



THE BASIC CONCEPTS IN THE QURAN

O you who believe! If you fear Allah,

He will grant you a criterion

(to judge between right and wrong), remove from you

(all) evil (that may afflict) you, and forgive you:

for Allah is the Lord of grace unbounded.

(Al-Anfal, 29)

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First published 2000
© Goodword Press, 2000

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Printed in India

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Contents

Introduction

Idolatry

Oppression (Fitnah)

The two Aspects of the Soul

Those who Take Vain Desires and Passions as God

Spirit, Conscience and Soul

Heart, Wisdom and Intelligence

Men of Understanding and the facts that hinder wisdom

Wisdom and Sentimentalism

Sources of Wisdom

Heedlessness and Attention

Acting Upon Conjecture

Loyalty and Obedience

Determination

Perseverance

Righteous Deeds

Giving Thanks to Allah

Not Pursuing Personal Benefits

Brotherhood and Solidarity

Modesty and Arrogance

Trust in Allah and Submission

Praying for Forgiveness and Repentance

Prayer

Introduction

In reading the Qur'an, we often come across many concepts with which we are familiar in our daily lives. These concepts are the key to an understanding of the Qur'an. Wisdom, patience, loyalty, unbelief and the favours of Allah are some of these concepts, to name a few.

The majority of the aforementioned concepts are, however, used with quite different connotations in the course of our daily lives. Should those somewhat conversant with the Qur'an establish their Qur'anic standpoint on the basis of these connotations, they will surely come to have a poor grasp of its content.

Let's take "wisdom" as an example. "Wisdom" is randomly used to express intelligence, smartness etc. Yet, none of these meanings bear any similarity whatsoever to the word's actual meaning in the Qur'an. In its real sense, wisdom is a favour granted exclusively to believers. Contrary to the prevalent conviction, it does not remain constant; it changes depending upon the strength of personal faith. Wisdom is a divine guide for the soul; displaying a righteous attitude and conduct to earn the pleasure of Allah, observing Allah's limits, obeying the commandments of Allah, distinguishing good from evil, conducting oneself in the best possible way, giving the best decisions to attain the hereafter—all these become possible through wisdom.

An unbeliever, albeit an intelligent one, can never employ wisdom. He can be very intelligent; yet, being unfaithful, he can never conceive what wisdom really is. Intelligence is often believed to be synonymous with wisdom. Some, on the other hand, construe wisdom as a kind of intelligence blended with some sort of dignity and maturity. In reality, however, an unbeliever, even a mature, experienced, intelligent and sober one, lacks wisdom.

It is quite possible that someone with the aforementioned mentality may arrive at completely erroneous interpretations of the concepts in the Qur'an. At times, the dimensions of such a misinterpretation may be serious; they may become the source of bigoted or distorted beliefs. The same thing holds true for other concepts also.

That is why an accurate understanding of Qur'anic content and the meaning of these concepts is essential. It is necessary also to know the Qur'an by heart and to apply it to daily life.

In this booklet, some concepts frequently encountered in the Qur'an are explained in the light of the relevant verses; we have endeavoured to explain their hidden meanings as well as their general and special uses. Surely, Allah knows best.

Idolatry

'Shirk', the word used for idolatry in Arabic means "partnership/association". In the Qur'an, to practise idolatry is to associate any other being, any other person, or concept with Allah, considering them to be equal to Allah, and to act upon this unsound belief.

In translations of the Qur'an, idolatry is explained as "associating a partner with Allah". It is expressed thus: "having another god besides Allah", or "worshipping another god besides Allah".

In its broadest sense, idolatry is to adhere to principles and values, or pursue a life style other than is consistent with the teachings and moral values of the Qur'an. Someone adopting such principles simply sets up the person laying down these principles as a partner to Allah. This person may be anyone; his father, grandfather, an ancestor he may so exalt the society he is a member of, the founders of an ideology, a philosophy or its followers. In this broad sense of idolatry, someone adhering to a different way of living other than the Qur'an, simply practises idolatry. He may call himself an atheist, Christian, or Jew. He may even appear to be a Muslim, performing his regular prayers, fasting and obeying the laws of Islam. Nevertheless, anyone harboring a thought or judgment opposing the Qur'an is a mere idolater; by such a stance he simply manifests his acceptance of the existence of a ruler other than Allah.

