's blessings, to reach what is worse: *"O children of Adam, take your adornment [i.e., wear your clothing] at every masjid, and eat and drink, but do not waste…."* [Al-A'raf:31]. The required covering dress is an adornment in itself, and the extravagance in clothing to the point of infatuation takes it out of its purpose and becomes just like nudity. Allah Almighty does not accept transgression through a permissible that leads to a forbidden: {Surely He does not like the wasteful} [Al-A'raf:31].

Therefore, when Allah commanded us to cover up, He did not oblige us to incline ourselves to ugliness, {Ask, ˹O Prophet,˺ *"Who has forbidden the adornments and lawful provisions Allah has brought forth for His servants?"*} [Al-A'raf:32]. Rather, He made the dress itself an adornment without transgression, and left us a space to enjoy all that is good, and then promised the believers more in the Hereafter: {Say, "They are for the enjoyment of the believers in this worldly life, but they will be exclusively

theirs on the Day of Judgment} [Al-A'raf:32]. And He explained to us - most of it - that the forbidden is not in that which is good: {Say, "My Lord has only forbidden open and secret indecencies} [Al-A'raf:33], so a believer should not accept that which is forbidden, even if he, himself, did not commit it.

The Quranic legislation on a woman's private parts was not ambiguous so a proclaimer centuries later would come out to claim that the hijab is not an obligation. Also, the third call is addressed to all humanity.: {O children of Adam! When messengers from among yourselves come to you reciting My revelations…} [Al-A'raf:35], as if the messengers did not come with verses only, but also explained and highlighted what they contained of commands and prohibitions, and whoever dares to interpret them in accordance with their whims without valid reasoning, then they are included with the warning: {Who does more wrong than those who fabricate lies against Allah or deny His revelations? ...} [Al-A'raf:37].

There is no excuse for the general public who seek the verdicts of the misguided and what corresponds to their whims, nor for any girl who takes off her veil or compromise any other command under the pretext of the flimsy arguments put forward by the misguided, every sane adult is responsible of his own self, and will not be defended by those who misled him; and that is something about which the disbelievers can teach us a lesson: { until Our messenger-angels arrive to take their souls, asking them, *"Where are those ˹false gods˺ you used to invoke besides Allah?"* They will cry, *"They have failed us,"* and they will confess against themselves that they were indeed disbelievers. * Allah will say, *"Enter the Fire along with the ˹evil˺ groups of jinn and humans that preceded you."* Whenever a group enters Hell, it will curse the preceding one until they are all gathered inside, the followers will say about their leaders, *"Our Lord! They have misled us, so multiply their torment in the Fire."* He will

answer, “It has already been multiplied for all, but you do not know} [Al-A’raf:37-38].

May Allah protect us from His punishment, and may He grant us all continued protection and well-being.



Al-A'raf... Our fathers experienced both joy and hardship

We contemplated the two previous chapters of surah Al-A'raf. We discovered the role of Satan and his soldiers in misleading the children of Adam in the first chapter, and we saw the wisdom of coverage, chastity, and hijab in the second. And the noble surah is yet full of gems that I am eager to discover.

In the fifty-ninth verse, stories of some of the honorable prophets with their people begin, stories that are mentioned in many other surahs, but the sequence here will lead us to a great lesson.

The series begins with the first of the Prophets of Determination, Noah, *peace be upon him*: {We had certainly sent Noah to his people, and he said, *"O my people, worship Allah; you have no deity other than Him. Indeed, I fear for you the punishment of a tremendous Day. Said the eminent among his people, "Indeed, we see you in clear error."*} [Al-A'raf:59-60].

Then Prophet Hud, *peace be upon him*: *"And to ʿAad [We sent] their brother Hud. He said, "O my people, worship Allah; you have no deity other than Him. Then will you not fear Him?"* * Said the eminent ones who disbelieved among his people, *"Indeed, we see you in foolishness, and indeed, we think you are of the liars."* [Al Araaf:65-66].

And later, the story of Salih, *peace be upon him*: {And to Thamûd [We sent] their brother Salih. He said: *"O my people, worship Allah; you have no deity other than Him} [Al Araaf:73]. {Said the eminent ones who were arrogant among his people to those who were oppressed - to those who believed among them, "Do you [actually] know that Ṣâliḥ is sent from his*

Lord?" They said, *"Indeed we, in that with which he was sent, are believers."*} [Al Araaf:75].

We then see part of the story of Lot, peace and be upon him: {And [We had sent] Lot when he said to his people, "Do you commit such immorality as no one has preceded you with from among the world [i.e., peoples]? * Indeed, you approach men with desire, instead of women. Rather, you are a transgressing people. * But the answer of his people was only that they said, "Evict them from your city! Indeed, they are men who keep themselves pure}. [Al Araaf:80-82].

Finally comes the story of Shuaib, *peace be upon him*: {And to the people of Midian We sent their brother Shuaib. He said, *"O my people! Worship Allah—you have no other god except Him} [Al Araaf:85]. {The arrogant chiefs of his people threatened, "O Shuaib! We will certainly expel you and your fellow believers from our land, unless you return to our faith."* He replied, "Even if we hate it?} [Al Araaf:88].

The commonality in these stories is clear; every messenger begins to call to monotheism, with the exception of the story of Lot -*peace be upon him*- who focused his call on rejecting the obscenity rampant among his people. As for the response, it comes from the upper class among the people of Noah and Hud, and from those who showed arrogance among the people of Salih and Shuaib, while the response comes collectively from all the people in the story of Lot, perhaps because the practice of obscenity among them was shared by almost everyone, or at least they acknowledged it and did not reject it, and in that the leaders and common folk are equal.

The other common aspect between these stories is the tragic end, as Allah Almighty did not postpone their punishment to the Hereafter but hastened their eradication after establishing His case against them.

The most important thing is yet to come, so ponder with me: {Whenever We sent a prophet to a society, We afflicted its ⌜disbelieving⌝ people with suffering and adversity, so perhaps they would be humbled} [Al Araaf:94]. After narrating the stories of the five exterminated nations, which Allah made examples of to everyone after them, the verse tells us that every village receives revelation from Allah, then its people reject their messenger, so they are made to face hardship at first, the reason being: *"perhaps they would be humbled."* Man by nature tends to indulge in ingratitude when in a state of prosperity, as the Quran says elsewhere: {No! [But] indeed, man transgresses* Because he sees himself self-sufficient. [Al-Alaq:6-7]. {Then We exchanged in place of the bad [condition], good} i.e. Allah sent down prosperity and bliss on them after hardship, {until they increased} i.e. recovery. And their money and their children abounded, {and said, *"Our fathers [also] were touched with hardship and ease} which means, they reviewed the history of their fathers and grandfathers and saw that the alternation of hardship and prosperity is a law of life, and almost every generation goes through this experience, and they concluded from this that the hardship that struck them after their prophet had left and his message prevailed was not a punishment from Allah, but rather a "natural phenomenon"*, and then they deserved annihilation: { So We seized them suddenly while they did not perceive} [Al-A'raf:95].

I still remember the astonishment I felt the first time I contemplated these verses. I felt I had found the two lines that would settle the whole debate. Hardly a calamity occurs in our time without hearing objections to any sermon, or attributing each calamity to the observable laws of nature, which can be predicted, and perhaps mitigated.

In another surah our Lord Almighty says: {And whatever strikes you of disaster - it is for what your hands have earned; but He pardons much} [Shu'ara':30], for the link between calamities, disasters and sin is a settled matter; even if a calamity befell a believing nation alone, that does

not mean - as some ignorants may think- that Allah Almighty is angrier with them than with those who openly commit disbelief and obscenities. Allah may hasten the punishment (not to the degree of eradication and extermination) of a community, a group or an individual as a warning so that they repent to Him, or to atone some of their sins before the Day of Gathering when they come to Him. The disbelievers may also be left as they are without punishment or admonition, as a respite and a trial. For the wisdom of Allah is not measured by human standards, and His treatment of every group or individual among His servants is not calculated by mathematical equations.

If we return to surah Al-A'raf, we will find a clear warning that we in this age are included in: {Has it not become clear to those who inherited the earth after its [previous] people that if We willed, We could afflict them for their sins? But We seal over their hearts so they do not hear} [Al-A'raf:100]. So pay attention, dear reader, to the explicit link between calamity and sin: *"We could afflict them for their sins."* Then, ponder the danger of denying this linkage: *"But We seal over their hearts so they do not hear."*, and that is exactly what is happening today.

The torment of the Children of Israel

After the previous verses originated the concept of punishment and its entitlement by narrating the stories of five groups of people punished by extermination, the following verses devote a wider space to a more detailed story, which is more appropriate for us in quoting lessons and morals, as Allah did not punish who is in this story with complete eradication, as our Messenger -*peace be upon him*- also promised us not to never meet this fate. In the hadith the Prophet -*peace be upon him*- said: (I asked my Lord for three things, and He granted me two and withheld one. I asked my Lord not to destroy my nation by the *"sanah"*, and He granted me that. I asked my Lord not to destroy my nation by drowning, and He granted me that. And I asked Him not to cause my nation to fight among

themselves, but He withheld that.) [Sahih Muslim], and the *"sanah"* here means drought.

The story begins with the saying of the Almighty: {Then We sent after them Moses with Our signs to Pharaoh and his establishment, but they were unjust toward them. So see how was the end of the corrupters} [Al-A'raf:103], it's as if it tantalizes us from the beginning to discover a new outcome..

The verses narrate the dialogue of Moses -*peace be upon him*- with Pharaoh, and Pharaoh's revenge on the sorcerers who disavowed and exposed him. Then the awe seizes us from their remarkable resilience in the face of the threat of torture, execution, and crucifixion: {Your rage towards us because we believed in the signs of our Lord when they came to us. Our Lord, shower us with perseverance, and let us die while submitting to You} [Al-A'raf:126].

Then comes the public stance which reminds us of the stances of people in the stories of ancient nations, yet here it seems more relevant to our era, for the previous five stories revolved around tribal people. As for the story of Moses -*peace be upon him*- it occurred in the capital of a mighty state; this prophet faced a king at the head of a major civilization {And the eminent among the people of Pharaoh said, {Will you leave Moses and his people to cause corruption in the land and abandon you and your gods} [Al-A'raf:127].

Moses -*peace be upon him*- demands patience from his people (the Children of Israel), as if in this moment there is solace for our Prophet Muhammad -*peace be upon him*- when he, along with his companions, were persecuted in Mecca: {Said Moses to his people, *"Seek help through Allah and be patient. Indeed, the earth belongs to Allah . He causes to inherit it whom He wills of His servants. And the [best] outcome is for the righteous."*} [Al-A'raf:128].

Then comes a time of misery and misfortune; hardship visits the people as it did nations before them: {And We certainly seized the people of Pharaoh with years of famine and a deficiency in fruits that perhaps they would be reminded} [Al-A'raf:130]. If preceding generations would look back at the prosperity and adversity that befell their forefathers, and considered it a law of life, then the people of Pharaoh were indeed the more tyrannical and oppressive: {But when good came to them, they said, *"This is ours [by right]."* And if a bad [condition] struck them, they saw an evil omen in Moses and those with him. Unquestionably, their fortune is with Allah, but most of them do not know} [Al-A'raf:131 They attributed prosperity to themselves: 'This is ours because of what we deserve.' And if drought befell them in another season, they would despair: 'This is because of Moses and his followers!

Imagine that such defiance was displayed after they witnessed with their own eyes the miracle of the staff and the hand, and after even the magicians themselves acknowledged that it was not magic. Then contemplate this astonishing audacity: {And they said, *"No matter what sign you bring us with which to bewitch us, we will never believe in you."*} [Al-A'raf:132]. This is just like what we hear today of the denial of the miracle of the Quran, because even if the most brilliant minds in the fields of science, history, law and linguistics testify that it is not the words of a man, you will still find ungrateful people who insist on brazenly denying the revelation.

{So We sent upon them the flood and locusts and lice and frogs and blood as distinct signs} Thus complete seven signs (miracles) that prove the truth of what their prophet said, and yet: {but they were arrogant and were a criminal people} [Al-A'raf:133].

Although some of these miracles came in the form of a natural disaster, such as locusts, lice and floods, and before them drought and crop failure, the first miracle was more obvious than everything that followed it, which

is Moses' challenge to the sorcerers, as some of them were strange and unprecedented in the history of nations, as some commentators said: the water of their wells and rivers turned into blood.

{And when the punishment descended upon them, they said, *"O Moses, invoke for us your Lord by what He has promised you. If you [can] remove the punishment from us, we will surely believe you, and we will send with you the Children of Israel"*} [Al-A'raf:134]. That is, when they neared destruction, they began to bargain, not out of faith in obvious miracles, but in recognition of helplessness.

It is remarkable that they asked Moses to call *"his Lord"* to lift the torment, as it is difficult for the pagans of any time and age to imagine the existence of one God dominating the whole existence, and I have heard such a denunciation from some followers of eastern pagans today (Buddhism, Hinduism and their derivatives), Pharaoh's people were convinced after they tasted the torment that Moses' Lord is capable of restricting them, and yet they remained adamant not to follow him, believing that there are other gods worthy of worship as well, but when it was proven their gods were unable to stand up to the Lord of Moses, they began to compromise: *"Let us believe in you."*

At this point in particular the establishment of proof was complete; the deadline ended as their negotiations with Moses *-peace be upon him-* proved their conviction that these verses were not sorcery or some natural phenomena. So Moses called them: {But when We removed the punishment from them until a term which they were to reach, then at once they broke their word} [Al-A'raf:135]. That is, they did as their ancestors of previous nations did. {So We took retribution from them, and We drowned them in the sea because they denied Our signs and were heedless of them} [Al-A'raf:136]. Thus, they deserved eradication as it was deserved by those before them. Although the eradication was not of everyone among them, but of Pharaoh and his entourage and soldiers

who followed the Children of Israel to the sea, and then the pharaonic civilization continued in Egypt after this incident; although the remaining historical records to this day do not tell us what happened after that, which leads some historians to believe that those who inherited the rule from the drowned Pharaoh have erased this miserable story from their records.

Disbelief after salvation

If I were reading this story for the first time, the first thing that would come to mind is that the story will end happily, as movies and novels have us accustomed, especially after reading the verse of good news {And We caused the people who had been oppressed to inherit the eastern regions of the land and the western ones, which We had blessed. And the good word of your Lord was fulfilled for the Children of Israel because of what they had patiently endured. And We destroyed [all] that Pharaoh and his people were producing and what they had been building} [Al-A'raf:137]. However, a new chapter of Moses' suffering -*peace be upon him*- is about to begin.

Before I tell you about it, I will draw your attention, dear reader, to a fair deduction from the previous verse: the monuments of the drowned Pharaoh had been destroyed, including the edifice of Haman, of which we have not found a trace. It is mentioned elsewhere in the Quran: { And Pharaoh said, "O Haman, "construct for me a tower that I might reach the pathways} [Ghafer:36].

As for the Children of Israel, they did not immediately inherit the eastern and western parts of the land; rather, they had to pass a test of eligibility in order to establish themselves in the lands of the Levant. However, they failed from the first step: {And We took the Children of Israel across the sea; then they came upon a people intent in devotion to [some] idols of theirs. They said, *"O Moses, make for us a god just as*

they have gods." He said, *"Indeed, you are a people behaving ignorantly} [Al-A'raf:138]. This is another confirmation of the entrenchment of pagan polytheistic concepts in their minds, just as the people of Pharaoh saw that Moses -peace be upon him- had a "special"* god, who may cause harm or benefit, and be called and worshiped, but not singled out to be worshiped alone. So the Children of Israel were also thinking, even after all they saw with their own eyes from the punishments inflicted on the people of Pharaoh who persecuted them, and after they saw the sea split to free them from Pharaoh's army, Despite all of this, their minds still reject the concept of Monotheism, and their souls still incline towards the worship of tangible idols.

The following verses show that Moses' plight -*peace be upon him*- with his people was akin to his experience with the people of Pharaoh or even worse. This part of the story is most unbearable for the soul, because the stories of the Messengers of Determination make us feel ashamed and small in comparison to what we may face in confronting our adversaries, and in them is enough solace to suffice every preacher who feels weary.

This nation was not satisfied with their first request: *"Make us a god as they have gods."* As soon as their prophet left them to go to receive revelation, they hurried to make their idol: {In the absence of Moses, his people made from their ⌜golden⌝ jewelry an idol of a calf that made a lowing sound…} [Al-A'raf:148].

The divine command to repent came to them: {Moses chose seventy men from among his people for Our appointment…}. Thus, he went out with seventy of their best to Mount Sinai at the appointed time to declare repentance before Allah. In this terrible and heart-wrenching situation, some of them dared to say: *"Show us Allah outright,"* as if polytheism had dominated their minds to the extent that they could no longer comprehend the existence of a great God beyond their senses, so they were immediately punished with an earthquake that took their lives.

Imagine dear reader, this difficult situation after all the hardship encountered by the Messenger of Allah, Moses -*peace be upon him*- in the face of the tyranny of Pharaoh and his followers, and after his patience with their infidelity for about forty years - as stated in the narrated stories - he then endured the tragedy of the children of Israel collecting their gold ornaments to make an idol in the form of a calf. Allah promised them forgiveness if they humbly came supplicating to Mount Tur (Sinai). After all this, they surprised their prophet with the absurd request to see Allah; that is when they were struck by Him. While Moses -*peace be upon him*- stood among them, watching in amazement and sorrow.

He cried out and prayed to Allah: {And Moses chose from his people seventy men for Our appointment. And when the earthquake seized them, he said, "My Lord, if You had willed, You could have destroyed them before and me [as well]. Would You destroy us for what the foolish among us have done? This is not but Your trial by which You send astray whom You will and guide whom You will. You are our Protector, so forgive us and have mercy upon us; and You are the best of forgivers} [Al-A'raf:155].

Allah Almighty answered the supplication of His prophet, and revived those men in dignity for Him, we find confirmation of their revival in another surah: {so the thunderbolt took you while you were looking on. * Then We revived you after your death that perhaps you would be grateful} [A-Baqara:55-56]. Allah then tested them with a new trial: {And [mention, O Muhammad], when it was said to them, *"Dwell in this city and eat from it wherever you will and say, 'Relieve us of our burdens,' and enter the gate bowing humbly; We will [then] forgive you your sins. We will increase the doers of good [in goodness and reward]."* [Al-A'raf:161]. Yet surprisingly, they failed again: {But those who wronged among them changed [the words] to a statement other than that which had been said to them}. They deserved to be punished again: {So We sent upon them a punishment from the sky for the wrong that they were doing} [Al-A'raf:162]. We learn from this that the sin was committed by *"those*

who wronged among them" only, and that their punishment did not include eradication or extermination. And the interpreters differed in their view of the type of punishment, if it was a plague or another affliction.

"Be disgraced apes."

Let us persist with the story to discover more wonders, as the people were tried once more, but failed again: {Ask them ˹O Prophet˺ about ˹the people of˺ the town which was by the sea, who broke the Sabbath. During the Sabbath, ˹abundant˺ fish would come to them clearly visible, but on other days the fish were never seen. In this way, We tested them for their rebelliousness} [Al-A'raf:163]. Al-Qurtubi says: It was narrated that it was in the time of David and not in the time of Moses -peace be upon them- and the conclusion of this test is that Allah ordered them not to fish on the Sabbath (Saturday), but they did not abide by this legislation, so they were punished with a more severe test: fish would come to them in abundance on the Sabbath (Saturday), and disappear for the rest of the week, so they circumvented the divine command.

Al-Qurtubi comments: Satan himself whispered to them, saying: *"You were only forbidden from taking it (the fish) on the Sabbath, so take precautions."* Thus, they would drive the fish to the shore on Friday, where they could not leave due to the low levels of water. Then they would take them on Sunday and deceive in their capture.

It may come to your mind - dear reader - that the torment will descend upon them as it had before, but something important happened first, as the verse says: {When some of ˹the righteous ones˺ among them questioned their 'fellow Sabbath-keepers˺, *"Why do you ˹bother to˺ warn those ˹Sabbath-breakers˺ who will either be destroyed or severely punished by Allah?"* They replied, "Just to be free from your Lord's blame, and so perhaps they may abstain} [Al-A'raf:164]. In his commentary, Ibn Kathir explains that they were divided into three groups: the first committed a

grave sin, the second forbade them and retired from them, and the third remained neutral.

The verses here inform us of an important dialogue which demonstrates the consequences of such distinction. The neutral group questions the deniers, *"Why do you advise a people whom Allah will destroy or punish severely?"* They reply: *"So Allah may excuse us"*, that is, so we may be excused by Allah for performing the duty of enjoining good and forbidding evil, *"so they may abstain."* That is, hope still remains for their guidance. And no preacher must fail to guide a person, no matter how unjust they may be.

Consequently, penalty is due: {When they ignored the warning they were given, We rescued those who used to warn against evil and overtook the wrongdoers with a dreadful punishment for their rebelliousness} [Al-A'raf:165]. Allah saves those who dutifully preach to the wrongdoers, and punishes the latter with a grave torment that keeps them from eradication but irrevocably transforms them out of the human species. {But when they stubbornly persisted in violation, We said to them, *"Be disgraced apes!"*} [Al-A'raf:166].

The soul is left to wonder about the fate of the third party, and I am pleased to have found the answer: Ibn Abbas says: I do not know what befell the neutral party, did they survive or perish? To this Ikrima answers: I never relented in arguing with him until he was convinced that they had indeed survived, since they had rejected the actions of the wrongdoers. For this he rewarded me a cloak.(1)

The following verse expands the scope of torment that will befall the disbelievers among the children of Israel until the Day of Resurrection: {And ˹remember, O Prophet,˺ when your Lord declared that He would

(1) Safwat al-Tafasir, Vol. 1, p. 479.

send against them others who would make them suffer terribly until the Day of Judgment} [Al-A'raf:167]. Scholars have emphasized the displacement, dispersal and enslavement of the children of Israel throughout the centuries. This does not contradict the period of their superiority in the land which came to be in our time, affirming the divine promise in surah Al-Isra: {And We warned the Children of Israel in the Scripture, "You will certainly cause corruption in the land twice, and you will become extremely arrogant} [Isra'a:4]. And it is only a transient period, never to last.

After all the trials, successes, failures and punishments that the children of Israel experienced through in the age of prophecies, subsequent generations resorted to distorting the Torah and turning to the world: {Then they were succeeded by other generations who inherited the Scripture. They indulged in unlawful gains, claiming, *"We will be forgiven ⌜after all⌝."* And if similar gain came their way, they would seize it}.

Strangely, the Torah itself contained a covenant which outlaws lying about Allah and distorting His words, yet they committed what the Torah warned them not to commit: {Was a covenant not taken from them in the Scripture that they would not say anything about Allah except the truth? And they were already well-versed in its teachings} [Al-A'raf:169]. Thus they lost their position among the nations.

Now, imagine dear reader, the elation of our Prophet Muhammad -*peace be upon him*- when he recited these stories years after surah *"Al-A'raf"* had descended, having stabilized in Medina, and conquered Mecca, and Arab delegations pledging allegiance to him, while surrounded by his brave companions, and it had been revealed to him that word of

Islam will pervade the earth,(1) and that his nation is most entitled to carry the message that the children of Israel failed to uphold.

Am I not your Lord?

It struck me that the beginning of the story of Moses -*peace be upon him*- with Pharaoh and the children of Israel began precisely in the middle of the surah, that is, verse 103, as the surah consists of 206 verses. And thus the space which is devoted to narrating the story, and extracting wisdom from it, is half of the surah.

As the story ends with a reminder of the covenant Allah made to the people of Israel, we are reminded of another covenant placed upon the children of Adam: {And ⌜remember⌝ when your Lord brought forth from the loins of the children of Adam their descendants and had them testify regarding themselves. ⌜Allah asked,⌝ *"Am I not your Lord?"* They replied, *"Yes, You are! We testify."* ⌜He cautioned,⌝ *"Now you have no right to say on Judgment Day, 'We were not aware of this.' * Nor say, 'It was our forefathers who had associated others ⌜with Allah in worship⌝ and we, as their descendants, followed in their footsteps. Will you then destroy us for the falsehood they invented?"*} [Al-A'raf:172-173].

Then, light is shed upon the satanic role of enslaving the children of Adam. After Allah took a covenant from us while we were in the world of atomicity, and we vowed that monotheism is inherently instinctual, there comes the short story of a knowledgeable man who knew the truth and was thus guided. However, he later chose to disbelieve despite his knowledge so Satan took possession of him and he thus became a demon among men: {And relate to them ⌜O Prophet⌝ the story of the one to whom We gave Our signs, but he abandoned them, so Satan took hold of him,

(1) It is narrated from the Prophet Muhammad (*peace be upon him*) that he said: *"There will not remain upon the face of the Earth a house made of mud or hair, except that Allah will make the word of Islam enter it."* This was narrated by Ahmad, and authenticated by Ibn Hibban, Al-Hakim, Al-Albani, and Al-Arna'out.

and he became a deviant} [Al-A'raf:175]. Scholars differ on the identity of the man. It was said he was of the children of Israel or that he was one of the Canaanites who confronted Moses - *peace be upon him* - or that he may have also been of Quraysh.

Whatever his name or era, notice the fate of this knowledgeable man: {If We had willed, We would have elevated him with Our signs} He would have qualified to be raised in the ranks of distinguished scholars {but he clung to this life—following his evil desires. His example is that of a dog: if you chase it away, it pants, and if you leave it, it ⌜still⌝ pants. This is the example of the people who deny Our signs. So narrate ⌜to them⌝ stories ⌜of the past⌝, so perhaps they will reflect} [Al-A'raf:176]. What a frightening analogy!

Also consider the following analogy, which reminds us of surah Al-An'am: {Indeed, We have destined many jinn and humans for Hell. They have hearts they do not understand with, eyes they do not see with, and ears they do not hear with. They are like cattle. In fact, they are even less guided! Such ⌜people⌝ are ⌜entirely⌝ heedless} [Al-A'raaf:179]. The hearts were obliterated, then the senses became meaningless, thus the inattentive jinn and humans became like cattle, yet even less guided.

After these concluding examples, I can now say that I have realized part of the wisdom in narrating the stories of the prophets and their patience, and the instant punishment of some peoples. I realized that the negligence to draw lessons from stories of former generations is the reason for the repetition of such stories, until a generation who repeats: *"Our forefathers have experienced thick and thin"* comes, and they are encompassed by the same evil fate.

Therefore to learn, it suffices us to listen: {When the Quran is recited, listen to it attentively and be silent, so you may be shown mercy} [Al-A'raaf:204]. Then we combine knowledge with acclamation and supplication, hoping to avoid the fate of the knowledgeable person who

was *"immortalized to earth"* and became *"like a dog."*: {Remember your Lord inwardly with humility and reverence and in a moderate tone of voice, both morning and evening. And do not be one of the heedless} [Al-A'raaf:205].

The best conclusion to this journey of knowledge in the history of nations is a prostration of recitation before Allah, and to evoke Allah's dispensation with His servants and their need for Him: {Surely those ⌜angels⌝ nearest to your Lord are not too proud to worship Him. They glorify Him. And to Him they prostrate} [Al-A'raaf:206].



"When the most wicked of them was roused"... Why was Salih's she-camel's killer the most disobedient of the forefathers?

The Prophet - *peace be upon him* - asked Ali Ibn Abi Talib: O Ali, who is the most miserable of the forefathers? Ali replied: Allah and His Messenger know best, so the prophet -*peace be upon him* - answered: *"The one who hamstrung the she-camel."* This is part of a long hadith, which was narrated many ways according to al-Tabarani, Al-Bazzar and Abu Ya'la, and all are true.

I remember that my father asked my brother and I the same question in our youth. We all answered with whatever names of tyrants and disbelievers came to memory. When we were unable to answer correctly and heard this hadith, I immediately wondered: How is the killer of the she-camel, a miracle of Prophet Salih - *peace be upon him* - more disobedient than Pharaoh and other fearsome people?! As I matured, it became more understandable and all the more clearer as I reflected on both Quranic and social signs.

I begin my journey with you, dear reader, by contemplating upon our current reality, for it is enough to watch a few documentaries or read a few books about the tyrants of the twentieth century and the next, to establish the context on which we will build.

Instead of diving into countless historical examples, we will find in the biographies of the German tyrant Adolf Hitler, the Spaniard Francesco Franco, the Soviet Joseph Stalin, the Chinese Mao Zedong, and the North Korean dictator Kim Il-sung striking models of human deification. We

also find in the latter dynasty, which continues to this day, stories that prove that deification still exists in the era of modernity, globalization and the information and communication revolution. Rather, we have plenty of examples of tyranny in our Arab world to understand this miserable reality.

What I want to highlight in these examples is the gradual development of paranoia that plagues tyrants. I liken it to an example of a beast fed by close advisors to enslave the people. One who watches documentaries – which document the details of this crazy development and its psychological background – recognizes the wisdom of the jurists who strictly prevent approaching leaders and receiving their gifts, fearing that close contact with them will sow cruelty in the heart and pave the way to offering compromises. What about those who are nurtured in palaces from a young age, or prepare to be tyrants, only to find all the factors of power come together in their hands?

It was narrated in the Musnad of Imam Ahmad that the Prophet -*peace be upon him* - said: "Whoever comes to the gates of a ruler will be infatuated, and whoever grows closer to the ruler grows further from Allah).[1]

From this perspective, you realize Allah's great reward for the just ruler. Even the Prophet -*peace be upon him*- counted *"the just ruler"* as the head of the seven types of people who Allah will provide shade for on a day when there is no shade except His [The authenticity of this hadith is Agreed upon]. How difficult is it for a man to have the ability to conquer his opponents, or to oppress his friends, only to refrain from that for the fear of Allah? And what if he became a king with loyal followers, money, armies and media to achieve all his hopes and dreams?

(1) Musnad Ahmad (2/371).

On the other hand, look at the stories of some human rights advocates and revolutionaries opposing their country's authorities, and look how they have spent half their lives denouncing injustice. They eventually may spend long periods of time in prisons. And if one day, they were to gain power, you find that they turn into the very tyrants they once revolted against.

Thus, the affliction of money and power overwhelms the mind and soul and may transform the simple man into a mighty man who destroys the land and the people. This is something that all people can understand and observe for themselves, but the killer of the she-camel, although he did not possess a great kingdom, was more daring and brazen than Pharaoh!

Thamud's Story

Let us revisit the Noble Quran to read the story. Thamud were an ancient civilization, who settled in northern Arabia around the eighth century BC. The Arabs knew of their homeland after their destruction by the surviving carved monuments in the mountains. They were the ones addressed by their prophet Salih, *peace be upon him*: {to carve homes in the mountains with great skill} [Ash-Shu'ara:149], {and established you in the land—⌜and⌝ you built palaces on its plains and carved homes into mountains} [Al-A'raaf:74].

In the beginning, we find that their story seems familiar. Arrogance or rejection is the recurring reaction in most of the stories of the prophets mentioned in the Quran. In surah Al-A'raaf we read: {The arrogant chiefs of his people asked the lowly who believed among them, *"Are you certain that Salih has been sent by his Lord?"* They replied, *"We certainly believe in what he has been sent with."*. The arrogant said, *"We surely reject what you believe in."*} [Al-A'raf:75-76], and in surah Hud: {They argued, *"O Salih! We truly had high hopes in you before this. How dare you forbid us to worship*

what our forefathers had worshiped? We are certainly in alarming doubt about what you are inviting us to} [Hud:62]. In surah Ash-Shu'ara: {They replied, "You are simply bewitched! You are only a human being like us, so bring forth a sign if what you say is true."} [Ash-Shu'ara:153-154]. And in surah Al-Qamar: {Thamûd rejected the warnings ⌜as well⌝, arguing, *"How can we follow one ⌜average⌝ human being from among us? We would then truly be misguided and insane. Has the revelation been sent down ⌜only⌝ to him out of ⌜all of⌝ us? In fact, he is a boastful liar."*} [Al-Qamar:23-25].

Here their story is similar to the rest of the infidel peoples. The noble surahs have mentioned part of their discussion, and the response of the noble Prophet Salih -*peace be upon him*- as they accused him of engaging in witchcraft and lies, just as others did. Also, they refused to acknowledge his distinction as a prophet with a message because he was a human being like themselves. And the idea that a man alone was sent to them inflated their deficient minds. Although these same minds acknowledged, across all ages, that an immoral king can rule over them, conquer them based on a corrupt religion, and even force them to worship him. As for a righteous man, known to be good and pure among them, to call them to godliness and to worship Allah alone, is far beyond their comprehension.

As usual, they asked their prophet for a miracle: {You are only a human being like us, so bring forth a sign if what you say is true} [Ash-Shu'ara:154]. The scholars agree that they specified specific evidence, as if it were a test for their prophet, and they said to him, *"Bring out for us from this rock a red she-camel and have her deliver before us, and go to this water source and drink, and in return gives us the same amount of milk."*. There is no doubt that such an impossible request can only be asked by someone who is not convinced by simple intellectual evidence. Rather, he wants to indulge his senses with materialistic evidence. This is the nature of dull minds across all times, especially in our days as materialism overshadows everything.

Ibn Kathir says in his interpretation: The Prophet of Allah, Salih *-peace be upon him-* took covenants and promises from them that they would believe and follow him, before he fulfilled their request. He then prayed and stood to call on Allah Almighty to answer their request, and so from the rock a pregnant she-camel erupted exactly as they had requested. Some of them believed, yet most disbelieved.(1)

A she-camel from a rock

Let us imagine this fascinating scene, for such miracles were unfamiliar to them; their prophet approached them with revelation, in accordance with reason and instinct. Thus when they saw with their own eyes, the splitting of the rock and the exit of a living she-camel from its hollow exactly in the form they described, they could not have claimed that it was a prearranged trick.

The miracle fully took place before witnesses, their argument fulfilled per their request, leaving only their promise to be fulfilled. Only then, Prophet Salih *-peace be upon him-* said: {This is Allah's she-camel as a sign to you. So, leave her to graze ⌜freely⌝ on Allah's land and do not harm her, or else you will be overcome by a painful punishment} [Al-A'raf:73], {And tell them that the ⌜drinking⌝ water must be divided between them ⌜and her⌝, each taking a turn to drink ⌜every other day⌝. [Al-Qamar:28]. And in a third surah: {Salih said, *"Here is a she-camel. She will have her turn to drink as you have yours, each on an appointed day. And do not ever touch her with harm, or you will be overtaken by the torment of a tremendous day."*} [Ash-Shu'ara:156].

The scholars say that Prophet Salih commanded them to take turns in drinking from the well with the she-camel. She drinks one day, and they drink the other. In return she provides them a generously sufficient amount of milk.

(1) Ibn Kathir, Volume 3, p. 379

Compared to other miracles mentioned in the Noble Quran in the stories of the prophets, the she-camel may seem simple at first glance, but there is a subtle difference that needs to be carefully considered. I will compare it here with the miracles of Moses -*peace be upon him*- as an example.

The miracle of the hand and the stick were the first and greatest miracles of Moses, but they happened once in front of Pharaoh in his palace. They then recurred only when it was time to challenge the magicians. This was in a parade scene for which people gathered, and for which the magicians prepared. After its end, Prophet Moses' hand -*peace be upon him*- returned to its original state, and so did the stick.

Then the other signs appeared: {So We plagued them with floods, locusts, lice, frogs, and blood—all as clear signs} [Al Araaf:133]. And they came upon the people of Pharaoh one after the other. Although they were finally forced to implore Moses to remove this torment (which confirms their acknowledgment of Allah Almighty's existence and His power) some still argued that these adversities and disasters were attributed to natural causes, and that Moses and people of Israel had a god of their own, as they had gods of their own.

As for the sign of the she-camel, it appeared as it was requested, according to the conditions of the challenge. Even magicians - if they existed among the people of Thamud - cannot stuff a live camel into the hollow of a rock and then take it out safely. If they did, it is most unlikely to be with the same qualities that were requested in advance. And suppose it did happen this way - assuming it is a jinni – it is still not reasonable for it to remain incarnate the whole time, while they see it, touch it, speak about it and fed on its abundant milk, in some narrations, is described as being so blessed that it was sufficient for the whole people.

So, the miracle was not just a passing event that took place only before the eyes of those present. Rather, it is a great sign that came to be

in accordance with their conditions, only to then remain as a source of livelihood and a living example from which lessons may be drawn.

Perhaps, dear reader, you have seen examples of audacious atheists on social media platforms today, who demand such miracles as a condition for their belief, as if the miracle of Prophet Muhammad -*peace be upon him*- which remains preserved by Allah from every alteration or distortion, is not enough. So, they insist on replacing a greater miracle with an inferior one, restricting their minds to the limits of the tangible, material world!

If a materialistic atheist saw any paranormal activity with his own eyes today, such as magic by the hands of a magician, or the blessings which Allah has endowed to some of His devotees, you may expect him to attribute them to sorcery and deception. If he were to check for himself, to search and examine them closely, he would attribute them to the gaps in science that are yet to be discovered. The strange thing is that you find fantasies which contradict common sense in some modern physics theories, a blatant return to Greek sophistry .(1)

Returning to the people of Salih, they could have continued in their way of faithless ingratitude and infidelity and still enjoyed the milk of the she-camel miracle, as does any stubborn atheist if he sees a magician breach physical limits with his magic. But the miscreants who exceeded all limits, decided to kill the sensory evidence itself. As if keeping the she-camel alive to eat, drink, walk, and be milked before their eyes, was a bother to them. For when the bullheaded find themselves in a reality

(1) This is very common today in attributing everything incomprehensible—or yet-to-be-imagined fantasies—to quantum physics. You will find this sophistry specifically among those who take a preconceived denial of the existence of Allah, because they *"dislike what Allah has revealed"* [Surah Muhammad:9], before they even investigate its reality. I advise here reading the book *"Physics of the Impossible"* by theoretical physicist Michio Kaku, who is famous for proposing the theory of superstrings. This book is full of fantastic justifications for dreams that defy reality and reason under the guise of science.

that collides directly with their passions, they are left before two options: Either to submit to common sense and to acknowledge that reality is the truth, or to try to change this reality by any means to prove their desires to be true.

Let us ponder these verses: {And there were in the city nine ˹elite˺ men who spread corruption in the land, never doing what is right. They vowed, *"Let us swear by Allah that we will take him and his family down by night. Then we will certainly say to his ˹closest˺ heirs, 'We did not witness the murder of his family. We are definitely telling the truth."*} [An-Naml:48-49]. Notice that they were not content with corruption alone, rather they were also not rectifiers, as evil is inherent in these miserable souls.

Ibn Kathir says: Nine tyrants ruled Thamud as they were the elders of the people, their names and surnames known to the Arabs. Among them was the killer of the she-camel, who was believed to be Qaddar bin Salif; all had agreed among themselves to kill the she-camel, and then to kill Prophet Salih, *peace be upon him*.(1)

Note that their prophet not only preached and reminded, but also warned them after they witnessed the evidence with their own eyes, that touching the she-camel had a dire consequence: {And O my people! This she-camel of Allah is a sign for you. So leave her to graze ˹freely˺ on Allah's earth and do her no harm, or a swift punishment will overtake you!"} [Hud:64]. Imagine the tyranny of those who witnessed such a sign and heard the warning, yet were not deterred, especially since Salih -*peace be upon him*- had known what they plotted to do, he thus warned them in the hope that he would find among them a sane person who fears torment, and this is also what Al-Razi referred to in his interpretation.(2)

In another surah, the Almighty says: {when the most wicked of them was roused ˹to kill the she-camel˺ * But the messenger of Allah warned

(1) Tafsir al-Quran al-'Azeem, Vol. 3, p. 381.
(2) Al-Tafsir al-Kabir, Vol. 17, p. 178.

them, *""Do not disturb˹ Allah's she-camel and her ˹turn to˺ drink!"* * Still, they defied him and slaughtered her. So, their Lord crushed them for their crime, leveling all to the ground} [Ash-Shams:12-14]. It seems to me from the sequence of these verses that the most miserable people had plotted to slaughter the she-camel first, then the warning of the Prophet Salih followed, while he reminded them that it is the she-camel of Allah. The phrase, 'Allah's she-camel' comes as a warning, Al-Zajaj interprets it as, *"Leave the she-camel of Allah alone"*,[1] yet they denied him and killed the she-camel.

Strange ingratitude

The miscreants were unsatisfied with this immorality, feeling no regret. Moreso, we do not find verses or narrations which indicate that they felt any guilt for their crimes. Then what degree of dullness and arrogance had they reached?!

The scholars report that Salih -*peace be upon him*- cried when he saw the she-camel had been slaughtered, so he warned them that the torment was thus inevitable. The licentious replied mockingly: and what is the sign of that? He replied: *"Tomorrow your faces will turn yellow, then they will turn red, then they will be blackened, and then you will be met with torment on the fourth day."*[2]

And when they witnessed the authenticity of the sign on their faces day after day, they neither repented or were deterred. This is one of the most amazing things I have read about the tyranny of the children of Adam. Just as they rushed to kill the she-camel, in an effort to escape the conflict between reality and fantasy, they finally decided to kill Prophet Salih himself, as if killing the evidence and the messenger would exclude

(1) Tafsir al-Baghawi, Vol. 8, p. 440.
(2) Tafsir Abu al-Sa'ud, Vol. 4, p. 350.

them from the authority of Allah who revealed the evidence and sent the messenger. Is there misery such as this?!

The prophet's mission is thus complete and it is time for his salvation: {When Our command came, We saved Salih and those who believed with him by a mercy from Us} [Hud:66], and also time to rid the earth of these demons: {When Our command came, We saved Salih and those who believed with him by a mercy from Us and spared them the disgrace of that Day. Surely your Lord ⌜alone⌝ is the All-Powerful, Almighty. Then they were not able to rise up, nor were they helped} [Adh-Dhariyat:44-45]. Imagine the horror of this scene, as they wake on the fourth day after their faces are blackened, to see with their own eyes the implementation of their extermination. Scholars differ in its description, as some mention that it was a huge lightning bolt which uprooted them with wind and burning, and others say that it was a loud scream that removed their hearts and left them lifeless.

Then comes the closing scene: {So he turned away from them, saying, *"O my people! Surely I conveyed to you my Lord's message and gave you ⌜sincere⌝ advice"*}, What an end. I imagine this patient prophet looking from afar at the palaces carved in the mountains, which are now empty, and then turns to Palestine - as scholars say - while repeating: {but you do not like ⌜sincere⌝ advisors. } [Al Araaf:79].

Just as the traces of Aad remained a testament to their destruction, so did the traces of Thamud: {So their homes are there, ⌜but completely⌝ ruined because of their wrongdoing. Surely in this is a lesson for people of knowledge, And We delivered those who were faithful and were mindful ⌜of Allah⌝} [Surah An-Naml:52-53].

It was narrated in the two Sahih by 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar -*may Allah be pleased with him*- that the Messenger of Allah -peace and blessings be upon him- said: "Do not enter upon the abodes of the tormented except that you do while weeping. If you are not weeping, do not enter upon

them, for what has befallen them will not befall you.). This was when he passed with his companions by Hijr, the home of Thamud, en route to the Battle of Tabuk. In Bukhari's narration: (Then he covered his head and hurried to walk until he crossed the valley) [Bukhari:4419], and in Sahih Muslim (then he rebuked – meaning the cattle he was riding – and he hurried up until he passed the area.) [Muslim:2980].

It is noteworthy that the Prophet -*peace be upon him*- ordered his companions, after leaving the place quickly, to shed the water that they had drawn from that land, except for what they had drawn from the she-camel's well, and he also commanded them to feed their cattles the dough that they kneaded from the water of the area's wells, as if the water itself had been cursed in this fateful place.(1)

If Allah – Almighty – has decreed by His mercy not to eradicate the nation of Muhammad- may Allah bless him and grant him peace-(2) we have no guarantee that torment will not descend on part of this nation in this world, and we must take heed from these stories of which we see remnants today.

---

(1) Although it is widely believed in popular culture that *"Mada'in Saleh"* in northern Saudi Arabia is the dwellings of the people of Thamud, historical investigation proves that it is from the remnants of the Nabateans, and its age is around two thousand years. As for the people of Saleh, they were much older, and some researchers suggest that their location was at the site of *"Al-Khuraybah,"* about ten miles away from what is called Mada'in Saleh. It appears from authentic Hadiths that the Arabs knew this location accurately, and that the Prophet, *peace be upon him*, and his companions were specifically aware of which well the camel used to drink from, either by revelation or because it was common knowledge among the inhabitants of the region for generations. However, the precise documentation of these geographical details was not accurately recorded on maps or in oral traditions to reach us as the authentic Hadiths did.

(2) In the authentic Hadith narrated by the Prophet Muhammad, *peace be upon him*, from his Lord, it is stated: *"Verily, I have given you [O Muhammad] for your nation [the guarantee] that I will not destroy them collectively."* [Narrated by Muslim].

Although since my youth I have been reciting the story of the she-camel, I did not realize the enormity of killing the she-camel, nor the misery of its killer, until after this reflection. It may come to mind that tyrants are the most miserable, criminal people, and we may overlook the affliction of power and control that they were tested with before they started to act arrogantly. As for the miserable commoners, even if they possessed some influence, had no palaces, followers, nor armies chanting their names. Nor did oppressed peoples prostrate before them, but ingratitude tyrannized their minds until it disabled their judgment, and megalomania deteriorated them so that they possessed not the slightest components to face the challenge they were afflicted with.



Between surah Yunus and Nuh. Why would a prophet invoke upon his people?

I was reading the great surah of Yunus, the tenth surah of the Quran preceded by surah Al-Tawbah, with all of its lessons in warfare and bartering. It precedes surah Hud and other surahs that carry details of the stories of the prophets, peace be upon them.

I found that the preface of the surah was indicative of its contents: {Alif-Lãm-Ra. These are the verses of the Book, rich in wisdom. Is it astonishing to people that We have sent revelation to a man from among themselves, ˹instructing him,˺ *"Warn humanity and give good news to the believers that they will have an honorable status with their Lord."*? Yet the disbelievers said, *"Indeed, this ˹man˺ is clearly a magician!"*} [Yunus:1-2]. It supports the Prophet -*peace be upon him*- in confronting the fierce disbeliever, consoling his heart with the stories of his prophet brethren who suffered greatly from their people, and warns those who are arrogant and careless of an imminent torment: {If Allah were to hasten evil for people as they wish to hasten good, they would have certainly been doomed. But We leave those who do not expect to meet Us to wander blindly in their defiance} [Yunus:11].

Seventy verses pass in the discussion of the disbelievers, then the story of Noah -*peace be upon him*- begins on the seventy-first, summarized in three verses. In summary, I found a focus on the aspect of denial and subsequent warnings: {Then after him We sent ˹other˺ messengers to their ˹own˺ people and they came to them with clear proofs. But they would not believe in what they had rejected before. This is how We seal the hearts of the transgressors} [Yunus:74].

Immediately after that, the story of Moses and Aaron, peace be upon them, begins: {Then after these ⌜messengers⌝ We sent Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh and his chiefs with Our signs. But they behaved arrogantly and were wicked people. When the truth came to them from Us, they said, *"This is certainly pure magic!"*} [Yunus:75-76]. The focus of the narration is to refer directly to denial and arrogance, so the following verses summarize the insistence of Pharaoh's people to deny miracles and signs even after the magicians themselves believed in them, This impressed in my mind that they were closer in resemblance to objects than to humans.

Then came the verse that deserves pause: {Moses prayed, *"Our Lord! You have granted Pharaoh and his chiefs luxuries and riches in this worldly life, ⌜which they abused⌝ to lead people astray from Your Way! Our Lord, destroy their riches and harden their hearts so that they will not believe until they see the painful punishment. Allah responded ⌜to Moses and Aaron⌝, "Your prayer is answered! So be steadfast and do not follow the way of those who do not know."*} [Yunus:88-89]. We are here before a supplication of two honorable prophets upon their people to not be guided, and the divine answer.

Some scholars say that the Arabic letter *"L"* in the word *"Leyadhillo"* which means *"to go astray"* holds the meaning of consequence and insistence, so the meaning is: O Lord, You gave them adornment and money to loyally worship you, but they did not, so the consequence of their action was misguidance.

Others say that it is the *"L"* for reasoning, so the meaning is: O Lord, you gave them adornments and money as a way of solicitation to test them after they had gone astray, and they became ever more tyrannical.

Whatever the meaning of the *"L"*, the question that came to my mind was: Why would two prophets invoke misguidance upon their people?

The previous page of the Quran was still fresh in the mind, as the surah only mentioned the story of Noah -*peace be upon him*- brief and focused, and then briefly referred in another verse to the denial of the following peoples against the people of Noah, as if it were a reference to the colluding of tyrants regarding the insistence on denying and not believing the message.

I proceeded reading in search of a satisfactory answer, and as soon as the story of Moses and Aaron -peace and be upon them- ended, it became clear to me that the verses were digging in my mind and heart directly, and I found that they addressed the prophet directly for revelation was received by him before reaching us: {If you ˹O Prophet˺ are in doubt about ˹these stories˺ that We have revealed to you, then ask those who read the Scripture before you. The truth has certainly come to you from your Lord, so do not be one of those who doubt, and do not be one of those who deny Allah's signs or you will be one of the losers} [Yunus:94-95]. I thought to myself: What a warning! If a disbeliever had read these verses and believed that Muhammad -*peace be upon him*- had come up with this text himself, he would not have thought that Muhammad would address himself in this way. It is a verse that resounds with certainty before the doubt itself arises, and supports the stories contained in the surah with what is in the memory of the people of the Book.

What next?! The following verse comes with a definitive report, the particle *"Inna"* works to emphasize the denial of any doubt: {Indeed, those against whom your Lord's decree ˹of torment˺ is justified will not believe — even if every sign were to come to them—until they see the painful punishment} [Yunus:96-97]. The scholars have said: Those whom Allah Has condemned to disbelief as a result of their choosing to go astray in the first place, will not believe in the truth regardless of miracles and signs.

Another story directly begins: {If only there had been a society which believed ⌜before seeing the torment⌝ and, therefore, benefited from its belief, like the people of Jonah. When they believed, We lifted from them the torment of disgrace in this world and allowed them enjoyment for a while} [Yunus:98]. The scholars differ in the narration of what happened to the people of Yunus *"Jonah"*, who are the inhabitants of Nineveh in Iraq, after they disbelieved their prophet as other nations did, Jonah *-peace be upon him-* warned them of torment within three days, and since they had never witnessed Jonas lie, agreed to remain vigilant, and when they found that Jonas left the village at night, they hurried to declare collective repentance, so Allah accepted. Other interpreters say that the torment had already begun to descend, as the sky darkened and the roofs of their homes blackened, so they rushed to repentance, so Allah removed the torment, as in the verse.

The following couple of verses continue on: {Had your Lord so willed ⌜O Prophet⌝, all ⌜people⌝ on earth would have certainly believed, every single one of them! Would you then force people to become believers?} [Yunus:99]. Allah is able to guide all people, but He did not oppress them when He gave them the freedom to choose, and those who disbelieved did so of their own free will. {It is not for any soul to believe except by Allah's leave, and He will bring His wrath upon those who are unmindful} [Yunus:100]. The choice of any human being to believe is not contrary to the will of Allah, and this is obvious, but man's choice of disbelief is not the result of Allah forcing him to do so, only making those who do not reason in the first place evil, who themselves choose ingratitude, so their hearts are sealed by Allah as punishment.

I continued reading, passing through more warning to the disbelievers of Quraish, and patience and reassurance for the Prophet's heart *-peace be upon him-*. Then the surah concludes with two eloquent verses: {Say, ⌜O Prophet,⌝ *"O humanity! The truth has surely come to you from your Lord. So whoever chooses to be guided, it is only for their own good. And*

whoever chooses to stray, it is only to their own loss. And I am not a keeper over you."} [Yunus:108]. It contains an affirmation of the establishment of the argument and the completion of the revelation of the truth, and then a direct command to the Prophet *-peace be upon him-* to be patient and wait for the separation on the Day of Resurrection: {And follow what is revealed to you, and be patient until Allah passes His judgment. For He is the Best of Judges} [Yunus:109].

Thus, the venerable surah ends, but questions still fill my head, why did the surah bear the name of the Prophet Jonah *-peace be upon him-* even though it was mentioned only in one verse, while the story of the people of Moses filled a larger space than the surah itself?

Surah Hud

I continued onto surah Hud, which also carries the name of another honorable prophet, its subject never leaving the venue of discussion, blaming the polytheists and warning them, and also consoling the Prophet *-peace be upon him-* while he was facing malice from his nation just as the prophets preceding him faced from their nations.

After two pages, I found myself again before the story of Nuh, *peace be upon him*, and he is the first of the possessors of determination among the messengers from a chronological perspective. Before the story begins, the surah differentiates between two kinds: {*"The example of these two parties is that of the blind and the deaf, compared to the seeing and the hearing. Can the two be equal? Will you not then be mindful?"*} [Hud:24], a few verses laters, I read that Noah *-peace be upon him-* addresses the liars among his people: {He said, *"O my people! Consider if I stand on a clear proof from my Lord and He has blessed me with a mercy from Himself, which you fail to see. Should we ˹then˺ force it on you against your will?} [Hud:28]. Is there better clarification and conciseness than the prophet here confidently speaking about the "existence of a proof"* that he stands

by and relies on, the guidance that is clear and in compliance with the mind and common sense, which also speaks of the *"blindness"* in which they are immersed. Then, he condemns the very issue that has been spinning in my mind since I asked about the obliteration of the hearts of Moses' people, for Noah condemningly asks: Do I force you all to be on the straight path while you all are disliking it?!

What is also note-worthy is Noah's answer that comes after the absurdity of his people, as they said: {...*"We see you only as a human being like ourselves, and we see that no one follows you except the lowliest among us, who do so ⌜hastily⌝ without thinking. We do not see anything that makes ⌜all of⌝ you any better than us. In fact, we think you are liars."*} [Hud:27]. Their saying clearly is a logical misrepresentation, as their claim of not following Prophet Noah is because his followers are strictly from the lowest class of people and the general public!

After Noah debates these fools, they respond strangely: *"...You have argued with us far too much, so bring upon us what you threaten us with, if what you say is true."* [Hud:32], instead of asking for further evidence, they did not put in front of their eyes the possibility of being wrong and to ask for guidance, but rather they jumped directly asking to expedite the torment. {He responded, "It is Allah Who can bring it upon you if He wills, and then you will have no escape!} [Hud:33]. So, the matter is contingent on His alone, and the prophets do not claim anything more than the mission of delivering the message.

Returning to the core the pressing question, and the argument of guidance against misguidance, Nuh -*peace be upon him*- says: {My advice will not benefit you—no matter how hard I try—if Allah wills ⌜for⌝ you to stray. He is your Lord, and to Him you will ⌜all⌝ be returned."} [Hud:34]. He is determined that advising them at length will not be beneficial unless Allah Almighty permits guidance.

And if, dear reader, the question about the will of Allah Almighty to misguide them crosses your mind, as is in the previous verse, I mentioned earlier that Allah does not blacken the heart of an oppressor except as a torment after establishing evidence, and after two verses only: {And it was revealed to Noah, "None of your people will believe except those who already have. So do not be distressed by what they have been doing} [Hud:36]. For Allah Whose knowledge has encompassed everything – and Allah Almighty's knowledge reveals and does not oblige – knew in His eternal knowledge that no one among the people of Noah would believe, except those previously guided. And Allah told his messenger of this, so he ordered him to build the arch, to rescue himself and the few believers from the fatal torment.

This sparked in my memory the story of Noah in the surah Al-'Ankabut: {Indeed, We sent Noah to his people, and he remained among them for a thousand years, less fifty. Then the Flood overtook them, while they persisted in wrongdoing} [Al-'Ankabut:14], and I imagined the situation of this great prophet who was steadfast in reasoning, advising and preaching for nearly ten centuries, yet only few believed in him. If one of us reasoned with a stubborn atheist for one session and found his stubbornness is that of one tenth of Noah's people, he would despair, maybe even standing to supplicate against this ungrateful person to be more astray.

Surah Nuh

I jumped directly to the surah which carries the name of this great prophet, the first of the possessors of determination, with the longest tolerance due to extended age, who was sent during the earliest age of mankind, thus revelation did not come to him with stories of people that preceded him to console him and sympathize with him.

I saw in this short surah strange examples of arrogance and unrighteousness towards a prophet, in a way that cannot be tolerated by us, if we were to receive such a treatment by an arrogant person even once. {And whenever I invite them to be forgiven by You, they press their fingers into their ears, cover themselves with their clothes, persist ˹in denial˺, and act very arrogantly} [Nuh:7].

Imagine, dear reader, nine hundred and fifty years of trying in different ways to reach a people, only to declare: {He cried, "My Lord! I have surely called my people day and night} [Nuh:5]. {Then I certainly called them openly, then I surely preached to them publicly and privately} [Nuh:8-9], despite also offering worldly temptations, {He will shower you with abundant rain, supply you with wealth and children, and give you gardens as well as rivers} [Nuh:11-12]. So if Allah Almighty wanted to misguide them for no reason, then he would not have sent them a patient prophet with this unique tolerance, and his prophet would not have offered this preaching and outreach.

After this show of patience, which none could possibly bear, except a prophet among the possessors of determination, I can now understand the supplication of this patient prophet against his people: {Noah had prayed, "My Lord! Do not leave a single disbeliever on earth} [Noad:26]. Not only because he waited for nearly ten centuries, but also because Allah Almighty revealed to him, as in surah Hud, that none of his people will believe except for the ones who already believed and here I can understand why Noah -*peace be upon him*- invoked upon his people with a painful complaint: {For if You spare ˹any of˺ them, they will certainly mislead Your servants, and give birth only to ˹wicked˺ sinners, staunch disbelievers} [Nuh:27]. Allah had revealed that to him and commanded him to build the arch and await the flood.

Returning to Yunus

This maze of questions returned me to point A, and I was hesitant about what the interpretations said, that Moses *-peace be upon him-* did not invoke upon Pharaoh and his people until after it was revealed to him that they were to die as disbelievers.

I then said to myself, the mentioning of his supplication in a surah that carried the name of Prophet Jonah- *peace be upon him*- may be to point out the patience of this prophet and what affliction he had endured and that hope could come without expecting it. Also, Jonah's village is the only village wherein all inhabitants believed: {If only there had been a society which believed ˹before seeing the torment˺ and, therefore, benefited from its belief, like the people of Jonah…} [Yunus:98]. In fact, it was the only village that believed after its prophet had lost hope from it!

The people of Nineveh did not believe in Jonas *-peace be upon him-* as I have mentioned, and when he warned them of torment, they awaited until they saw it arrive, and only then did they instantly declare repentance. And Allah protected them from it.

There is another side to this story though. Prophet Jonas *-peace be upon him-* had not received a divine order to leave the village when he did: {And ˹remember˺ when the Man of the Whale stormed off ˹from his city˺ in a rage}, he left in a state of anger before Allah had permitted, {thinking We would not restrain him} He thought that he had completed his mission and that Allah would not hold him accountable, by restraining inside the whale. And when he endured what he did, and the whale had swallowed him in the sea: {Then in the ˹veils of˺ darkness he cried out, *"There is no god ˹worthy of worship˺ except You. Glory be to You! I have certainly done wrong."*} [Al-Anbya:87].

If Jonas *-peace be upon him-* had waited only a few hours, his eyes would have been satisfied seeing his whole people repented, and he

would have seen an unprecedented scene, which is reverting a whole village, and seeing all the women and children dressed up modestly, then hurried to Allah crying and supplicating, and the cattle and the beasts started to moan in an unprecedented scene, until they were showered by Allah's mercy and Allah took the torment away from them.(1)

Whether he waited or not, Yunus *-peace be upon him-* did not supplicate Allah to blacken their hearts, because Allah did not suggest that to him, but rather he was punished for rushing and leaving the village, and in this what is enough to proof Allah's mercy towards his servants and giving them a grace window until the last moment. His high level of generosity is that he punished his respectful prophet because he was not patient until he was allowed to exit until his people deserved to be punished.

This also presents a lesson not to judge anyone in a rush, as prophets who supplicated against their people did so only after Allah revealed that they were hopeless peoples. In fact, Noah *-peace be upon him-* continued to reach out and preach for nearly ten centuries, and Moses *-peace be upon him-* continued to provide Pharaoh with sign after sign, altogether nine, while he was awaiting Allah's plan.

Your wonder would yet increase, dear reader, if you knew that Moses continued to wait for forty years after he invoked upon them, and this period is not the period of outreach and his redundant attempts, but rather only the waiting period for Allah's plan to mortify Pharaoh and his people after Moses knew that they will not believe.(2)

Al-Zamkhashari says in his interpretation of Allah's words: {Allah responded ˹to Moses and Aaron˺, *"Your prayer is answered! So be steadfast…}* - *"Your ask is approved, and what you ask for will happen, but on it's time, so be steadfast, and be resilient in what you stand for*

(1) Al-Durr al-Mansur fi al-Tafsir bil-Ma'thur, Vol. 7, p. 705.
(2) The previous reference, Vol. 7, p. 695.

and continue to reason. Because Noah -peace be upon him- continued his outreach among his people almost one thousand years, so do not hasten."(1)

And with the conclusion of this image, I say, perhaps surah Yunus was limited to the stories of Noah, Moses and Jonah because they have in common this important lesson, and for the consolation that it provides to our generous prophet's heart, *peace be upon him*, for the seal of the prophets is the one whose hands collect the experiences of those who preceded him, and he was the most steadfast and patient, and the one who received the divine order to be promoted to the highest level among the prophets: {So endure patiently, as did the Messengers of Firm Resolve. And do not ˹seek to˺ hasten ˹the torment˺ for the deniers. On the Day they see what they have been threatened with, it will be as if they had only stayed ˹in this world˺ for an hour of a day. ˹This is˺ a ˹sufficient˺ warning! Then, will anyone be destroyed except the rebellious people?} [Al-ahqaf:35], and he was the one who received direction not to rush a torment towards his people: {So be patient with your Lord's decree, and do not be like ˹Jonah,˺ the Man of the Whale, …} [Al-Qalam:48]. And he was the one who narrated all these stories and commands to his people, and remained steadfast despite their ingratitude until he had fulfilled his duty, peace and blessings be upon him.

(1) Al-Kashaf, Vol. 2, p. 366. p62

Jacob and Joseph .. Do not relate your vision to your brothers

Since being told across many centuries and especially in the Bible,[1] the story of Joseph has captured the hearts and minds and inspired poets, painters, novels, TV and cinema with countless beautiful art, and it will remain one of the most beautiful stories across times, places, languages and cultures, because of its thrills and the depth of its wisdom and the virtuous morals.

So what would you think if you read this story in the most beautiful form of literature known to man? And how would you feel if you happened upon the Quran and found this surprise: surah Yusuf? And what of the euphoria you would experience as you read, 'the best of stories,' knowing that Allah Almighty is its narrator?

Khaled BIn Mi'dan narrates: *"Surah Yusuf and surah Maryam are of the fruits that the people of heaven will indulge in"*[2] – this joy is befitting of the joys of the people of heaven. And Ibn Ata'a says: *"No sad person listens to surah Yusuf except that he feels relieved by it"*.[3] It's no wonder then, how I was consoled by it in the toughest situations, and how I used to cry while repeating one of its best verses: {I complain of my anguish and sorrow only to Allah…}, and how these words touch my heart every time I repeat them.

Perhaps dear reader, you would like to know which parts of this surah the literary giants favored. Still, language is not a skill I excel in, so

(1) *"The Holy Bible"* is a term referring to the collection of both the Old and New Testaments, believed in by most Jews and Christians in the modern era.
(2) Tafsir al-Baghawi, Vol. 4, p. 212.
(3) The same previous source.

we shall sail in another direction, and I shall reveal a dangerous question which came to mind through contemplation and opened the gates of wisdom to me.

The conspiracy of brother and sons

Let us imagine the following scene which is an introduction to the suffering of two prophets: {Then they returned to their father in the evening, weeping * They cried, "Our father! We went racing and left Yusuf with our belongings, and a wolf devoured him! But you will not believe us, no matter how truthful we are} [Yusuf:16-17], and then imagine the looks of this griefed father while listening to his sons, and seeing their lying eyes which they couldn't hide: {...But you will not believe us, no matter how truthful we are} [Yusuf:17].

And still imagine Jacob -*peace be upon him*-, as he is holding Joseph's shirt filled with blood: {And they brought his shirt, stained with false blood} He saw it intact, unripped but remained painfully patient: {He responded, *"No! Your souls must have tempted you to do something ⌜evil⌝. So ⌜I can only endure with⌝ beautiful patience! It is Allah's help that I seek to bear your claims."*} [Yusuf:18].

Here a question popped into my head: why did Jacob -*peace be upon him*- remain silent about this crime which he didn't believe? Why didn;t he rush to the scene to search for his precious one as any of us would do in his place? Rather, why didn't he force his sons to admit what they had done to their brother? Why did he choose the toughest way, to remain silent and patient?

The story's suspense-filled events went by and kept me occupied from this question – but the Prophet of Allah, Jacob – this old, respected man did not forget his love towards his sons, and remained steadfast with beautiful patience, relying on Allah until he was brought up again to new events.

After many years, the first interaction between Joseph -*peace be upon him*- then became the treasurer of Egypt – and his brothers took place: {And Joseph's brothers came and entered his presence. He recognized them but they were unaware of who he really was} [Yusuf:58]. Then Joseph came up with a trick to keep one of his brothers so he would not be taken back by the rest of them. They hopelessly returned to their father, again lesser in number. Jacob -*peace be upon him*- repeated the same response: {No! Your souls must have tempted you to do something ˹evil˺. So ˹I am left with nothing but˺ beautiful patience! ...} [Yusuf:83], as if he had lost trust in his sons, no longer believing their claims. He supplicated Allah to return his two sons to him: {*"I trust Allah will return them all to me. Surely He ˹alone˺ is the All-Knowing, All-Wise."*...} [Yusuf:83], after they thought he had forgotten Joseph and lost hope in seeing him again.

I was also amazed by Jacob's resilience, that he became an old man and hid his pain in his heart, remembering when Joseph told him in his youth: {*"O my dear father! Indeed I dreamt of eleven stars, and the sun, and the moon—I saw them prostrating to me!"*...} [Yusuf:4], and then Jacob's recommendation was: {"O my dear son! Do not relate your vision to your brothers...} [Yusuf:5], since not everything known can be spoken, and not all pains are treated through confession.

{He turned away from them...} without asking them to confess anything, and only shed tears until he was blind: {...lamenting, *"Alas, poor Joseph!"* And his eyes turned white out of the grief he suppressed} [Yusuf:84].

Yet his sons, with guilt chasing them for tens of years and not daring to confess what they had done in the first place, were amazed with their father's patience the whole time: {They said, *"By Allah! You will not cease to remember Joseph until you lose your health or ˹even˺ your life."*} [Yusuf:85] from sadness and grievance.

And who can bear this pain through these long years except the prophets? Who else besides them are role models for patience: {"I complain of my anguish and sorrow only to Allah, and I know from Allah what you do not know} [Yusuf:86].

Tribulation for patience

Finally the answer came to me, and the last sentence made me certain: {...and I know from Allah what you do not know} that it was revealed to Jacob - *peace be upon him* - from the beginning, that Allah Almighty ordered him to remain silent and patient when they brought him Joseph's shirt, and he hid great despair in his heart, waiting for relief, day after day, month after month, year after year, until he had lost his second son too, along with his eyesight. All the while remaining patient, never complaining.

I also remembered that Joseph was revealed to, when his brothers threw him in the well: {...We inspired him: *""One day˹ you will remind them of this deed of theirs while they are unaware ˹of who you are˺."*} [Yusuf:15]. Allah inspired him with tranquility, and relieved his anxiety by revealing there is divine wisdom in all that has happened, and ordered him to remain patient until the time comes. So, Joseph's patience is like his father's patience. He also bore the struggle of captivity, being away from his family and imprisoned for a few years, until his situation changed from being imprisoned to living in the palace: {This is how We established Joseph in the land to settle wherever he pleased...} [Yusuf:56]. He did not leave in search of his family but rather he waited for the divine order.

Both prophets hid their secrets in their hearts and continued their mission to guide people and deliver the message, until the moment of truth was due: {They replied ˹in shock˺, *"Are you really Joseph?"* * He said, *"I am Joseph, and here is my brother ˹Benjamin˺! Allah has truly been gracious to us}, and he -peace be upon him- summarized the lesson in his*

piety and patience: {Surely whoever is mindful ˹of Allah˺ and patient, then certainly Allah never discounts the reward of the good-doers."} [Yusuf:90].

The time for confession, apology and regret had come: {They admitted, *"By Allah! Allah has truly preferred you over us, and we have surely been sinful."*} [Yusuf:91]. And it is also time for forgiveness from the pure of mind: {Yusuf said, "There is no blame on you today. May Allah forgive you! He is the Most Merciful of the merciful!} [Yusuf:92].

Then came the relief which Jacob -*peace be upon him*- had awaited too long: {But when the bearer of the good news arrived, he cast the shirt over Jacob's face, so he regained his sight}. He then confessed that he was ordered to remain silent and be patient: {Jacob then said ˹to his children˺, *"Did I not tell you that I truly know from Allah what you do not know?"*} [Yusuf:96].

Finally, the time came for the final apology to their father, begging for forgiveness: {They begged, *"O our father! Pray for the forgiveness of our sins. We have certainly been sinful."* [Yusuf:97], which is also the time for forgiveness and high morals: {He said, *"I will pray to my Lord for your forgiveness. He ˹alone˺ is indeed the All-Forgiving, Most Merciful."*} [Yusuf:98].

The family reunion is now complete: {When they entered Joseph's presence, he received his parents ˹graciously˺}, and the wisdom of tribulation was fulfilled; after suffering separation and poverty, the grace of reunion is complete with the move to Egypt: {…and said, *"Enter Egypt, Allah willing, in security."*} [Yusuf:99], and Allah has made it up for them by replacing their situation with security and wealth.

And Joseph was at comfort when the vision was fulfilled: {Then he raised his parents to the throne, and they all fell down in prostration to Joseph, who then said, *"O my dear father! This is the interpretation of my old dream. My Lord has made it come true}, and he started to count Allah's*

blessings upon him: {He was truly kind to me when He freed me from prison, and brought you all from the desert". Clearly, he did not avenge himself or gloat against his brothers, and the state of authority did not change him when they fell down in prostration, but rather, he referred his brother's sin to the devil: {…after Satan had ignited rivalry between me and my siblings…}, and he did not say to his father: do you see how much did we suffer and waited? As the completion of faith in the prophets' hearts is not mature until after showing gratitude: {…Indeed my Lord is subtle in fulfilling what He wills. Surely He ˹alone˺ is the All-Knowing, All-Wise."…} [Yusuf:100].

Joseph humbly continued to count blessings: {*"My Lord! You have surely granted me authority and taught me the interpretation of dreams. ˹O˺ Originator of the heavens and the earth! You are my Guardian in this world and the Hereafter. Allow me to die as one who submits and join me with the righteous."*} [Yusuf:101].

Do you see, dear reader, how suffering tries the most loved people to Allah? And Prophet Muhammad -*peace be upon him*- said: (The most tried people are the prophets, then the righteous ones, then the behaved ones to the most behaved ones).[1] Allah has not just sent them to deliver the message but also to teach us to be patient based on what they have experienced of trials and calamities, and yet despite what Allah has favored them with, they are humans like us, they feel the pain, they cry and get sad like us. So, they provide the best stories of mankind through their suffering, patience and true reliance on Allah, and the most perfect ones with the highest reach to the depths of the hearts.

So, the surah states after the last event: {We only sent before you ˹O Prophet˺ men inspired by Us from among the people of each society}, so they are not angels, but men like us, so we have to search within this wisdom and learn from what they have gone through: {Have the deniers

(1) Narrated by Ahmad and others, and authenticated by Al-Albani.

not traveled through the land to see what was the end of those ˹destroyed˺ before them?}.

Then the surah puts another lesson of wisdom before us: {And when the messengers despaired and their people thought the messengers had been denied help, Our help came to them ˹at last˺} [Yusuf:110], as if it is a reprimand if you rush the state of relief, and a reminder of what those great prophets Jacob and Joseph had gone through lots of trials that consumed a lot of their age, while waiting without complaining.

As the story begun with: {We relate to you ˹O Prophet˺ the best of stories through Our revelation of this Quran} [Yusuf:3], it is ended with a verse: {In their stories there is truly a lesson for people of reason…} [Yusuf:111], so no one learns from these best stories except for the people of reason, and everyone else goes through them for fun and entertainment.

And {…This message cannot be a fabrication…}, and not just a story from old times, {rather ˹it is˺ a confirmation of previous revelation, a detailed explanation of all things, a guide, and a mercy for people of faith}.

Al-Qasas... Peace be upon you; we seek not the ignorant

At the start of the twenty-first century, the data and communication revolution changed the world. It has shortened distances and removed barriers in the exchanging of ideas and news, and allowed anybody, even a senseless and worthless person to become a *"content creator"* or *"influencer"*.

With the start of the second decade of this century revolutions, disturbances and wars in most Arab regions began. The parties involved found a free platform for conflict on satellite channels and social media platforms. If political tremors often follow social disruption, then in our era, a media openness and foreign intervention have been blessed by this coincidence.

The youth and the newer generation have found themselves in an unprecedented state of mixed-up chaos, what they thought to be fundamental has shaken up, and many principles, values and creeds have fallen. Arab societies – which used to be described as stable are now exposed to worldly desire.

And just as many eastern and western societies before had gone through great intellectual and societal quakes, the ghost of counterculture has encompassed the region, which is already wounded by dependability, transgression and corruption.

The edge of shipwreck

Nihilism is an intellectual current that contradicts the principles that can build any intellectual or political system, and it is an etiological

stance that considers rejection and insubordination and revoking as its symbols, for the counterculture person rejects objective facts and knowledge, revolts against religious and ethical principles, and believes that life is meaningless.

If you were to reason with such a person, you would not be able to find any common ground to reason, because knowledge itself is doubted, and thus the possibility of confirming human intellect is denied – whether true or not. So, the capability of learning for such a person is a place of doubt, and he also denies any sense of belonging, and would try to destroy any knowledge or sense of belonging. You are at a loss with such a person.

Despite the fact that during the twentieth century these thoughts were crystalized in a philosophical paradigm under the umbrella of *"post-modernization"*, it is not an exception in history, as its roots clearly return to the Greek sophism, that was documented in the dialogues between Socrates and Platoon, and I can glance their effects too in the dialogue among the rebels against the prophets' messages across eras, of which the Quran has recorded some of its wonders.

Illogical ingratitude

I expect that the Islamic prohibition of senseless controversy is no secret to you, dear reader. One of the most common commandments of the prophet -*peace be upon him*- is: (I guarantee a house in Paradise for one who leaves argumentation, even if he is right),[1] and he also said: (If you see greed is being followed, lust is being followed, this life being preferred over the hereafter, and the admiration of everyone's own opinion, then take care of yourself and stay away from the public).[2]

(1) Abu Dawood:4800.
(2) Abu Dawood:4341, and Tirmidhi:3058.

However, I may sometimes find myself stuck in an unexpected discussion with a sophist, or a nihilist, and I see that the solution is only to throw the ball in his court, and instead of trying to prove what I believe, or even to refute his belief, if any, I ask him to offer an alternative that we can agree on, or at least determine the criteria that we can judge to.

And since the noble Quran contains {a detailed explanation of all things} [Yusuf:111], I was confident of finding the ideal approach to deal with the skeptics in some of its verses, especially in the dialogues documented by the Quran between the prophets and the deniers. I wasn't surprised when I found their refutation sometimes in the same style, especially when the denier crosses the limit between reason and desire.

There are many examples, but I will suffice here with contemplating some verses from surah Al-Qasas. After concluding the story of Moses *-peace be upon him-*, the infallible revelation states: {Also so they would not say, if struck by an affliction for what their hands have done: *"Our Lord! If only You had sent us a messenger, we would have followed Your revelations and become believers."*} [Al-Qasas:47]. This means, if not for their saying when a calamity befell them due to their sins, 'Why did You not send to us a messenger so that we could have followed Your verses and been among the believers?' – a conditional statement, as Al-Qurtubi says.(1)

It's as if sending messengers came to establish the argument against those hardened minds. Even though their faith and conviction are impossible, they and their associates will argue once the messengers come, as the following verses continue: {But when the truth came to them from Us, they said, *"If only he was given the like of what Moses had been given."* Did they not deny what had been given to Moses earlier? They claimed, *"Both ⌜Scriptures⌝ are works of magic, supporting each other!"* Adding, *"We truly deny both."*} [Al-Qasas:48]. This implies that the

(1) Safwat al-Tafasir, p. 879.

disbelievers of Quraysh demanded from Muhammad -*peace be upon him*- to bring them what Moses brought in terms of miracles and scripture to the Children of Israel. The response came: 'Did they not disbelieve in what was given to Moses before?' meaning, did those who learned this argument from the Jews not reject what Moses brought to them? Indeed, the Jews used to instruct the disbelievers with such responses to argue against the Prophet, *peace be upon him*."

Scholars say that the disbelievers sent messengers to the Jewish leaders in Medina asking about Muhammad. The Jews informed them that his qualities were indeed mentioned in the Torah. However, the disbelievers responded only with 'two works of magic supporting each other,' or in another recitation, 'two magicians supporting each other,' meaning the Torah and the Quran were two compatible forms of magic or that Moses and Muhammad -peace be upon them- were both magicians.

This signifies that the disbelievers were ready to accept from the Jews whatever aligned with their desires. When some Jews acknowledged in their secret correspondences that Muhammad -*peace be upon him*- was indeed truthful, the disbelievers simply denied the authenticity of the Torah!

Faced with this contradiction, there was no point in debating such minds except by playing in their field. The surah then addresses the Prophet, *peace be upon him*: {Say, ⌜O Prophet,⌝ *"Bring then a scripture from Allah which is a better guide than these two…} [Al-Qasas:49]. Such a brilliant response, is as brief as it overwhelms the experts of sophistry. Instead of seeking debate to ascertain the truth of the Torah and the Quran, the solution lies in challenging the opponents to produce a superior book. An exceptional promise is made that if they do so, Muhammad will abandon what he follows and join them: {… so I may follow it, if your claim is true."*} [Surah Al-Qasas:49].

After turning the tables on them, the surah assuredly continues: {So if they fail to respond to you, then know that they only follow their desires ...} [Al-Qasas:50]. This is the epitome of the fruitless argument we see today — merely following desires, neither searching for truth nor attempting to understand. {...And who could be more astray than those who follow their desires with no guidance from Allah? Surely Allah does not guide the wrongdoers} [Al-Qasas:50]. The reward for those who choose to follow their desires is the closure of the door of guidance in their faces. In such debates, you'll witness how the denier juggles intellectual premises and conclusive evidence but then simply raises his shoulders and says plainly: 'I'm not convinced!'

To follow this is a magnificent Quranic gesture, touching upon our reality once again, shifting the discussion to those among the people of the book who believed in the Prophet, *peace be upon him*. The surah praises their refusal to engage in futile argument: {When they hear slanderous talk, they turn away from it, saying, *"We are accountable for our deeds and you for yours. Peace ⌜is our only response⌝ to you! We want nothing to do with those who act ignorantly."*} [Al-Qasas:55].

Some interpreters suggest that this verse describes the state of the believers among the Jews and Christians. When some disbelievers attacked them for leaving their religions and following the message of Muhammad -*peace be upon him*- the new believers did not burden their minds and hearts with pointless debates. They simply said, 'Peace be upon you; we seek not the ignorant'.(1)

Then, a comforting touch for the heart of the Messenger of Mercy: '{You surely cannot guide whoever you like ⌜O Prophet⌝, but it is Allah Who guides whoever He wills, and He knows best who are ⌜fit to be⌝ guided} [Al-Qasas:56], so he wouldn't grieve over the fate of those insisting on

(1) The previous reference, p. 881.

closing their minds. We are not burdened with guiding people, and Allah did not disclose to us what hides in their hearts—acceptance or rejection.

Finally: {Do not let them turn you away from the revelations of Allah after they have been sent down to you. Rather, invite ˹all˺ to ˹the Way of˺ your Lord, and never be one of the disbelievers} [Al-Qasas:87]. A preacher and reformer should not hinder their mission with futile debates; that's the goal of their adversaries. Let them suffice by throwing the ball in their opponents' court and focus on their own salvation.



Ar-Rum... They only know the worldly affairs of this life

Perhaps one of the greatest misconceptions that has reached your ears today, dear reader, is that ethics constitute the essence and ultimate principle of religion. You still see this imported idea repeated here and there until the significance of creed and worship fades away within you, and the status of good behavior rises to the level of salvation. So, you cannot help but wonder: How did humans become the center of existence? And when did my treatment of people become more important and prioritized over my relationship with Allah?!

A cursory glance at those who propagate this fallacy is sufficient for a response. You will not find it among youth dedicated to mosques and engrossed in the Quran, but more likely within circles engrossed in Hollywood movies, novels, and translated books. Perhaps among those who only open the Quran during Ramadan. Thus, it's no wonder that someone might ask: Why would good-hearted people enter the Fire merely because they didn't believe in Allah?

The prevailing opinion among many scholars is that those who did not receive the message of Islam in its correct form, which at least motivates them to seek its validity, are akin to the people of the interval between prophets. As for those to whom the message has reached and who have known the truth of Islam, the proof has been established upon them. They are obliged to believe in the oneness of Allah and follow what has been ordained in terms of rituals and abstentions. Good conduct, kindness of heart, and refraining from harming others are among the rulings of Islamic law, but they are not the essence of the religion nor the purpose of existence.

It is known that this flaw in establishing prioritizations has become apparent only within the dominant liberal culture. However, those accustomed to pondering over the texts of revelation will not only find compelling answers but will also fortify their minds against the impact of fallacies, even if they are not committed to seeking knowledge.

Priorities in Life

These reflections came to mind as I pondered surah Ar-Rum, which begins with a miraculous prophecy about the victory of the Byzantines over the Persians in a few years. This prophecy was fulfilled in 629 CE, despite the imminent collapse of the Byzantines against the Persian onslaught. The surah states: {⌜This is⌝ the promise of Allah. ⌜And⌝ Allah never fails in His promise. But most people do not know. They ⌜only⌝ know the worldly affairs of this life, but are ⌜totally⌝ oblivious to the Hereafter} (Ar-Rum:6-7).

Commentators extensively elaborate on the latter verse, highlighting how throughout ages, many people have been engrossed in worldly matters at the expense of the Hereafter. Ibn Abbas reportedly said: 'They know the affairs of their livelihoods, when to sow, harvest, plant, and build, but they are blind to matters concerning the Hereafter.'

Today, we witness many Muslims, and others too, readily embracing the toils of this world. They diligently raise their children, emphasizing the need for effort and late-night studies to obtain the highest degrees and best jobs, as if academic and professional success is the ultimate purpose of existence. Meanwhile, success in the Hereafter remains sidelined, and children might even be raised with the idea of transforming worship itself into a means to improve worldly conditions. Their minds may be shaped to believe that seeking God's pleasure is merely a means to excel in their worldly dreams, rather than achieving success in the test that life truly is.

Worse yet, the Hereafter has been entirely removed from the list of priorities. Some young Muslims vigorously pursue fame in music or dance, or at least seek to be labeled as 'influencers' on social media. They might sacrifice their Hereafter while chasing an increased number of followers, and some might even risk their lives attempting to capture an impressive image atop a towering building, meeting tragic ends. Yet, if they were offered martyrdom for the sake of Allah with a similar risk percentage, they might hesitate and withdraw.

The reality is that most people find the obligations of religion burdensome but have no qualms about engaging in life's challenges to improve their living conditions. Surprisingly, those content with their sustenance in this life exert less effort for the Hereafter.

Here comes the next verse, redirecting our gaze towards what truly matters: {Have they not reflected upon their own being? Allah only created the heavens and the earth and everything in between for a purpose and an appointed term. Yet most people are truly in denial of the meeting with their Lord!} [Ar-Rum:8]. Allah did not create the universe aimlessly; there is a clear purpose, and it isn't the improvement of the conditions of this transient life.

If, by the grace of Allah, we understand these insights, many people, despite the clear upcoming meeting with their Lord, are disbelievers!

The surah continues: {Have they not traveled throughout the land to see what was the end of those ⌜destroyed⌝ before them? They were far superior in might; they cultivated the land and developed it more than these ⌜Meccans⌝ ever have. Their messengers came to them with clear proof. Allah would have never wronged them, but it was they who wronged themselves} [Ar-Rum:9]. This verse invites us to travel and contemplate the fate of past nations that developed and lived on earth more than what even Quraysh did. The goal isn't merely to construct grand structures and

skyscrapers; while urban planning and infrastructure are necessary, they shouldn't take precedence over what truly matters.

What is intriguing nowadays to see how occupied the new 'preachers' and motivational figures across other cultures are, from Japan in the East to America in the West, and how they compare the perceived backwardness of Muslims with the progress of other people, without pausing to contemplate the ultimate purpose of existence.

Also, have you noticed – dear reader- the fascination of many Muslims with the wonders of ancient pyramids and temples, yet barely a word of admonition is heard from them regarding the fate of those extinct civilizations? Despite the Quran's urging to ponder upon the destiny of those mighty nations, and not to enjoy sightseeing among their ruins instead.

On that Day they will be separated

Hardly had these thoughts begun to whirl in my mind when my eyes fell upon His saying, Exalted is He: {On the Day the Hour will arrive, the wicked will be dumbstruck} [Ar-Rum:12]. Then His saying: {And on the Day the Hour will arrive, the people will then be split ˹into two groups˺} [Ar-Rum:14]. It was as though these verses reminded me that everything circulated by 'the criminals' should not be given attention. For when the hour of accountability arrives and the cover is removed from sight, they will be in despair and separated; they will fall silent, and their arguments will be cut off. Then they will be sorted out, distinguished from the survivors.

Then, the surah recounted Allah's signs, directing the mind toward the duty of worship, starting from our creation from dust, passing through the blessings of marriage, tranquility, diversity of peoples and languages, the blessing of sleep at night and noon, and some cosmic signs in lightning, rain, the beginning, and the return of creation. It's as if the

context alerts the reader to their own weaknesses and their need for a Creator and Manager who oversees the affairs of this universe down to its minutest details, leading them to this example: {He sets forth for you an example ⌜drawn⌝ from your own lives: would you allow some of those ⌜bonds people⌝ in your possession to be your equal partners in whatever ⌜wealth⌝ We have provided you, keeping them in mind as you are mindful of your peers? This is how We make the signs clear for people who understand} [Ar-Rum:28]. Would anyone accept that their servant be a partner in their wealth equally? If the pagan Quraysh man could not accept his equality with another human, how could he accept the equality of his Creator with idols made of stones?

The same question resurfaces: How can a person today overlook their need for this Creator, the Almighty, and equate Him with material idols? Then lean toward the utmost folly and deny the existence of his Creator, claiming sufficiency in himself, let alone the sufficiency of this universe teeming with countless beings by itself as well?

The answer is direct in the next verse: {In fact, the wrongdoers merely follow their desires with no knowledge. Who then can guide those Allah has left to stray? They will have no helpers} [Ar-Rum:29]. What a clear answer! All this rhetoric veiled in empirical knowledge is nothing but philosophical hypotheses, even if those boasting atheism hold Nobel Prizes. Science is one thing; interpreting sensory and mathematical observations with hypotheses that align with desires is another. How difficult it is to convince someone who claims their atheism is the essence of knowledge! Who can guide whom Allah has sent astray?

Before delving further into thought, the next verse hurried me to recalibrate my compass: {So be steadfast in faith in all uprightness ⌜O Prophet⌝—the natural Way of Allah which He has instilled in ⌜all⌝ people. Let there be no change in this creation of Allah. That is the Straight Way, but most people do not know} [Ar-Rum:30]. This is what is required:

to adhere to the innate nature shared by all people, even though most of these people 'do not know'. Their ignorance and conviction, their submission to innate nature and reason, do not harm me. The saying of Ali ibn Abi Talib suffices me: 'Know men by the truth, not the truth by men.'

The flow of this delightful dialogue with Allah's verses continues, describing one of those revealing verses that label the misguided as: {… who have divided their faith and split into sects, each rejoicing in what they have} [Ar-Rum:32]. It offers me more reassurance, for the followers of factions, religions, and conflicting currents have divided the religion among themselves, and each faction rejoices in what it has innovated. The criterion is simple: if one of them is afflicted, they all submit. Then the next verse says: {When people are touched with hardship, they cry out to their Lord, turning to Him ⌜alone⌝. But as soon as He gives them a taste of His mercy, a group of them associates ⌜others⌝ with their Lord ⌜in worship⌝}. [Ar-Rum:33].

So, the truth that aligns with the innate nature often doesn't need logical debate and philosophical arguments but rather a calamity striking the heart of the rebel to compel them to submit. Hence, {Corruption has spread on land and sea as a result of what people's hands have done, so that Allah may cause them to taste ⌜the consequences of⌝ some of their deeds and perhaps they might return ⌜to the Right Path⌝} [Ar-Rum:41]. What we suffer aims for our return, for us to reflect, repent, and desist from rebellion.

But stubbornness becomes a habit for those whose hearts are sealed {So you ⌜O Prophet⌝ certainly cannot make the dead hear ⌜the truth⌝. Nor can you make the deaf hear the call when they turn their backs and walk away} [Ar-Rum:52]. And so on until the time of accountability arrives: {And on the Day the Hour will arrive, the wicked will swear that they did not stay ⌜in this world⌝ more than an hour. In this way they were always

deluded ⌜in the world⌝}. [Ar-Rum:52]. As if all this prolonged life, the center of their concern, passed through their thoughts after resurrection like an hour of the day. Then the answer comes to them from those who spent their lives in obedience instead of folly and argument: {But those gifted with knowledge and faith will say ⌜to them⌝, *"You did actually stay—as destined by Allah—until the Day of Resurrection. So here is the Day of Resurrection ⌜which you denied⌝! But you did not know ⌜it was true⌝."*} [Ar-Rum:56].

Imagine, dear reader, the shock of one whose life's focus was amassing wealth and gaining titles, leaving behind the tyrants who killed people and corrupted the lands. How would they react when they emerge from their graves, brushing off the dust from their heads, rushing barefoot, panicked, crying out with extreme faith, 'I remained only an hour!'? And pleading for a return and a chance for re-examination? How would they react when they see those they looked down upon and mocked, answering them: 'This is the Day of Resurrection, but you did not know'? The opportunity has ended, the way back is cut off.

They will continue to argue, swear more oaths, and break more promises, but all in vain: {So on that Day the wrongdoers' excuses will not benefit them, nor will they be allowed to appease ⌜their Lord⌝} [Ar-Rum:57]. The evidence was sufficient for those willing to understand and contemplate: {We have certainly set forth every ⌜kind of⌝ lesson for people in this Quran. And no matter what sign you bring to them ⌜O Prophet⌝, the disbelievers will definitely say ⌜to the believers⌝, *"You are only a people of falsehood."*. This is how Allah seals the hearts of those unwilling to know ⌜the truth⌝} [Ar-Rum:58-58].

Contemplate with me this concluding verse: {So be patient, for the promise of Allah certainly is true. And do not be disturbed by those who have no sure faith} [Ar-Rum:60]. Feel the coolness of reassurance descending upon your heart, as all their preceding denials will not harm

you, and you should not let their doubts burden you with levity, rushes, or deviation.

If your eyes fall again on the tremendous material disparity between the believers and the people of this world, remind yourself once more that they 'only know the outward appearance of worldly life,' and all they have attained is merely the 'apparent' from a transient phase. Do not allow despair to creep into your heart, as shifting the balance of power between nations is neither within your reach nor mine. In the Hereafter, we are only responsible for our best abilities and efforts.



Fussilat... When Utbah ibn Rabi'ah returned to Quraysh with a different demeanor than he had left with!

Biographies of the Seerah have recorded remarkable stories of some discussions that took place between the leaders of the pagans and the prophet -*peace be upon him*- in the early days of his mission. Perhaps the most remarkable and thought-provoking is the story of Utbah ibn Rabi'ah, which I will narrate to you, dear reader, as it came in the biography of Ibn Hisham. I then invite you to contemplate with me.

Ibn Ishaq narrated from Muhammad ibn Ka'b al-Quradhi: It was reported that Utbah ibn Rabi'ah, a prominent figure, once said while sitting in a gathering of Quraysh, and while the Messenger of Allah -*peace be upon him*- sat alone in the mosque: 'O people of Quraysh, shall I go to Muhammad and speak to him?'

They replied: 'Yes, Abu Al-Walid, go to him and speak.' So, Utbah went to the prophet -*peace be upon him*- and said, 'O son of my brother, you are from among us; you know your status within our clan and your place in lineage. You have come to your people with a momentous matter, which has caused division among them, derided their dreams, insulted their idols and religion, and disbelieved in what their forefathers followed. Listen to me, I propose to you some options for consideration, perhaps you may accept some of them.'

The Messenger of Allah -*peace be upon him*- replied, 'Speak, Abu Al-Walid, I am listening.'.

Utbah continued, 'O son of my brother, if you seek wealth through this matter you have brought, we will gather wealth for you until you become

the wealthiest among us. If it is honor that you seek, we will grant you such status that no decision will be made without your approval. If it is power you desire, we will make you our leader. And if this matter that comes to you is something you cannot rid yourself of, we will find the best physicians and spend our wealth to cure you, for sometimes a man is overcome by an affliction from which he seeks a cure.' When Utbah finished, and the Messenger of Allah -*peace be upon him*- had listened to him attentively, he said, 'Have you finished, Abu Al-Walid?' He replied, 'Yes.' The prophet said, 'Now listen to me.' Utbah said, 'I'm listening.'

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful: {Ha-Mim. A revelation from the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate. A Book whose verses have been detailed, an Arabic Quran for a people who know, as a giver of good tidings and a warner; but most of them turn away, so they do not hear. And they say, *"Our hearts are within coverings from that to which you invite us, and in our ears is deafness, and between us and you is a partition, so work; indeed, we are working."* [Fussilat:1-5]. Then the Messenger of Allah -*peace be upon him*- continued reciting to Utbah, who listened attentively, placing his hands behind his back, relying on them for support to hear from the Prophet. After finishing the recitation, the prophet -*peace be upon him*- prostrated and then said, 'You have heard, Abu Al-Walid, what I recited. It is up to you and your people.'

Utbah then stood and went back to his people. Some of them said to others, 'We swear by Allah, Abu Al-Walid has returned with a different face than he left with.' When he sat among them, they asked, 'What went on with you, Abu Al-Walid?' He replied, 'I have heard something, by Allah, like nothing I've ever heard before. It is neither poetry, nor sorcery, nor fortune-telling. O people of Quraysh, obey me and leave this matter to me, leave this man and what he claims, for by Allah, momentous news shall come of what he claims. If the Arabs harm him, you would have spared yourselves. If his authority prevails among the Arabs, his dominion will

be yours, his honor will be your honor, and you will be the happiest of people.

They said, His eloquence has bewitched you, Abu Al-Walid.' He replied, 'This is my opinion, so do as you wish.'.

In another version of the same story, Ibn Kathir mentioned in *"Al-Bidaya wal-Nihaya"* that Utbah added to his proposal the desire for women, saying, 'If it is through you that this matter comes, then choose any women from Quraysh, and we'll marry you to ten.'

Al-Bayhaqi also narrated this story and added that when Utbah returned to his people, he said to them, 'The prophet recited to me from the beginning of surah Fussilat until he reached the verse: *"But if they turn away, then say, 'I have warned you of a thunderbolt like the thunderbolt [that struck] 'Aad and Thamud.'"* [Fussilat:13]. Then I held onto his garment and beseeched him by kinship to stop, for you know that when Muhammad says something, it is not a lie. I feared that punishment might befall you.'"

Your eloquence has bewitched you, Abu Al-Walid

The story ends here, and the reflection on its marvel begins, as the prophet -*peace be upon him*- delivered a great lesson in listening until the end: 'Have you finished, Abu Al-Walid?' And a more profound lesson in contentment with a response of the revealed Word of the Lord of all creation, without adding a single word.

Also note, dear reader, that within the folds of his refined discourse, Utbah concealed weighty accusations, as he did not place in all the possibilities he listed even one possibility for the truthfulness of the prophet -*peace be upon him*-. He presumed from the outset that the prophet was seeking wealth, sovereignty, dominion, or women, and in the best-case scenario, afflicted by jinn possession. Nevertheless, the

prophet -*peace be upon him*- did not get angry, did not defend himself, did not start refuting those accusations by highlighting evidence of his detachment from worldly matters, nor did he complain or lament the abandonment by his people. Instead, he contented himself with reciting only thirty-eight verses of moderate length, not exceeding three and a half pages from today's commonly circulated Quran. In the subsequent version, all he recited was just one page.

And the question you undoubtedly begin to ask: What kind of 'sorcery' is it to produce a recitation of Quranic verses upon a leader of the Quraysh, causing this monumental shift from an opponent who excludes the possibility of truthfulness to a sympathizer defending him? How did these verses shake the heart of a seasoned political figure in minutes, causing him to return to his people 'with a different demeanor than he had left with'?!

We won't reach the answer until we read those verses together through Utbah's eyes, attempting to embody his persona and, as if for the first time, imagine what was swirling in Utbah's mind after each one:

'In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.' A peculiar beginning without preambles, as the Arabs worshiped Allah but associated idols with Him. However, praising Him with attributes of mercy was not common.(1)

{Ḥâ-Mĩm. ˹This is˺ a revelation from the Most Compassionate, Most Merciful} [Fussilat:1-2]. Two letters without apparent meaning, yet another indication that Muhammad brings forth unusual words. Then a

(1) When the Prophet Muhammad (*peace be upon him*) made peace with the polytheists in Al-Hudaybiyah, he instructed Ali to write *"In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful."* Upon hearing this, Suhail ibn Amr (the envoy of the Quraysh) objected, saying, *"We do not know what is meant by 'In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful,' but write what we are familiar with: 'In Your name, O Allah.'"* [Narrated by Muslim]

direct confirmation that this is a revelation not associated with him but from the same Most Merciful.

{⌜It is⌝ a Book whose verses are perfectly explained—a Quran in Arabic for people who know} [Fussilat:3]. So, it's a book, not poetry, and it doesn't resemble the Arabs' speech in structure. Yet it's a Quran - meant to be recited - in the Arabic tongue, directed at those who understand and know!

{delivering good news and warning. Yet most of them turn away, so they do not hear} [Fussilat:4]. It begins with good news before warning, rebuking the Quraysh for their aversion. Then it cornered Utbah by pushing him to listen so he won't be among 'those who do not hear.'.

{They say, *"Our hearts are veiled against what you are calling us to, there is deafness in our ears, and there is a barrier between us and you. So do ⌜whatever you want⌝ and so shall we!"*} [Fussilat:5]. Another embarrassment for Utbah, evoking the image of his companions in their insistence on not listening. Hearts are sealed, ears deaf, and an all-encompassing barrier prevents any communication. The only way out of this bleak picture is through listening to Muhammad -*peace be upon him*-.

{Say, ⌜O Prophet,⌝ "I am only a man like you, ⌜but⌝ it has been revealed to me that your God is only One God. So take the Straight Way towards Him, and seek His forgiveness. And woe to the disbelievers— those who do not pay alms-tax and are in denial of the Hereafter} [Fussilat:6-7]. A remarkable humility that dismantles all of Utbah's illusions. The negotiation isn't with someone seeking wealth or power but with a man insisting he's just a human, receiving revelations. His message is solely about the oneness of God, seeking forgiveness for past transgressions, with an explicit warning to those who turn away.

{⌜But⌝ those who believe and do good will certainly have a never-ending reward} [Fussilat:8]. A swift balance to the whole picture, emphasizing the reward for those who accept the offer.

{Ask ⌜them, O Prophet⌝, "How can you disbelieve in the One Who created the earth in two Days? And how can you set up equals with Him? That is the Lord of all worlds. He placed firm mountains on the earth, standing high, showered His blessings upon it, and ordained ⌜all⌝ its means of sustenance—totaling four Days exactly—for all who ask. Then He turned towards the heaven when it was ⌜still like⌝ smoke, saying to it and to the earth, 'Submit, willingly or unwillingly.' They both responded, 'We submit willingly. So He formed the heaven into seven heavens in two Days, assigning to each its mandate. And We adorned the lowest heaven with ⌜stars like⌝ lamps ⌜for beauty⌝ and for protection. That is the design of the Almighty, All-Knowing} [Fussilat:9-12]. Astonishing and amazing verses ring in an educated man's ears, breaking the myths of the pre-Islamic Arabs who paid little attention to the creation of existence. Here is Utbah, hearing for the first time about the creation of the earth in two days, its formation and preparation for life in four days, then the creation of the seven heavens from smoke, and the placement of planets, stars, and comets within them.

{If they turn away, then say, ⌜O Prophet,⌝ *"I warn you of a ⌜mighty⌝ blast, like the one that befell 'Âd and Thamûd} [Fussilat:13]. Here, fear had taken hold of Utbah, seizing every conceivable loophole. He couldn't contain himself until he grabbed the Prophet's mouth - as in the second narration - pleading with him to stop the recitation, as if acknowledging the truth of his prophethood while persisting in not following him. Apparently, the Arabs knew the fate of their ancestors who perished in the Arabian Peninsula and the reason for their destruction {The messengers had come to them from all angles, ⌜proclaiming,⌝ "Worship none but Allah."* They responded, "Had our Lord willed, He could have easily sent down angels ⌜instead⌝. So we totally reject what you have been sent with} [Fussilat:14].

Now, continuing the narration of the verses as in the first account, leading to the verse of prostration (Sajda), we find a terrifying detail about the destruction of ʻAad and Thamud: {As for ʾÂad, they acted arrogantly throughout the land with no right, boasting, *"Who is superior to us in might?"* Did they not see that Allah ˹Himself˺, Who created them, was far superior to them in might? Still, they persisted in denying Our signs. So, We sent against them a furious wind, for ˹several˺ miserable days, to make them taste a humiliating punishment in this worldly life. But far more humiliating will be the punishment of the Hereafter. And they will not be helped. As for Thamûd, We showed them guidance, but they preferred blindness over guidance. So, the blast of a disgracing punishment overtook them for what they used to commit} [Fussilat:15-17]. Nothing could be more explicit than this description, encompassing direct threats.

{And We delivered those who were faithful and were mindful ˹of Allah˺} [Fussilat:18]. After all the threats and warnings, good news comes to restore balance.

{˹Consider˺ the Day ˹when˺ the enemies of Allah will be gathered for the Fire, all driven in ranks. When they reach it, their ears, eyes, and skin will testify against what they used to do} [Fussilat:19-20]. Here begins an unfamiliar scene in Utbah's mind, as the Arabs outright denied resurrection, considering it even more objectionable in their simple minds than the concept of the oneness of Allah and His purity from association with others. Here, the scene of resurrection takes shape in Utbah's imagination, revealing a strange dialogue, with the second party being the limbs of the body after their recreation.

{They will ask their skin ˹furiously˺, *"Why have you testified against us?"* It will say, *"We have been made to speak by Allah, Who causes all things to speak. He ˹is the One Who˺ created you the first time, and to Him you were bound to return} [Fussilat:21]. A series of successive shocks descend*

upon Utbah, as after being warned of a destructive bolt that would end life in this world, his mind now tries to gather its strength to believe in the warning of resurrection after destruction. Then, he imagines the horror of the situation after resurrection, discovering the transformation of the body itself into a witness condemning its owner.".

{You did not ˹bother to˺ hide yourselves from your ears, eyes, and skin to prevent them from testifying against you. Rather, you assumed that Allah did not know much of what you used to do. It was that ˹false˺ assumption you entertained about your Lord that has brought about your doom, so you have become losers. Even if they endure patiently, the Fire will ˹always˺ be their home. And if they ˹beg to˺ appease ˹their Lord˺, they will never be allowed to} [Fussilat:22-24]. So, how do you react after discovering the transformation of the body itself into an opponent in court? The threat of fire is the consequence.

{We placed at their disposal ˹evil˺ associates who made their past and future ˹misdeeds˺ appealing to them. ˹So˺ the fate of earlier communities of jinn and humans has been justified against them ˹as well˺, ˹for˺ they were truly losers} [Fussilat:25]. Here, a new piece of information is also discovered. The Arabs believed in jinn and practiced sorcery extensively. They even attributed some divine attributes to the demons. The Quran now reveals to the reader that among these demons are companions who accompany humans to whisper and beautify falsehood. The punishment will reach everyone when the time for accountability arrives.

{The disbelievers advised ˹one another˺, *"Do not listen to this Quran but drown it out so that you may prevail} [Fussilat:26]. Another description of the disbelievers' stance towards this statement. In the fifth verse, reproach and condemnation began: "And they say, 'Our hearts are within coverings from that to which you invite us'."* Then the verses moved to reproach concerning the destruction of 'Aad and Thamud, and what the deniers will face of horrors after resurrection. It returns to put in front of the behavior

of its people, which befits only the foolish. The matter did not stop at their turning away, as in the previous verse; rather, their transgression extended to turning others away from listening to the Quran. They even raised their voices with shouting, whistling, and mischief to prevent the Prophet from reciting the Quran whenever he intended to convey it to them. What a position they are in! Here is a person hearing this shameful description in a calm negotiation session, unable to cause uproar, and finding no choice but to listen and remain silent.

{So, We will certainly make the disbelievers taste a severe punishment, and We will surely repay them according to the worst of their deeds. That is the reward of Allah's enemies: the Fire, which will be their eternal home—a ⌜fitting⌝ reward for their denial of Our revelations. The disbelievers will ⌜then⌝ cry, "Our Lord! Show us those jinn and humans who led us astray: we will put them under our feet so that they will be among the lowest ⌜in Hell⌝} [Fussilat:27-29]. What a terrifying threat, after an overwhelming condemnation!

{Surely those who say, *"Our Lord is Allah,"* and then remain steadfast, the angels descend upon them, ⌜saying,⌝ "Do not fear, nor grieve. Rather, rejoice in the good news of Paradise, which you have been promised. We are your supporters in this worldly life and in the Hereafter. There you will have whatever your soul's desire, and there you will have whatever you ask for: an accommodation from the All-Forgiving, Most Merciful ⌜Lord⌝} [Fussilat:30-32]. After all that warning that Utbah was hearing, the sense of relief now begins through extending his hand to be rescued, to remove the fear, sadness of Utbah's heart and gives him glad tidings if he believes and remained steadfast, as Arabs used to believe in angels and glorify them, and then even used to call them "the daughters of almighty Allah'' according to what was revealed in Az-Zukhruf: {Still they have labeled the angels, who are servants of the Most Compassionate, as female…} [Az-Zukhruf:19]. Utbah did not find any difficulty in imagining the angels revealing upon the believers in heaven.

{And whose words are better than someone who calls ⌜others⌝ to Allah, does good, and says, *"I am truly one of those who submit."*?} [Fussilat:33]. Here, the discourse concludes. After all that Utbah has heard of warning and glad tidings, he will now listen to the approach that the Prophet -*peace be upon him*- adheres to in his call. It is as if he is recalling the simple offerings that the Prophet has laid on the negotiating table—wealth, power, and women. Now, at the end of the detailed response, he listens to Allah's praise for His Messenger and for anyone who invites to Allah, does good deeds, and declares that they are Muslim.

{Good and evil cannot be equal. Respond ⌜to evil⌝ with what is best, then the one you are in a feud with will be like a close friend} [Fussilat:34]. I imagine Utbah's feeling a chill here, perhaps dropping his hand. Who can respond to this miraculous statement in goodness and eloquence? What would he say to someone who came to negotiate with him to abandon his call, only to hear echoing in his ears: *"And not equal are the good deed and the bad. Repel [evil] by that [deed] which is better"*? How will he wipe the sweat from his brow, listening to his opponent's statement rejecting all compromises: {Respond to evil with what is best ..} [Fussilat:34], then how he is going to debate with him after that while his opponent is extending a friendly hand saying: {...then the one you are in a feud with will be like a close friend} [Fussilat:34].

{But this cannot be attained except by those who are patient and who are truly fortunate} [Fussilat:35]. As if the Prophet -*peace be upon him*- clarifies to him here that it is a high status that is only due for the determined ones.

{And if you are tempted by Satan, then seek refuge with Allah. Indeed, He ⌜alone⌝ is the All-Hearing, All-Knowing} [Fussilat:36]. Even the patient and the greatly fortunate one may be whispered to by Satan when faced with harm from their enemy. Here, the reminder comes from Allah, the Hearing, the Knowing, of the necessity to seek refuge in Him.

{Among His signs are the day and the night, the sun and the moon. Do not prostrate to the sun or the moon, but prostrate to Allah, Who created them ˹all˺, if you ˹truly˺ worship Him ˹alone˺} [Fussilat:37]. After Utbah heard about the creation of heavens and earth, and his ears heard the words of the Creator directly from the mouth of His Messenger, he now listens to this turn for a reminder about the signs of the Creator in the alternation of night and day. Then, this stern divine command reaches his ears, prohibiting prostration to the sun and the moon and emphasizing the unity of worship for Allah. Although the Quraysh were not known for worshiping celestial bodies, they believed, like the rest of the Arabs, that the sun and moon only eclipse at the death of a great figure. Sun worship was common in Yemen during the days of Saba, and its traces remained in some Arab tribes like Banu Tamim, Dabba, Taym, 'Ukl, and 'Udd, to the extent that some were called *"servants of the sun."*. Indeed, this was the name of Utbah's own grandfather, and some of Kinana used to worship the moon as well.

{But if the pagans are too proud, then ˹let them know that˺ those ˹angels˺ nearest to your Lord glorify Him day and night, and never grow weary} [Fussilat:38]. This is the completion of the obligation. The clarification has been completed, the message has been conveyed, the proof has been established, and the Messenger -*peace be upon him*- fulfilled the trust. He informed Utbah that if he persisted in arrogance, a countless number of mighty angels would never cease worshiping, glorifying, prostrating, and obeying His commands.

Then the Prophet -*peace be upon him*- inclined to the ground in prostration, completely surrendering in his servitude to the divine command: *"But prostrate to Allah who created them."* [Fussilat:37]. Utbah did not utter a word.

The Prophet -*peace be upon him*- sat upright, not adding anything beyond the words of Allah, the Exalted, except to say, *"You have heard, O Abu Al-Walid, what I have heard. So, it's up to you"*.

The Collapse of Negotiations

Imagine with me, dear reader, the final scene. Utbah, sent as an envoy by the leaders of Quraysh, confidently presented offers of wealth and status to the prophet. Now, he rises from his small council, speechless and helpless, burdened with shame. Thoughts race through his mind. Should he declare his Islam before this man who is supported by miracles, risking mockery from his people and losing everything? Or should he return to them - while they are awaiting his arrival - to inform them of his failure?

I have mentioned the continuation of the story for you, dear reader, but reading the conclusion now will fill your heart with another emotion. So, ponder with me:

They said to each other: *"By Allah, Abu Al-Walid has returned without the face he went with."* When he sat among them, they asked, *"What's behind you, O Abu Al-Walid?"* He replied, *"Behind me is something I've heard, by Allah, like nothing I've ever heard before. It's not poetry, sorcery, or fortune-telling. O people of Quraysh, obey me and make peace between him and me. Leave me be with this man and what he brings."* So, they left him. By Allah, what I heard from him will be significant news. If the Arabs harm him, it will be by someone else not you. If he gains power among the Arabs, his sovereignty will be yours, his honor your honor, and you will be the happiest of people.

They said, *"By Allah, O Abu Al-Walid, his tongue has bewitched you ."* He responded, *"This is my opinion about it. So, do as you see fit."*.

I implore you, if tears do not well up in your eyes or if you do not feel at least a shiver, reread the preceding paragraph again.

Remember, every time you lift your head from the prostration of recitation in surah Fussilat, to thank Allah that He guided us to Islam without us seeking guidance, without seeing His Messenger -*peace be upon him*- and without hearing the Quran recited by his tongue. Remember that Utbah was just one step away from salvation, yet he refused, and the story has not ended yet.

The Drums of War

Utbah's aforementioned story was not a passing initiative that came to his mind during a casual gathering with his people. It was the final attempt by Quraysh to contain the *"turmoil"* that kept them awake at night. Muhammad's influence was growing, and the declarations of faith by Hamza and Umar ibn Al-Khattab shifted the balance of power in all of Makkah. The new call was no longer limited to the weak and the slaves; it now attracted knights and nobles, threatening the start of a new era that would overturn all of Quraysh's deeply rooted political and religious norms.

In this heated atmosphere, you may grasp, dear reader, the catastrophe that struck Quraysh when Utbah returned to them *"with a completely different look on his face."* His exposure to just thirty-eight verses from surah Fussilat was enough to collapse the negotiations. This prompted Abu Talib, the Prophet's uncle, to pre-empt events before the people intended to harm his nephew, issuing an urgent call among Banu Abd Manaf - the branch from which the noble lineage of Quraysh descended - calling for the protection of Muhammad, *peace be upon him*. The people responded to the call out of kinship.

Time turned, and pressure mounted on the Prophet -*peace be upon him*- and those who believed with him. They migrated to Medina. Then came the inevitable confrontation when the Muslims went out in pursuit of Abu Sufyan's caravan from Syria. Utbah ibn Rabi'ah and a cavalry of

Quraysh emerged to protect the caravan. When they learned of its safe return, the two camps had begun forming their ranks at Badr.

Quraysh began beating the drums of war. Utbah was seen preaching outside the ranks. The prophet -*peace be upon him*- saw him from a distance atop a red camel, addressing his people, *"O people, obey me regarding these men. For if you battle them, that will remain in your hearts, each one you face the killer of his brother or his father. I will bear what I say, retreat!"* The Prophet -*peace be upon him*- said, *"If none of them are good, the man on the red camel is. If they obey him, they will be guided."*.

Utbah failed to convince Quraysh, and history recounts bitter exchanges between him and Abu Jahl. The latter shouted at the top of his voice, *"No, by Allah, we will not retreat until we reach Badr. We will camp there, slaughter the camels, and provide food. The Arabs will hear about us, our march, and our gathering, and they will continue to fear us afterward."* The chants rose in support of Abu Jahl.

Just before the battle, the knights from both sides emerged for individual combat. The companion Abu Hudhayfa ibn Utbah, who was a Muslim, called his father Utbah to fight, but the Prophet -*peace be upon him*- forbade Abu Hudhayfa from fighting his father. Utbah then engaged in combat with the companion Ubaydah ibn Al-Harith until he was wounded. Then Ali ibn Abi Talib and Hamza ibn Abdul Muttalib rushed to aid Ubaydah, resulting in a fierce duel between renowned Arab knights. Finally, Utbah fell before the eyes of his people who insisted on leading him to perdition, while the voices of the Muslims resounded with their shouts of *"Allahu Akbar."*

It was only a matter of time before the battle raged, and seventy of the pagans fell one after another. Among them were 'Uqbah ibn Abi Mu'ait, Shaibah ibn Rabi'ah, and Al-Walid ibn 'Utbah, Utbah's brother and

son, and *"Pharaoh of this nation,"* Amr ibn Hisham, whom the Muslims called Abu Jahl. He fell helpless, struck by the swords of two young boys, and Abdullah ibn Mas'ud finished him off And thus ended the story of the prominent knights of Quraysh, and the balance between Islam and disbelief shifted after this incident.

Abu Hudhayfah wasn't the only one among the children of Utbah who converted to Islam, rather his brothers, Abu Hisham, Umm Aban, and Fatimah, also embraced Islam. Even Hind bint Utbah, who was the wife of Abu Sufyan and who instigated her brother Abu Hudhayfah when he intended to confront his father in Badr, embraced Islam along with her husband after the conquest of Makkah.

Many thoughts come to mind as I contemplate this remarkable story; wisdom did not protect Utbah from perishing in disbelief, nor did he benefit from all the miraculous signs he witnessed. We still see young men and women in our era who were raised in faith and righteousness, perhaps having memorized the entire Quran, yet they turn away and choose disbelief over faith.

Anas ibn Malik reported that the Prophet Muhammad, *peace be upon him*, slew three in the battle of Badr. He approached them and stood over them, calling out their names: 'O Abu Jahl bin Hisham, O Umayyah bin Khalaf, O Utbah bin Rabi'ah, O Shaibah bin Rabi'ah! Have you not found what your Lord promised to be true? Verily, I have found what my Lord promised me to be true.' Upon hearing this, Umar asked, 'O Messenger of Allah! How can they hear you and answer you when they have perished?' He replied, 'By Him in whose hand is my soul, they can indeed hear what I say, but they cannot respond.' Then he commanded that they be dragged and thrown into the pit in Badr." Narrated by Muslim in his Sahih.

I wish my heart could have softened for Utbah upon hearing this verse, which was the last he heard from the mouth of the Messenger of Allah -*peace be upon him*-: {But if the pagans are too proud, then ˹let them know that˺ those ˹angels˺ nearest to your Lord glorify Him day and night, and never grow weary} [Fussilat:38]. But alas, he was unable to respond.



Surah Muhammad... a truthful and trustworthy prophet, and sealed hearts

Before I began contemplating surah Muhammad, what struck me first was that it only mentions the name of Prophet Muhammad once at the beginning. It does not refer to his noble lineage, nor does it recount anything about his struggles with his adversaries or praise his virtues, accomplishments, or miracles.

It struck me that if I were a hostile denier seeking evidence to discredit this prophet, I would start with the surah bearing his name, expecting to find commands for blind obedience, a listing of his astounding miracles, glorification of his character and achievements, and promises of his victory and eternal place in history among the greats. This is what many false claimants of prophecy do and what we still see among the leaders of closed-minded religious sects today.

However, this surah contains none of that. Moreover, it is shorter than most other surahs named after prophets. The verses of surah Muhammad in the Quran do not exceed four pages. It is longer than surah Nuh but shorter than surahs Yunus, Hud, Yusuf, and Ibrahim, and even shorter than the surah named after Luqman, who was a wise man but not a prophet.

Although we have two other surahs named after this prophet, the ones named Al-Muzzammil and Al-Muddathir, they contain instructions about his mission without any praise or glorification, or even promises of triumph and empowerment, despite being revealed at the beginning of his mission, a time when false claimants of prophecy boast grand promises and visions to rally crowds.

As for surah Muhammad, revealed in Madinah after the emigration *"Hijrah"* and laying the foundation for the new state, it distinguishes itself from other Surahs named after prophets by enumerating the various categories of enemies faced by this final prophet. While previous prophets -peace be upon them- faced a single category of disbelievers, usually idolaters or those who corrupted the revelations among the children of Israel, the seal of the prophets *-peace be upon him-* faced all sorts of disbelief. From the idolatrous disbelievers to those who denied his prophethood, to the distorters of revelation from the people of the book to the hypocrites who feigned loyalty while conspiring with the enemy, and even those who apostatized after accepting Islam. Undoubtedly, different approaches were required for each group, and the approach of battle for the combatant among them.

The Enemies of Muhammad

The surah begins by distinguishing two comprehensive groups: {Those who disbelieve and hinder ⌜others⌝ from the Way of Allah, He will render their deeds void. As for those who believe, do good, and have faith in what has been revealed to Muhammad—which is the truth from their Lord—He will absolve them of their sins and improve their condition} [Muhammad:1-2]. The clear distinction presented here is between the disbeliever whose disbelief extends to actively opposing Islam - even with a word - and faces the frustration of all their efforts, and the believer who follows their faith with good deeds, assured of the cancellation of their bad deeds and the rectification of their affairs.

The reason for this distinction is crystal clear {This is because the disbelievers follow falsehood, while the believers follow the truth from their Lord. This is how Allah shows people their true state ⌜of faith⌝. [Muhammad:3]. All of this, centers around the differentiation of truth from falsehood.

The surah then directly addresses the method of dealing with the disbelievers. After the migration, the conflict shifted from debate to the battleground: {So when you meet the disbelievers ⌜in battle⌝, strike ⌜their⌝ necks until you have thoroughly subdued them, then bind them firmly. Later ⌜free them either as⌝ an act of grace or by ransom until the war comes to an end. So will it be. Had Allah willed, He ⌜Himself⌝ could have inflicted punishment on them. But He does ⌜this only to⌝ test some of you by means of others. And those who are martyred in the cause of Allah,1 He will never render their deeds void} [Muhammad:4], with a promise to the martyrs who stood against them of entering Paradise: {and admit them into Paradise, having made it known to them} [Muhammad:6].

What caught my attention was that after describing the disbelievers as following falsehood and turning away from the way of Allah, the surah mentions that the reason for this deviation that leads to punishment is their rejection of what Allah intended for them. It states succinctly in a verse: {That is because they detest what Allah revealed, so He has rendered their deeds void} [Muhammad:9]. Note the repetition of the warning of nullifying their deeds.

As is customary in the Quran, after the warnings to the disbelievers come the glad tidings for the believers, a striking pedagogical method that combines motivation with caution to maintain balance in the reader's mind. The surah then enumerates categories of anticipated rewards in Paradise: {The description of the Paradise promised to the righteous is that in it are rivers of fresh water, rivers of milk that never changes in taste, rivers of wine delicious to drink, and rivers of pure honey. There they will ⌜also⌝ have all kinds of fruit, and forgiveness from their Lord. ⌜Can they be⌝ like those who will stay in the Fire forever, left to drink boiling water that will tear apart their insides?} [Muhammad:15].

The surah then directs our attention to another category of disbelievers: {There are some of them who listen to you ⌜O Prophet⌝, but

when they depart from you, they say ⌜mockingly⌝ to those ⌜believers⌝ gifted with knowledge, *"What did he just say?"* These are the ones whose hearts Allah has sealed and who ⌜only⌝ follow their desires} [Muhammad:16]. These are the hypocrites, and the surah vividly illustrates their hypocrisy in the form of ignorance. Some of them would hear the Quran from the Prophet's mouth and then go out to ask knowledgeable companions like Ibn Abbas or Ibn Mas'ud the same questions they heard, either in mockery or due to their ignorance and lack of intellectual capacity. They didn't ask to learn or understand, but 'Allah has sealed their hearts.'.

Among the traits of the hypocrites is their fear of death, especially in the path of Allah: {And the believers say, *"If only a surah was revealed ⌜allowing self-defense⌝!"* Yet when a precise surah is revealed, in which fighting is ⌜explicitly⌝ mentioned, you see those with sickness in their hearts staring at you like someone in the throes of death. It would have been better for them} [Muhammad:20]. This resembles what we witness today, some regions where people are obligated to bear arms for self-defense, some intellectuals openly declare that they do not seek martyrdom but prefer seeking refuge in Europe. The following verse responds unequivocally: {to obey and speak rightly. Then when fighting was ordained, it surely would have been better for them if they were true to Allah} [Muhammad:21].

Although there are several verses in the Quran that describe sealed hearts, the subsequent message must hold your attention and touch your heart. After the surah describes the hypocrites: {These are the ones who Allah has condemned, deafening them and blinding their eyes} [Muhammad:23], it asks in the following ayah: {Do they not then reflect on the Quran? Or are there locks upon their hearts?} [Muhammad:24]. asking the hypocrite to embarrass them: Do you ponder over the Quran? If they claim they do - and they lie - it reiterates: Is your heart not then sealed?

In the next verse, we learn of another category, those who turned away after recognizing guidance: {Indeed, those who relapse ˹into disbelief˺ after ˹true˺ guidance has become clear to them, ˹it is˺ Satan ˹that˺ has tempted them, luring them with false hopes. That is because they said ˹privately˺ to those who ˹also˺ detest what Allah has revealed, "We will obey you in some matters. But Allah ˹fully˺ knows what they are hiding} [Muhammad:25-26]. Striking is that their deviation began with betrayal and collaboration with the enemies; they offered their services to the Jews, and their fate was complete apostasy from Islam.

In this passage, the mention of betrayal may remind you, dear reader, of numerous instances of such treachery in our era, leading some to disbelief after having embraced faith, while others still harbor hidden hypocrisy.

Hatred is evident in all these scenarios. The idolaters *"disliked what Allah revealed,"* as seen in the ninth verse, the Jews similarly *"disliked what Allah sent down,"* as in the preceding verse, and the apostates also *"disliked Allah's acceptance"*, as stated here {This is because they follow whatever displeases Allah and hate whatever pleases Him, so He has rendered their deeds void} [Muhammad:28].

Remarkably, hypocrisy does not merely dwell in the hearts. There is a divine promise that their tongues will expose them, as expressed to the prophet: {Had We willed, We could have truly shown them to you ˹O Prophet˺, and you would have certainly recognized them by their appearance. But you will surely recognize them by their tone of speech. And Allah ˹fully˺ knows your doings ˹O people˺} [Muhammad:30]. This isn't a justification for arbitrarily accusing people of hypocrisy but serves as a response to the attempts seen today to undermine Islam through interpretative means. Many modern intellectuals openly lean towards the requisites of disbelief while appearing to criticize, renew, or reform

religious principles, barely distinguishing themselves from atheists except in their insistence on being within the framework of Islam.

The companions of Muhammad were aware of some hypocrites, describing them among themselves. Abdullah bin Mas'ud said, *"Had you prayed in your houses as this one who stays behind in his house prays, you would have abandoned the Sunnah of your prophet. If you abandon the Sunnah of your prophet, you would go astray... I have not seen anyone leaving behind this except a known hypocrite."*(1) Similarly, Ka'b bin Malik spoke of his reluctance during an expedition and expressed, *"Whenever I went out among the people after the departure of the Messenger of Allah, I looked around, and I was sorry to see none but a man suspected of hypocrisy or a man excused by Allah due to his weakness."*(2) Some hypocrites were known among the companions, undoubtedly not admitted by the hypocrites themselves, nor did the Prophet disclose their names except to Huzaifah bin Al-Yaman and entrusted him with it.

Muhammad's companions

After discussing the conditions of disbelievers, the surah urges those who believe alongside the Messenger to remain steadfast and resolute: {So do not falter or cry for peace, for you will have the upper hand and Allah is with you. And He will never let your deeds go to waste. This worldly life is no more than play and amusement. But if you are faithful and mindful ⌜of Allah⌝, He will grant you your ⌜full⌝ reward, and will not ask you ⌜to donate all⌝ your wealth} [Muhammad:35-36]. Islam's message is balanced in promising paradise in the Hereafter and victory but also moderation in this world without delving into indulgence and ease. Allah reminds us of the reality of this life: it is nothing but a passing phase for trials, followed by recompense and then rest for the diligent.

(1) Muslim:654
(2) Al-Bukhari:4156

The conclusion warrants another pause: {Here you are, being invited to donate ˹a little˺ in the cause of Allah. Still some of you withhold. And whoever does so, it is only to their own loss. For Allah is the Self-Sufficient, whereas you stand in need ˹of Him˺. If you ˹still˺ turn away, He will replace you with another people. And they will not be like you} [Muhammad:38]. This invites a comparison with the discourse of false claimants of prophethood and leaders of closed sects today. None of them attract followers with such a clear message of surrendering matters to Allah and removing themselves as the authority. If the prophet desired leadership for himself, he would have promised them victory, control, and seizing worldly pleasures. Instead, he emphasizes that this entire life is just *"amusement and diversion,"* and that achieving temporary gains is not the ultimate goal. He plainly says: Allah is self-sufficient and doesn't need them, capable of replacing them. They are the needy in this world and reliant on His mercy for salvation in the Hereafter.

If the hypocrites in our era pondered over the Quran, they would vividly realize that the Prophet did not seek leadership for himself by inciting his companions to glorify and protect him, in exchange for empowering them and seizing people's possessions. They would understand that this path does not align in any way with the behaviors of sect leaders obsessed with their inflated egos. *"Will they not then reflect upon the Quran? Or are there locks upon [their] hearts?"*

The Mountain and the Star: Between the Rationality of Believing in the Majesty of the Creator and the Folly of Polytheism and Atheism

Surah At-Tur is one of the dearest surahs to me since I memorized it in my childhood. Like other Meccan surahs, it consists of short verses and a beautiful rhythm. It is mentioned in traditions that the Prophet -*peace be upon him*- used to recite it frequently in his prayers. In Sahih Hadith, Jabir ibn Mut'im reported: *"I heard the Prophet -peace be upon him- reciting At-Tur during the Maghrib prayer, and I never heard anyone with a better voice or recitation than his."* Blessed are those who heard his voice.

This Meccan surah, revealed to the Prophet while he was amongst the hills of Mecca, begins with an introduction that instills awe in the heart: {By Mount Ṭûr! * And by the Book written * on open pages ˹for all to read˺! * And by the ˹Sacred˺ House frequently visited! * And by the canopy raised ˹high˺! * And by the seas set on fire!* Indeed, the punishment of your Lord will come to pass—} [At-Tur:1-7]. These concise words raise questions about the secret behind the divine oath regarding these five creations.

The oath begins with Mount Tur in Sinai, where Allah spoke to Moses and revealed the Tablets of the Law, marking the beginning of the descent of the Torah.

Then, Allah swears by a written Book in parchment spread open, which scholars differ about. Some say it is the Preserved Tablet, wherein Allah has written everything, or it could refer to the Torah or the Quran,

as both are documented in scrolls. Others argue it signifies all the books sent down to the prophets.

Allah then swears by the frequented House, which, according to traditions, refers to the place of worship for the angels in the heavens, similar to how Muslims revere the Kaaba on earth. The oath continues with the raised ceiling, meaning the sky, and the sea filled with fire, interpreted either as the seas and oceans filled with water or as a depiction of the horrors of the Day of Judgment.

I imagined the idolatrous leaders of Quraysh sitting in their assembly near to the Kaaba, listening to the Prophet -*peace be upon him*- reciting this remarkable oath with its captivating musical pauses that resonate in the hearts. I envisioned the astonishment of the illiterate Arab, discovering new worlds beyond his imagination, from Mount Tur - known only to a few who learned to read and study the earlier scriptures - to a similar abode inhabited by angels in the highest heavens, and then a return to the earthly sky and its seas.

Before the bewilderment can subside, the polytheist is confronted with a severe warning and a contrasting musical interlude: {Indeed, the punishment of your Lord will come to pass – none will avert it} [At-Tur:7-8].

The verses do spare him time to rush to denial or mockery. Instead, he is presented with a scene that almost materializes before his eyes {on the Day the heavens will be shaken violently, and the mountains will be blown away entirely} [At-Tur :9-10].

The idolater will not hope to regain composure before the next verse startles him with a warning: {Then woe that Day to the deniers} [At-Tur:11]. If he dares to search his conscience for reassurance in his council, or if he ventures to speak in denial, the crushing response will befall him like a thunderbolt: {those who amuse themselves with falsehood!} [At-

Tur:12]. Perhaps the remaining shreds of modesty and honor will urge him to silence to preserve his dignity.

The warning is complete, and the people are rendered mute: {⌜It is⌝ the Day they will be fiercely shoved into the Fire of Hell. ⌜They will be told,⌝ *"This is the Fire which you used to deny} [At-Tur:13-14]. Anticipating any outcry accusing the Prophet of sorcery, the following question puts the accuser in the realm of the accused: {Is this magic, or do you not see?} [At-Tur:15]. As if the punishment has already befallen, and the polytheist is in Hell, being questioned about what he sees. If he remains unconvinced that this warning is imminent, the response is: {Burn in it! It is the same whether you endure ⌜it⌝ patiently or not. You are only rewarded for what you used to do."*} [At-Tur:16).

The warning concludes with the completion of the scene, and the glad tidings begin immediately: {Indeed, the righteous will be in gardens and bliss} [At-Tur:17]. The verses then provide a beautiful description of the promised bliss, presenting the polytheist with two clear choices.

The rhythm of the surah does not give me a moment for contemplation before wondering what thoughts would cross the mind of the denying polytheist when hearing an oath about unseen and magnificent things - the inscribed Book and the frequented House. The reprimand hastens before he can object: "So woe on that Day to the deniers – those who amuse themselves with falsehood} [At-Tur:11-12]. As if the surah embarrasses him with the question: Are you a denier? If he says yes, the reply is: You are playing and not seeking the truth in the first place!

The surah correctly contextualizes the debate, for there is a hidden world from which this miraculous speech has come, informing humans of aspects that elude them in that world. If a person denies what he hears while confined to a corner of the earth and then fails to produce similar speech, he is not fit for rational debate.

Surah An-Najm

I continued reading, opening the next surah: {By the stars when they fade away} [An-Najm:1]. This is another divine oath, and one of its verses can be seen with the naked eye - the stars that disappear (descend) at the rising of the sun. Some commentators mentioned that the reason for the revelation of this surah was the disbelievers' claim that Muhammad -*peace be upon him*- invented the Quran. In my mind, I thought, *"I will now learn how to engage in argumentation."*

{Your fellow man is neither misguided nor astray. Nor does he speak of his own whims. It is only a revelation sent down ˹to him˺} [An-Najm:2-4]. The discourse is rational and calm, delivering a definitive statement. It serves as a reminder to Quraysh about Muhammad, their companion whom they knew and interacted with for forty years. He remained among them, while they tested his truthfulness before he uttered the revelation. They unanimously acknowledged him as *"the truthful, the trustworthy."* Can it be conceivable that he would go astray and mislead after reaching the peak of integrity?

The verses then unveil the unseen source: {He has been taught by one ˹angel˺ of mighty power} [An-Najm:5], referring to the angel Gabriel (Jibreel), who is strong in power. {and great perfection, who once rose to ˹his˺ true form * while on the highest point above the horizon} [An-Najm:6-7]. He stood at a high point in the sky during the night of the Prophet's Ascension, revealing himself to Muhammad in his majestic form, created by Allah,(1) not in the human form in which he descended to Earth.

The surah continues to describe the Prophet's journey to the heavens and reaching the Lote Tree of the Utmost Boundary - a great tree sheltering the angels, seen by the prophet in his night journey, displaying

(1) Ibn Mas'ud, may Allah be pleased with him, said regarding the interpretation of this verse: *"Jibril (Gabriel) had six hundred wings."* [Narrated by Bukhari and Muslim].

some of Allah's greatest signs: {while the Lote Tree was overwhelmed with ⌜heavenly⌝ splendors! * The ⌜Prophet's⌝ sight never wandered, nor did it overreach. * He certainly saw some of his Lord's greatest signs} (An-Najm:16-18).

It seemed to me that this surah is an extension of the previous one. Both speak to defiant disbelievers about unseen phenomena beyond their imagination, from the Frequented House to the Lote Tree of the Utmost Boundary. Both begin by placing these signs before a grand divine oath.

In my mind, I concluded that the charlatans among the claimants of *"prophethood,"* whose speeches I followed, from the leaders of the so-called New Age movement,(1) lack the level of confidence exhibited in this discourse. When one of them claims communication with an unseen source - whether alleged intelligent extraterrestrial beings or the so-called *"Absolute"* from which spiritual energy emanates to fill the universe - they fall short of this self-assurance.

As for the prophet -*peace be upon him*- he stood in the midst of Makkah proclaiming these verses, articulating his extraordinary personal journey to the highest point of existence. He paid no attention to the astonishment of his opponents immersed in the trivial details of their earthly lives.

Essence of the Debate

To grasp the sequence of the rhetoric of defiance, I read the surah from the beginning. I found it began with a reminder of Muhammad's integrity and truthfulness: {Your fellow man1 is neither misguided nor astray. * Nor does he speak of his own whims} [An-Najm:2-3]. This is a rational introduction, followed by an emphatic statement with no room

(1) The term *"New Age movement"* refers to a wide spectrum of spiritual Western factions and trends influenced by Eastern philosophies, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism. It emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century, with some of its groups overlapping with secret societies and cults of Satan worship.

for debate: {It is only a revelation sent down ˹to him˺} [An-Najm:4). Then it describes his vision of the magnificent angel Jibreel in the sky: {He has been taught by one ˹angel˺ of mighty power} [An-Najm:5]. It firmly asserts the truthfulness of what he informed them about the Isra and Mi'raj without debate: {The ˹Prophet's˺ heart did not doubt what he saw} [An-Najm:11]. It then challenges those who deny him, without discussion as well: {How can you ˹O pagans˺ then dispute with him regarding what he saw?} [An-Najm:12]. It continues with the narrative of his ascension in the realm of the unseen: {And he certainly saw that ˹angel descend˺ a second time. * at the Lote Tree of the most extreme limit ˹in the seventh heaven˺—} [An-Najm:13-14]. Amid this narrative, the prophet's vision is reiterated with a resolute tone that allows no room for debate: {The ˹Prophet's˺ sight never wandered, nor did it overreach} [An-Najm:17). Then, there is a qualitative shift in the dialogue: {Now, have you considered ˹the idols of˺ Lât and 'Uzza, * and the third one, Manât, as well? * Do you ˹prefer to˺ have sons while ˹you attribute˺ to Him daughters?} [An-Najm:19-22]. Here, the table is turned on Quraysh.

The last four verses are not merely a taunt to the disbelievers, in my opinion, but the essence of the debate. The word *"Have you considered"* means, what is your opinion about such and such? The implied meaning is: after all that has been said about your confidence in the truthfulness and trustworthiness of Muhammad, and after he informed you of the events of the Night Journey and Ascension, and about the greatness of the Kingdom of Allah that you already believe in, what is your opinion about stone idols carrying mythical names, namely Lat, Uzza, and Manat? How do your minds exclude the possibility of the Night Journey of the Messenger of Allah to Al-Aqsa and his ascent to the heavens, and his sighting of the angels, while you believe in the supernatural attributes of your idols - which you crafted with your own hands?

In other words, if stones acquire supernatural qualities by being consecrated as sacred idols by humans, what prevents a person chosen by Allah as His messenger from experiencing miracles?

Satanic myths

The Arabs had adopted idols besides the Kaaba, houses revered in a manner similar to the Kaaba. These idols had servants (Sadanah) and guards (Hujab), offerings were presented to them as they were to the Kaaba, they were circumambulated just like the Kaaba, and sacrifices were offered to them as they were at the Kaaba.(1) Each major tribe had its own idol and temple, and Quraysh, in addition to Hubal (the chief idol placed inside the Kaaba), also revered Lat, Uzza, and Manat, although these idols were not centered in Makkah.

Lat represented the goddess of fertility, motherhood, and the earth among other communities. Her temple belonged to Banu Thaqif, and her worship spread across the Arabian Peninsula, reaching the Levant. The people of Tadmur (modern-day Syria) built the *"Temple of Lat,"* its remains still stand today. It contains an intact sculpture embodying Lat as a woman holding palm fronds in her hand, with a lion lying beside her.

As for Uzza, she resembled goddesses of beauty and love in other pagan beliefs, such as Aphrodite in Greek mythology, Venus in Roman mythology, Isis in ancient Egyptian mythology, and Ishtar (or Inanna) in the region between the Tigris and Euphrates. She symbolized a beautiful woman and represented the morning star (Venus). Uzza was worshiped by Quraysh, Bani Sulaym, Ghatfan, and Jusham, leaving traces in Petra, Jordan.

Manat was the goddess of fate, destiny, and death. Her statue was erected on the coast between Makkah and Medina and was venerated by Quraysh, as well as by the Aus and Khazraj in Yathrib (Medina), and

(1) The Prophet's Biography by Ibn Hisham (1/209).

those affiliated with them. People sought to visit her, offering sacrifices and precious gifts in hopes of rainfall and prevention of drought and barrenness.

These three goddesses formed a borrowed trinity - apparently influenced by other mythologies - with Hubal at its head, resembling Zeus in Greece, Jupiter among the Romans, Marduk among the Babylonians, and Baal among the Canaanites and Phoenicians in the Levant.

I am convinced that the origin of all these pagan beliefs is one: Satan himself.(1) The myth repeats everywhere, with variations in some details and names.

The Arabs, like others, claimed that these idols were carved in the likeness of celestial bodies (planets), which gained their sanctity from their elevated positions in the dome of the sky. They also believed that these gods were the actual angels and the daughters of Allah Almighty, and the stones they carved with their own hands were, in their belief, altars where these spirits resided. Thus, these stones acquired a holiness deserving blessings, sanctification, and the presentation of valuable sacrifices and gifts.

To complete the myth and lend it credibility, the demons themselves would manifest in some idols and temples. They would disguise themselves as priests and oracles, exhibiting supernatural feats on the hands and tongues of those priests, convincing people of their authenticity. Therefore, when prophet Muhammad -*peace be upon him*- sent Khalid ibn al-Walid to demolish al-Uzza,(2) narrations mention that a

(1) In the sacred Hadith, it is reported: *"Verily, I have created My servants as Hunafa (upright), but the devils came to them and deviated them from their religion, forbidding for them what I permitted, and commanding them to associate with Me that for which I have not sent down authority."* [Narrated by Muslim]

(2) Some historians say that Al-Uzza was an idol inside a temple, while others say it was a structure built upon three Samurat (date palm trees). Precious gifts were hung on the walls of the temple and on its trees.

demon in the form of a black woman emerged from it, wailing, and Khalid struck her down with his sword.

Superstitious Beliefs

After all that I have mentioned to you, dear reader, let's revisit the preceding verses together: {Now, have you considered ⌜the idols of⌝ Lât and 'Uzza, * and the third one, Manât, as well? * Do you ⌜prefer to⌝ have sons while ⌜you attribute⌝ to Him daughters?} [An-Najm:19-22]. Don't you see how the Quran exposes the fallacies of its deniers by laying bare their flimsy roots?

The verses inquire: Why did you attribute femininity to the angels, then associate these *"feminine"* angels with God, claiming they are His daughters, while at the same time feeling shame if a female child is born to you and boasting if a male is born?

The answer: {These ⌜idols⌝ are mere names that you and your forefathers have made up—a practice Allah has never authorized. They follow nothing but ⌜inherited⌝ assumptions and whatever ⌜their⌝ souls desire, although ⌜true⌝ guidance has already come to them from their Lord} [An-Najm:23]. In other words, guidance has come to correct these erroneous notions inherited from your forefathers. What now prevents you from following the truth?!

In the next two verses, Allah clarifies that His angels are merely obedient beings, neither gods nor demigods. Even their intercession is only effective with His permission, and they have no authority or involvement beyond His sovereignty: {⌜Imagine⌝ how many ⌜noble⌝ angels are in the heavens! ⌜Even⌝ their intercession would be of no benefit whatsoever, until Allah gives permission to whoever He wills and ⌜only for the people He⌝ approves} [An-Najm:26].

The explanation and reprimand continues: {Indeed, those who do not believe in the Hereafter label angels as female, * although they have no knowledge ˹in support˺ of this. They follow nothing but ˹inherited˺ assumptions. And surely assumptions can in no way replace the truth} [Surah An-Najm:27-28]. Myths are neither knowledge or science; they are baseless assumptions supported only by tales passed down from ancestors, gaining sanctity through habit, repetition, authority, and priesthood.

If the disbelievers mock the story of the Night Journey and Ascension due to its deviation from the conventional and familiar, what scientific basis supports assigning femininity to angels, then attributing said angels to the Lord, and establishing a dogmatic and ritualistic system on purely *"assumed"* narratives? {… And surely assumptions can in no way replace the truth} [An-Najm:28]. {This is the extent of their knowledge. Surely your Lord knows best who has strayed from His Way and who is ˹rightly˺ guided} [An-Najm:30]. What profound ignorance!

I said to myself, as this is the common attitude of the defiant in every era, the myths of materialistic paganism fell at the beginning of the European *"Enlightenment"* era, only to be replaced by the myths of materialistic secularism. While the ancients revered stones, believing that spirits resided in them and that they resembled celestial bodies, weaving from their imagination what aligned with their desires and served their interests, modernity stripped sanctity from all idols and planets to deny the existence of a hidden spiritual world. Instead, it wove from its imagination what fills scientific gaps and serves its interests.

Look, dear reader, at the system of atheism based fundamentally on the philosophy of *"scientism"* and how it made materialistic science - the tool for deriving theories from observations and experiments - the sole source of knowledge and truth. They erected it as a sacred idol, offering rituals of worship in its structures (labs).

Take the theory of evolution as an example, the functional adaptation observed in living organisms was forcefully associated with the assumption called *"natural selection."* They then generalized it to explain the origin of life and the ascent of organisms from the lowest to the highest, from bacteria to humans, without the need for a wise Creator. They dubbed this assumption as *"science,"* and *"that is the extent of their knowledge"*!

Just as the disbelievers rejected the story of the Night Journey and Ascension, finding themselves in more bizarre myths, the modern atheists dismiss all the mysteries of revelation. They reside in speculative notions of the universe arising from nothing and the evolution of organisms through natural selection.

Therefore, the problem for both groups lies in the Hereafter and its warnings, not in the unseen world or its harmony with reason. {So turn away ⌜O Prophet⌝ from whoever has shunned Our Reminder, only seeking the ⌜fleeting⌝ life of this world} [An-Najm:29]. Suffice contently with presenting the truth without wasting time in fruitless arguments with those who turn away, seeking only the worldly life.

Ignorance and Foolishness

If you desire another proof of their intellectual bankruptcy, consider this example: {Have you seen the one who turned away ⌜from Islam,⌝ * and ⌜initially⌝ paid a little ⌜for his salvation⌝, and then stopped?} [An-Najm:33-34]. This refers to Al-Walid bin Al-Mughira,(1) one of the nobles of Quraysh. When he leaned towards believing in the Messenger of Allah -*peace be upon him*- one of his friends criticized and rebuked him. Al-Walid said to his friend that he feared the punishment of Allah. His friend, without any hesitation, offered to take the punishment on his

(1) The prevailing view among interpreters is that, even though there are other opinions, the meaning remains the same.

behalf for a sum of money, on the condition that Al-Walid remains on the religion of his forefathers. The fool accepted this offer, without bothering to verify whether his friend could actually fulfill this absurd offer and if Allah would permit such an arrangement. Al-Walid began by paying a part of the agreed-upon amount, but when he lost his fear of Allah's punishment and his heedlessness returned, he became stingy, reneging on the agreement and refusing to pay the remaining amount!

Observe how fools decide the mechanism of divine accountability by themselves. One willingly exposes oneself to divine punishment for the enjoyment of some transient wealth in this world, while the other risks accepting such a deal without knowing if Allah will accept it in the Hereafter. Then the miserly one fails to fulfill the agreed-upon payment, exposing himself once again to the consequences of the failure of this bizarre deal. All that you see here is merely the following of assumptions, and it is worth asking: {Does he have the knowledge of the unseen so that he sees ⌜the Hereafter⌝?} [An-Najm:35]?

This foolishness is not exclusive to stone worshippers of the pasts; you see today something even more astonishing among the worshipers of materialistic knowledge. In a well-known example, billionaire Elon Musk tweeted, *"If I die in a mysterious way... it was great to get to know you all."* Among the numerous responses was a comment from a Muslim athlete who politely invited him to believe in *"the existence of the great Creator of this world."* Musk, known for his genius and culture before becoming the richest man in the world, thanked the Muslim commenter and confirmed that he would not mind going to hell if it is indeed his destination someday. He justified this by claiming that the vast majority of humans would be there.

Musk's response may seem sarcastic, but it clearly reveals his lack of belief in a Creator from the beginning. Despite the terrifying possibility of future punishment not occupying his mind, he does not turn to verify this

dreadful possibility as long as the vast majority of humans—according to his assumption—would share this fate! {… And surely assumptions can in no way replace the truth} [An-Najm:28]. This is exactly what can be expected from those who *"desire not except the worldly life."*

Before I conclude this journey, dear reader, I direct your attention back to the beginning, reminding you of the divine oath: {By the stars when they fade away} [An-Najm:1]. You may notice that it serves as an ideal introduction to the discussion that descended upon the myths of the disbelievers, who carved idols and worshiped them, claiming that these idols represented the *"feminine"* angels and resembled the stars and planets. If the Creator swore by His creation, the star, when it descends every morning, what attributes worthy of worship does the Most High and Exalted leave for the star?

As for the conclusion of the surah, it is no less awe-inspiring than its introduction. It includes a warning of the imminent Hereafter: {The approaching ˹Hour˺ has drawn near} [An-Najm:57], emphasizing its inevitable occurrence, for there is no escape from it: {None but Allah can disclose it} [An-Najm:58]. Then follows a rebuke and condemnation for the lack of concern: {Do you find this revelation astonishing, * laughing ˹at it˺ and not weeping ˹in awe˺, * while persisting in heedlessness?} [An-Najm:59-61].

Finally, here is the divine command for steadfastness on the path of salvation: "{So prostrate to Allah and worship Him alone} [An-Najm:62].

At this point, everyone who has escaped the trap of polytheism and foolishness prostrates and glorifies, saying: *"Glory is to my Lord, the Most High."*

Al-Mujadila, Al-Hashr and Al-Mumtahanah ... Monotheism first

Any Muslim who confronts atheism today is well aware of the bitterness left in his heart as a result of his adversary's debauchery. This in turn develops into cruelty and darkness. In response, one is compelled to seek remedy through supplication, night prayer, and contemplation of the Quran until clarity emerges.

This is the nature of humans; they are nothing more than souls molded from the dust of the earth. Then, the divine breath breathed life into them, and they embarked joyfully on the pleasures of the world, only to discover repeatedly the truth in the Creator's statement: {Indeed, We have created humankind in ⌜constant⌝ struggle} [Al-Balad:4]. Man is in a continuous trial as long as he experiences the fluctuations of his worldly fate. Tranquility will only be attained temporarily through seeking refuge in the Creator, while his ultimate wishes are fulfilled by entering the abode of peace, wherein there is eternal bliss without suffering.

I once came across an account on a social media platform belonging to one atheist who grew up in a religious family but then sealed their own heart with the full force of their own will. They not only turned away to join the party of Satan but also deemed themselves among its vilest soldiers.

The young man had sought refuge in the West and thus became captivated, becoming obsessed with what he saw as a civilization built on the ruins and blood of other nations. He was bewildered by the estrangement of his people after he became a soldier of Satan, as if his disbelief and his fight against fundamental aspects of human identity, especially if he was a Muslim, were trivial matters not worthy of attention.

I realized then that it was necessary to return to the program of liberating the heart from all that it clings to, before purification. While browsing the Quran, I coincidentally remembered a lecture by one famous preacher years ago. At the start of the lecture, he asked about the *"topic of the Quran,"* and the answers flew from the attendees, but he rejected each one, answering eventually: *"It is Allah the Almighty."* That answer struck my memory, challenging factors of forgetfulness.

Recalling that thought was fitting of the situation. After my mind was occupied with the nonsense of that denier, I found my heart yearning for something to restore the balance of worship. I began investigating what could support the theory of our preacher friend, who insisted that everything mentioned in the Quran, from stories and legislation to rulings and evidence, revolves around one central axis: the sincerity of faith and worship to Allah alone.

I had reached the end of the Quran from my reading of surah Al-Mujadila. I started reading thoughtfully, beginning with the story of the companion Khawla bint Tha'labah. She continued to consult the Prophet *-peace be upon him-* about her husband, who had uttered a common expression during the days of ignorance, telling her, *"You are to me like my mother."* He did not divorce her until Gabriel descended with the new legislative ruling to differentiate between expressions of disapproval and divorce.

It is narrated that Aisha *-may Allah be pleased with her-* said, *"Blessed is the One whose hearing encompasses everything. I can hear the words of Khawla bint Tha'labah, and some of it is concealed from me. She complained about her husband to the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him... I did not start to leave except that Gabriel had descended with these verses."*(1)

(1) Narrated by Al-Hakim and authenticated by him (3843).

What caught my attention here is the commencement of the surah with: {Indeed, Allah has heard the argument of the woman who pleaded with you ˹O Prophet˺ concerning her husband, and appealed to Allah. Allah has heard your exchange. Surely Allah is All-Hearing, All-Seeing} [Al-Mujadila:1]. The legislative ruling did not descend merely as a dry legal text but began with an ideological link that engages the mind towards the source of this revelation, emphasizing Allah's vast knowledge, encompassing and monitoring the minutest details of our lives.

It occurred to me: If someone claiming prophethood wanted to convince us that he had a comprehensive legislative constitution, would it ever cross his mind to present its legal provisions in this narrative format and insist on mentioning the ideological link without any compromise?

After finishing this story, I found myself facing another legislative ruling, transitioning smoothly from the ruling of clear disapproval, which came in the context of whispering in the story of Khawla, to the general rulings of whispering. However, this transition came through another ideological bridge, reminding us of Allah's knowledge of what we whisper among ourselves. Allah says: {Do you not see that Allah knows whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth? If three converse privately, He is their fourth. If five, He is their sixth. Whether fewer or more, He is with them wherever they may be. Then, on the Day of Judgment, He will inform them of what they have done. Surely Allah has ˹perfect˺ knowledge of all things} [Al-Mujadila:7] It is as if this comprehensive book utilizes a passing incident, like a woman's question about the ruling of her relationship with her husband, to alert the believers to Allah's knowledge of everything and His judgment of everything.

After that comes the reprimand of the Jews and the hypocrites for their whispering: {Have you not seen those who were forbidden from secret talks, yet they ˹always˺ return to what they were forbidden from, conspiring in sin, aggression, and disobedience to the Messenger? And

when they come to you ⌜O Prophet⌝, they greet you not as Allah greets you, and say to one another, *"Why does Allah not punish us for what we say?"* Hell is enough for them—they will burn in it. And what an evil destination!} [Al-Mujadila:8] Then the legislative ruling follows: {O believers! When you converse privately, let it not be for sin, aggression, or disobedience to the Messenger, but let it be for goodness and righteousness. And fear Allah, to Whom you will ⌜all⌝ be gathered} [Al-Mujadila:9].

Before concluding the surah, I was struck by this remarkable verse: { Satan has taken hold of them, causing them to forget the remembrance of Allah. They are the party of Satan. Surely Satan's party is bound to lose} [Al-Mujadila:19). Although it describes the situation of one of the hypocrites who began to swear in the presence of the Messenger of Allah, pledging with a group of his companions that they never insulted him in their gatherings, which revelation exposed, revealing their falsehood, the verse applies to every arrogant denier, with Satan. The precise description of possession here and its accuracy in illustrating the condition of that young man who grew up as a Muslim, only to be infiltrated by disbelief until he became part of the *"party of Satan,"* is remarkable!

My amazement hardly subsided from this coincidence until the concluding verse came {You will never find a people who ⌜truly⌝ believe in Allah and the Last Day loyal to those who defy Allah and His Messenger, even if they were their parents, children, siblings, or extended family. For those ⌜believers⌝, Allah has instilled faith in their hearts and strengthened them with a spirit from Him. He will admit them into Gardens under which rivers flow, to stay there forever. Allah is pleased with them and they are pleased with Him. They are the party of Allah. Indeed, Allah's party is bound to succeed} [Al-Mujadila:22].

I could not read it without feeling shivers run through my being, then a soothing and peaceful coolness descended upon my heart, which had been wounded by the transgression of that atheist. He complained

about his family's estrangement, forcing him to seek an alternative family among his likes in the West. The Quran clearly explains that a believer cannot reconcile true faith in Allah and the Last Day while showing affection to those who *"oppose Allah and His Messenger,"* even if they are close relatives.

The verse continues to sow tranquility with a series of beautiful promises, culminating in the description of protection and guardianship: *"Those are the party of Allah."*

O Allah, make me and anyone who reads these words among Your party, Your people, and Your chosen ones.

Surah Al-Hashr

The reflection did not end with that spiritual insight, dear reader. As I delved into reading surah Al-Hashr, a sense of glorification filled my heart with the opening verse: {Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth glorifies Allah. For He is the Almighty, All-Wise} [Al-Hashr:1]. Although the surah was revealed on the occasion of expelling the Jewish tribe of Bani Nadir from Medina due to their betrayal of the Muslims, the narrative, with its judgments and warnings, begins by reminding us that everything in existence glorifies Allah, and He is Mighty and Wise.

After outlining some of the rules regarding spoils of war(1) and the details of the incident, the surah describes the state of the hypocrites in their cowardice and abandonment: {Have you ˹O Prophet˺ not seen the hypocrites who say to their fellow disbelievers from the People of the Book,1 *"If you are expelled, we will certainly leave with you, and We will never obey anyone against you. And if you are fought against, we will surely help you."*? But Allah bears witness that they are truly liars. Indeed,

(1) Al-Fay' is what Allah grants to Muslims without fighting, and it has special rules for distribution that differ from the distribution of spoils acquired by the army after combat.

if they are expelled, the hypocrites will never leave with them. And if they are fought against, the hypocrites will never help them. And even if the hypocrites did so, they would certainly flee, then the disbelievers would be left with no help} [Al-Hashr:11-12]. Once again, I recalled that atheist who thought he had found his real family among his like-minded companions. I reflected on the situation of every young person who turns away, finding encouragement from such devils. Perhaps some of them would have embraced disbelief or remained in disbelief if they were not provided with the need for belonging, especially when these individuals are the first to abandon them if they are tested in this world, not to mention the test in the Hereafter.

Contemplate, dear reader, this scene: {⌜They are⌝ like Satan when he lures someone to disbelieve. Then after they have done so, he will say ⌜on Judgment Day⌝, *"I have absolutely nothing to do with you. I truly fear Allah—the Lord of all worlds."*} [Al-Hashr:16]. Then ponder at your own pace the following verse: {So they will both end up in the Fire, staying there forever. That is the reward of the wrongdoers} [Al-Hashr:17].

I could not help but project this horrifying scene onto that fallen young man, although he is still alive and provided for. I hope for his guidance and salvation, but the imagination may wander without restraint.

Now, picture the awe of standing before this noble conclusion and recall the theory of the preacher that I shared with you as we humbly read: {Had We sent down this Quran upon a mountain, you would have certainly seen it humbled and torn apart in awe of Allah. We set forth such comparisons for people, ⌜so⌝ perhaps they may reflect. He is Allah—there is no god ⌜worthy of worship⌝ except Him: Knower of the seen and unseen. He is the Most Compassionate, Most Merciful. He is Allah—there is no god except Him: the King, the Most Holy, the All-Perfect, the Source of Serenity, the Watcher ⌜of all⌝, the Almighty, the Supreme in Might,1 the Majestic. Glorified is Allah far above what they associate with

Him ⌜in worship⌝! He is Allah: the Creator, the Inventor, the Shaper. He ⌜alone⌝ has the Most Beautiful Names. Whatever is in the heavens and the earth ⌜constantly⌝ glorifies Him. And He is the Almighty, All-Wise} [Al-Hashr:21-24].

Since words fall short in commenting on the majesty of these verses, I will suffice by drawing your attention, dear reader, to the correspondence between the introduction and the conclusion of this surah.

Surah Al-Mumtahanah

Although the contemplation of the two previous surahs was profound and comprehensive, moving on to the next surah was more exciting for me. It seemed as if the Quran seizes the opportunity to address our hearts whenever we turn to it.

Initially, I did not notice that the central theme of the surah revolves around the concepts of loyalty and disavowal, the very issue that troubled that atheist. Surah Al-Mumtahanah was revealed to rebuke Hatib ibn Abi Balta'ah, a participant in the Battle of Badr who committed a grave error by sending a letter to Quraysh, warning them of the Prophet's plan to conquer Mecca. Although he justified his action by claiming to seek protection for his family in Mecca, the surah was revealed to strongly admonish him. It then elaborated on the matters of love and enmity for the sake of Allah, cutting off any room for personal opinions in this critical matter.

We might agree that blood ties are the strongest in human instinct. Intelligence agencies rely on family connections to build trust with their agents or even to engage in conflicts with their enemies. While a person might compromise on many inclinations and desires, their eagerness to protect their children and close family members may be their most uncompromising points, which can be exploited in complex conflicts of interest.

However, the divine order comes to rearrange loyalties, making allegiance to Allah the foremost. The heart must be stripped of attachment to parents and children when the primary balance is disturbed, without neglecting the minimum duty toward relatives. The surah begins with this clear instruction: {O believers! Do not take My enemies and yours as trusted allies, showing them affection …} [Al-Mumtahanah:1].

Then it continues {Neither your relatives nor children will benefit you on Judgment Day—He will decide between you ˹all˺. For Allah is All-Seeing of what you do} [Al-Mumtahanah:3]. Undoubtedly, dear reader, you recall the situation of that apostate young man, dismayed by his parents' disavowal, the judge divorcing his wife from him, and his son being cast aside. His Muslim family knows well that their son has become an enemy, not just to them but to Allah and His Messenger. After this, what family ties remain?

Thus, the surah reminds us of the story of Abraham -*peace be upon him*- and his people when they said to their families: {*"We totally dissociate ourselves from you and ˹shun˺ whatever ˹idols˺ you worship besides Allah. We reject you. The enmity and hatred that has arisen between us and you will last until you believe in Allah alone."* …} [Al-Mumtahanah:4].

It is noteworthy that the surah did not extinguish hope in the hearts of those grieving over the disbelief of their relatives. It left the door open for the possibility of their conversion to Islam and repentance {˹In time,˺ Allah may bring about goodwill between you and those of them you ˹now˺ hold as enemies. For Allah is Most Capable. And Allah is All-Forgiving, Most Merciful} [Al-Mumtahanah:7]. This verse consoles the companions with the potential conversion of their pagan relatives to Islam and the restoration of affection between them. This indeed happened when most of the pagans embraced Islam after the conquest.

However, the surah concludes by reiterating the prohibition of befriending disbelievers, as it began: {O believers! Do not ally yourselves

with a people Allah is displeased with. They already have no hope for the Hereafter, just like the disbelievers lying in ⌜their⌝ graves} [Al-Mumtahanah:13]. It seems like a conclusive warning to prevent Muslims from relying on hope, becoming lax in their actions. Associating with disbelievers is forbidden, even if they are among the closest of people,(1) yet hoping for their future conversion is entirely another matter, undeserving of any judgement.

Therefore, the essence of life is our servitude to Allah, and our understanding of this fundamental reality is truly the central theme of this book revealed to us by the Most High. This truth becomes clearer to those who contemplate with a vigilant mind, an unbiased soul, and a heart stripped of servitude to anyone other than Allah.



(1) There is a distinction between various forms of allegiance, some of which constitute disbelief, some fall under major sins, and others are less severe. One of the sources that elaborated on this distinction is the book *"Al-Wala' wa-l-Bara' fi-l-Islam"* by the author Muhammad bin Sa'id al-Qahtani.

Humanity... Between the Illusion of Divinity and the Dignity of Servitude

I am often struck by the use of the term *"humanity,"* whether in cultural and intellectual discourse or in daily communication, including narratives and media shared on social platforms. Over time, the word has become synonymous with the concept of kindness. Anyone possessing feelings of compassion, empathy, and noble ethics is automatically labeled as humane. When a ruler, for instance, gains fame for such attitudes, the state media might confer upon him the title of *"King of Humanity."* This title is also bestowed upon other celebrities.

A few years ago, this usage seemed amusing to me. It's peculiar to describe a human as *"humane,"* for whatever reason, as we do not qualify any animal as *"animal-like,"* for instance.

Consulting dictionaries may not alleviate this bewilderment, as the term was not common among our Arab ancestors. It appears mainly in modern dictionaries, such as Al-Mu'jam Al-Wasit (issued by the Cairo Institute), which defines humanity as the opposite of animality, signifying the sum of qualities that distinguish humans.

Foreign dictionaries first point to the term *"Humanism,"* a secular philosophical movement initiated by European Renaissance philosophers. It emphasizes giving greater attention to humans, rendering them the focus of existence, in contrast to religions that subordinate humans to the divine.

UN literature deals with *"humanity"* as the central principle on which all other principles are based, intending to protect health, life, and human rights. While these principles are formulated based on the

aforementioned humanistic philosophy, I won't dwell on them as they are not the subject of my inquiries.

The intended meaning is thus *"Humanity,"* also a term originating in the West within its own culture and not ours, signifying kindness toward the human species. After secularism established the human-centered creed *"humanity"*, kindness towards other people became the core of ethics.

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant (18th century) stated that humanity is the goal of ethics and the foundation for the concept of duty. The negation of the necessity of God in his philosophy undermined his moral instinct, leading him to connect ethics with a human duty he himself couldn't explain, and later Friedrich Nietzsche also rooted morality in nothingness and the absurdity of existence as an inevitable consequence of atheism!

Humanity, therefore, is the love for humanity and benevolence towards it, as material civilization teaches us. With the widespread use of this term, it has become a quality attributed to every person endowed with nobility and good ethics. It is almost understood as if the quality of humanity - the opposite of animality - is the essence of a person and is shared by all human beings. However, this quality should not be a source of either good or evil.

Researching Revelation

I finally turned to an electronic search tool and looked for the word *"human"* in the only book that I am certain is unauthored by humans. I found that the word is mentioned 63 times in the Quran. It does not always appear in the context of description. It is mentioned when discussing the creation and teaching of humans: {Indeed, We created man from sounding clay molded from black mud} [Al-Hijr:26], {taught humanity what they knew not} [Al-'Alaq:5]. It is also mentioned in a general command: {We

have commanded people to honor their parents. But if they urge you to associate with Me what you have no knowledge of,1 then do not obey them. To Me you will ˹all˺ return, and then I will inform you of what you used to do} [Al-ʻAnkabut:8]

If we move beyond these examples in our search for the qualities of humans in the book directed to them by their Creator, we find that most of these verses associate the word *"human"* with qualities of deficiency and weakness. Some examples include: *"And man was created weak"* [An-Nisa:28], {And man is ever hasty} [Al-Isra:11], {..And man was ever ungrateful} [Al-Isra:67], {… for humankind is ever stingy!} [Al-Isra:100], {…But humanity assumed it, ˹for˺ they are truly wrongful ˹to themselves˺ and ignorant ˹of the consequences˺,} [Al-Ahzab:72], {Indeed, humankind was created impatient} [Al-Ma'arij:19], {Condemned are ˹disbelieving˺ humans! How ungrateful they are ˹to Allah˺!} [ʻAbasa:17], {Surely humankind is ungrateful to their Lord—} [Al-ʻAdiyat:6], {He created humans from a sperm-drop, then—behold!—they openly challenge ˹Him˺} [An-Nahl:4].

These descriptions were unsurprising to me, and I don't believe, dear reader, they surprise you either. It is inevitable that some of these verses are imprinted in the mind of every Muslim, regardless of their level of knowledge. However, what is noteworthy when looking at them collectively is that you can hardly see anything other than qualities of deficiency. Perhaps the following verse is an exception: {Indeed, We have created humans in the best form} [At-Tin:4].

In my early years I wondered: If most human qualities in the book sent down by their Creator indicate deficiencies, was man created defective? And how is he held accountable if his evil outweighs his good?

Before searching for the answer in the Quran, I would like to draw your attention, dear reader, to the fact that the predominance of evil over goodness in man is the position of the Catholic Church, which claims

that man inherits the sin of Adam and Eve for eating from the tree. Some Islamic thinkers have also leaned towards this opinion based on their understanding of the Quranic verse: {ʿRememberʾ when your Lord said to the angels, *"I am going to place a successive ʿhumanʾ authority on earth."* They asked ʿAllahʾ, *"Will You place in it someone who will spread corruption there and shed blood while we glorify Your praises and proclaim Your holiness?"* Allah responded, *"I know what you do not know."*} [Al-Baqara:30]. However, some commentators wondered how the angels knew that evil would prevail over a new species that had not yet been created. They suggested that the earth was inhabited before the *"new successor"* by another species that corrupted it and shed blood, likely referring to the jinn.

The poet Al-Mutanabbi says: *"Injustice is a flaw in souls; if you find someone free from it, it's for a reason, not due to virtue."*

Let us revisit the Quran and contemplate some verses that repeatedly emphasize human weakness. Humans tend to repent in times of distress, but forget and return to heedlessness when relief comes. This is a trait familiar to all of us. However, the following verse points to another important aspect: {Whenever someone is touched by hardship, they cry out to Us, whether lying on their side, sitting, or standing. But when We relieve their hardship, they return to their old ways as if they had never cried to Us to remove any hardship! This is how the misdeeds of the transgressors have been made appealing to them} [Yunus:12]. Although weakness is natural, persisting in it until it becomes a habitual inclination that one finds acceptable is another characteristic that *"adorns"* the transgressors, those who exceed limits in disobedience, unlike those who become weak or forget.

Weakness and forgetfulness are thus characteristics with which humans are tested because their creation is fundamentally based on examination. If a person repents and returns to Allah, Allah forgives him

for his shortcomings, allowing him to be saved. However, if weakness persists, demons take control until the individual falls.

When we turn to some interpretations, we find a commendable distinction between generalization and specification. An example from the Quran is: {And He is the One Who gave you life, then will cause you to die, and then will bring you back to life. ⌜But⌝ surely humankind is ever ungrateful} [Al-Hajj:66]. Some brief interpretations pass over the term *"man"* without specification, implying that it encompasses the entire human race. However, Jalalain, a concise interpretation, mentions that the term is specific to disbelievers, excluding others.

Al-Qurtubi, may Allah have mercy on him, immediately follows, *"Indeed, man is ungrateful, meaning denying what has been revealed of signs indicating His power and uniqueness,"* with: "Ibn Abbas said: This refers to Aswad ibn Abd Al-Aswad and Abu Jahl ibn Hisham, Al-As ibn Hisham, and a group of disbelievers. It is said: He said that because the majority of people are ungrateful for blessings, as Allah said: {…⌜Only⌝ a few of My servants are ⌜truly⌝ grateful} [Saba:13].(1)

Thus, after limiting it to disbelievers, the generalization follows, indicating that the ingratitude to blessings is a characteristic found in the essence of humans as well. This is part of the nature of the test.

This discourse can be found in many other verses: {Yet ⌜some⌝ people ask ⌜mockingly⌝, *"After I die, will I really be raised to life again?"*} [Maryam:66]. Some interpreters mention that this verse was revealed about Ubbai bin Khalaf, while others say it was revealed about Al-Walid bin Al-Mughira. It is directed towards all those like them who deny resurrection. Similarly: {Do people not see that We have created them from a sperm-drop, then—behold!—they openly challenge ⌜Us⌝? } [Surah Ya-Sin:77], which some claim was also revealed about Ubbai, who brought

(1) Tafsir al-Qurtubi, Vol. 6, p. 71.

a bone to the Prophet -*peace be upon him*- that had decayed, and asked, *"Can Allah resurrect this after it has become decayed?"* The Prophet -*peace be upon him*- affirmed that He can, and this verse was revealed.(1)

Therefore, these verses were revealed to respond to a specific polytheist in a particular incident, but they are comprehensive verses in refuting every disbeliever like them. Disbelief may be in blessings, as in surah Al-Hajj, which allows generalizing the quality to the entire human race. It can also be disbelief in resurrection, as in the last two verses, so it can be said that here *"man"* refers only to the polytheist.

Good or Evil?

With all that has been discussed, the question might still linger: Is goodness or evil predominant within us?

Surprisingly, dear reader, materialistic science tends to lean towards determinism, suggesting that humans are driven rather than having free will. In other words, humans are instinctive beings acting according to the dictates of their nervous system.

In the realm of sociology, when a researcher studies a *"civilized"* materialistic society, they often find that humans tend towards cruelty in the absence of supervision and law. Instances of evil and injustice quickly emerge when an opportunity arises for one civilized human to exert control over another, as seen in the famous Stanford prison experiment conducted in 1971 by Dr. Philip Zimbardo. In this experiment, volunteer students were divided into guards and prisoners, and the former group did not hesitate to oppress and torture their peers.

These inclinations also manifest in various situations that you, dear reader, may encounter without realizing. For example, if I were to ask you about your stance on racism, you would likely quickly disavow it, citing

(1) Asbab al-Nuzul by al-Wahidi, p. 190.

noble teachings that condemn ignorant prejudice. However, the instinct of belonging, bias, and the rejection of a certain race or nationality may surface in you when your principles are practically tested, even subtly. This doesn't necessarily mean adopting aggressive racist positions but may involve an underlying sense of bias.

Instincts fundamentally stem from survival needs. Possessiveness, jealousy, partisanship, and belonging, as well as hostility towards others, are all necessities of life. Similarly, bodily desires are well-known instincts shared with most animals. While these instincts are contrary to ethics in all cultures, the more a person succeeds in suppressing and directing these instincts and demonstrating control, the more they are considered ethical and virtuous in societal norms. At times, it may require relinquishing some of these instincts and cultivating their opposites to be truly ethical, such as prioritizing altruism and sacrifice over possessiveness and jealousy.

Thus, the existence of these instincts in the psyche and body is not a flaw in itself. When the Quran describes humans {Indeed, humankind was created impatient * distressed when touched with evil, * and withholding when touched with good—} [Surah Al-Ma'arij:19-21], it is not an acknowledgment from the Creator that this creature was created in a flawed manner. Rather, it is an exposition and reminder to humans themselves of the instincts they are inclined towards, which are the foundations of their life requirements. However, it also requires continuous effort to regulate and refine them. Hence, the exception is stated in the next verse: *"Except for those who pray"* [Al-Ma'arij:22]. The following verses continue to describe the qualities of the prayerful, emphasizing the continuous struggle against one's own desires, indicating that humans ascend from the realms of instincts to the virtues of ethics through regular prayer.

Despite acknowledging the existence of these instincts, we don't fall into the abyss of *"determinism"* produced by materialistic philosophy - I don't mean science. It's peculiar to find prominent materialistic scientists, such as the renowned physicist Stephen Hawking, insisting that nerves govern human behavior, denying the principle of free will. Yet, paradoxically, they elevate freedom to the level of deity to be worshiped according to their liberal beliefs. Despite this, freedom of choice is a remarkable aspect exercised by every individual in every moment of their life.

The Almighty says about humans: {and shown them the two ways ˹of right and wrong˺} [Al-Balad:10], meaning that He clarified for humans the paths of good and evil. He also says: {Indeed, We guided him to the way, be he grateful or be he ungrateful} [Al-Insan:3], as if the two paths are clear before him for him to choose for himself, and this is the assignment.

But a lingering question remains: Why do the majority then choose the path of evil, disbelief, and ingratitude? This is confirmed in the Quran: *"{Say, 'Travel through the land and observe how was the end of those before. Most of them were associates [of others with Allah].'}"* [Ar-Rum:42]. Does the failure of most people in the test indicate the prevalence of deficiency and weakness within us?

I believe the answer is much simpler than it may seem. If we have just proven the existence of free will and the human ability to choose one's destiny, then even statistics across all ages lean towards the predominance of evildoers and disbelievers is not evidence of the intrinsic nature of evil and disbelief. Instead, it signifies only one thing: the majority of people willingly succumb to their desires.

Let me provide another example. If contemporary scientific methods shape our discussions, a researcher scrutinizes data to build upon it. If the repetition of observations in investigating a phenomenon reaches a certain point, the researcher assumes the validity of their theory

and generalizes its results. For instance, if a researcher finds that the majority of cars produced by a factory have a brake issue, they conclude a manufacturing flaw. This is an indisputable principle when applied to human bodies as well. However, we are not talking here about a flaw in the creation of the majority of people. There is no disagreement that deformities in creation are rare exceptions. The fault we discuss appears in people's actions, a result of their will and choice.

Therefore, no matter how many deviate from the straight path throughout history, it does not imply a flaw in their minds, abilities, or the validity of their accountability. It all pertains to their will and choice, not their creation. As long as there remains a proportion -even small- of humans committed to the truth in every era, it serves as additional evidence that success in the test is possible. Those who fail choose it entirely by their own will.

The Human" and "Mankind

This research naturally led me to a surah titled *"Al-Insan"* (The Human). The name alone is sufficient to raise expectations of finding comprehensive answers .

The surah begins with an acknowledgment that the reader might consider a question: {Is there not a period of time when each human is nothing yet worth mentioning?} [Al-Insan:1]. Al-Tabari says, *"This is a narrative, like someone saying to another, 'Have I honored you?' and he has indeed honored him."*(1) The verse refers to Adam, *peace be upon him*, and according to reports, Allah created him from clay and kept him in that form for forty years before breathing the spirit into him. The meaning of the verse is that a period came upon Adam, when he was nothing distinguished, possessing no prominence or honor; he was merely clinging mud and molded clay.

(1) Tafsir al-Tabari, Vol. 29, p. 251.

Therefore, this truth, revealed by the Creator, is the first thing that humans learn about themselves: their first ancestor, Adam, was created from clay and remained a hollow clay statue for many years before acquiring human characteristics through the breath of life from his Creator.

Then comes the second truth: {⌜For⌝ indeed, We ⌜alone⌝ created humans from a drop of mixed fluids, ⌜in order⌝ to test them, so We made them hear and see} [Al-Insan:2]. It serves as a reminder of the second origin for each of us. All this complexity arises from the union of a humble sperm and egg, culminating in the human, endowed with hearing and sight, qualified for testing.

Then the verse I mentioned earlier: {We already showed them the Way, whether they ⌜choose to⌝ be grateful or ungrateful} [Al-Insan:3]. In miraculous brevity, the result of the test distinguishes the two groups from one another: {Indeed, We have prepared for the disbelievers chains, shackles, and a blazing Fire} [Al-Insan:4]. What follows are verses dedicated to the qualities of the righteous and their promised bliss in paradise.

Is it not noteworthy that a surah named *"Al-Insan"* takes us through most of its verses on a flight of imagination towards paradise? We find no description of punishment or even mention of the characteristics of the disbelievers, despite starting by equally differentiating between the paths of gratitude and ingratitude.

The surah, therefore, focuses on the noble qualities of humans, even though the name *"Al-Insan"* is often associated in many places in the Quran with qualities of deficiency. The miraculous nature of this book leads us to the understanding that humans are not inherently flawed.

This is not the conclusion of the research. The entire Quran concludes with a surah titled *"An-Nas"* (Mankind), so that the last thing you read in

your Quran is a message that restores balance in your understanding of yourself.

On the last night of Ramadan, during my final recitation, I couldn't read past the openings of the final page without a sense of awe filling my heart. What emotions could overwhelm you when your tongue repeats the word *"people"* three times, each time coupled with one of the attributes of greatness: {Say, ˹O Prophet,˺ "I seek refuge in the Lord of humankind, * the Master of humankind, * the God of humankind} [An-Nas:1-3]?

Have you noticed how Allah, in His glory, associated with mankind three attributes: lordship, sovereignty, and divinity? It is as if our destiny only ascends through our recognition of our servitude to Him. Have you seen how our understanding of the origin of our creation progressed from clay, a substance that came upon it at some point in time when it was not even mentioned, to a sperm-drop mixture, then to creatures who hear, see, and freely choose between the two paths, reaching the highest possible station: the realization of servitude before the Lord, the Sovereign, and the Divine?

Have you seen how the Book also concludes by stating the tripartite equation: mankind, the Lord in His glory, and the one who whispers in the hearts of people from among the jinn and humans together? The completion of servitude requires human vigilance against their enemy: Satan and his forces, and seeking refuge in Allah for assistance, as if engaging in this battle does not guarantee victory for humans.

Key References

- Ibn Taymiyyah, *"Minhaj Al-Sunnah Al-Nabawiyyah Fi Naqdi Kalam Al-Shi'a Al-Qadariyya,"* Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University, 1st edition, 1986.
- Ibn Kathir, *"Tafsir Al-Quran Al-Azim,"* Dar Al-Fikr, Damascus.
- Abu Zayd Al-Maqrizi, *"Al-Quran Wal-Aql,"* Al-Idrisi Foundation, Casablanca, 1st edition, 2016.
- Jalal Al-Din Al-Suyuti, *"Al-Dur Al-Mansur Fi Tafsir Bil-Mathur,"* Hujr Center for Research, 2003.
- Jeffrey Lang, *"Even Angels Ask,"* translated by Mondhir Al-Abssi, Dar Al-Fikr, Damascus, 1st edition, 2001.
- Al-Hussein Bin Mas'ud Al-Baghawi, *"Tafsir Al-Baghawi,"* Dar Tayyiba.
- Al-Zamakhshari, *"Al-Kashaf An Haqaiq Ghawamid Al-Tanzil,"* Dar Al-Kitab Al-Arabi, Beirut, 3rd edition, 1987.
- Abdul Salam Al-Majidi, *"Al-Islam Fi Saba Ayat,"* Dar Al-Hadith Al-Ktananiya, Tangier, 1st edition, 2018 .
- Ali Bin Ahmed Al-Wahidi Al-Nisaburi, *"Asbab Al-Nuzul,"* edited by Essam Bin Abdul Mohsin Al-Humaidan, Dar Al-Ishlah, Dammam, 1992.
- Fakhr Al-Din Al-Razi, *"Al-Tafsir Al-Kabir,"* or *"Mafatih Al-Ghayb,"* Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyya, Beirut, 2004.
- Al-Qadi Abu Al-Saud, *"Tafsir Abu Al-Saud,"* verified by Khaled Mahfouz, Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyya, Beirut.
- Muhammad Abu Zahra, *"Ibn Taymiyyah: Hayatuhu Wa Asruhu - Ar'auhu Al-Fiqhiyya,"* Dar Al-Fikr Al-Arabi.
- Muhammad Bin Ahmed Al-Qurtubi, *"Tafsir Al-Qurtubi (Al-Jami Li Ahkam Al-Quran),"* Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyya, Beirut.


Al-Sabeel
INTERNATIONAL
شجرة
طيبة
Blessed Tree