Idolatry does not essentially require an absolute denial of the existence of Allah. Rather, the majority of the idolaters avoid explicitly accepting such an attribute or "title". Never scrupulous in conduct, they deceive themselves throughout their lives. On the Day of Judgment, they still reject being involved in idolatry. The stance they adopt is explained in the following verse:

One day shall We gather them all together: We shall say to those who ascribed partners (to Us): "Where are the partners whom you (invented and) talked about?" There will then be (left) no subterfuge for them but to say: "By Allah, our Lord, we were not those who associated other gods with Allah." Behold! How they lie against thier own souls ! But the (lie) which they invented will leave them in the lurch.

(al-Ana'am, 22-24)

An idolater does not necessarily have to make "declarations". You will certainly never hear a statement like this: " I hereby take this divine being as a god besides Allah and I swear an oath of loyalty to him." Idolatry resides primarily, in the heart and is then disclosed through word and deed. From the standpoint of the Qur'an, having a preference for a being other than Allah underlies it. Giving preference to the will of some person over the Will of Allah, for instance, fear of other people rather than fear of Allah, or an attachment to some person rather than to Him are examples of idolatry described in the Qur'an.

From the foregoing, it is clear that idolatry is the diversion of the feeling of "love" from Allah to other beings. The strong attachment formed to idols is explained in the following verse:

Yet there are men who take (for worship) others besides Allah, as equal (with Allah): They love them as they should love Allah. But those of the Faith are overflowing in their love for Allah. If only the unrighteous could see, behold, they would see the penalty: that to Allah belongs all power, and Allah will sternly enforce the penalty.

(Surah Al-Baqara, 165)

This verse makes it clear that "love" given to the wrong people lays the basis for "worshipping others than Allah" as well as idolatry. Unlike believers, unbelievers can never

maintain an intimate relation with their Creator. They love either themselves or others, or both; they share out their love among their fathers, sons, brothers, wives, husbands, lovers, the people they are surrounded by, and so on. As well as for people, unbelievers feel attachment for non-living things, or rather concepts like money, possessions, houses, cars, status, prestige, etc.

The superior and gorgeous properties of all living things and non-living things alike, are mere reflections of the infinite attributes of Allah. The unique possessor of these features is Allah and therefore the only One worthy of loyalty, devotion and love. Feeling an attachment then for anything other than Allah is mere association of partners with Allah.

In another verse, in the words of prophet Abraham, it is asserted that unbelievers leave Allah and strengthen the bond with their idols:

And he said: "You have taken (for worship) idols besides Allah, out of mutual love and regard between yourselves in this life; but on the Day of Judgment you shall disown and curse each other: and your abode will be the Fire, and you shall have none to help you."

(Al-Ankaboot, 25)

Passion for women is the most striking example of ascribing partners to Allah in terms of love. The woman in question can be anyone—a spouse, a girl friend, or even a woman to whom one is platonically attracted. In consequence, if the love felt for a woman makes a man drift apart from Allah, makes him see a woman as equal to or at a higher level than Allah, then this is explicitly "ascribing partners to Allah." Such a mentality, assumed to be innocent behaviour in society, has serious consequences, however, in the presence of Allah:

(The Pagans), leaving Him, call but upon female deities: they call but upon Satan the persistent rebel!

(An-Nisa, 117)

This point of view also holds true for women. This type of love, unacceptable in the presence of Allah, is however encouraged in modern societies under the "innocent" rubrics of "love", "romanticism" or "dating." The indoctrination of romanticism- especially targeting young people—has devastating effects upon new generations. This is surely a great hindrance to the healthy development of the youthful mind and consciousness. As a result of this indoctrination, generations devoid of understanding, come into being. In such circumstances, the members of society live in a total unawareness of the purpose of their existence on Earth, and the exigencies of their religion and faith. Such people simply cling to an ignorant way of living and lead their lives without knowing what love of Allah or fear of Allah really mean.

Another reason for the individual to drift into shirk is fear. Just like love, fear should be felt only for Allah. One who feels or shows fear for created beings simply attributes individual might to them. This is idolatry, pure and simple.

Allah has said:

"Take not (for worship) two gods: for He is just One Allah: then fear Me (and Me alone)." To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and on earth, and to Him is duty due always: then will you fear other than Allah?

(An-Nahl, 51-52)

Unbelievers go in great fear of other people. This is narrated in the Qur'an:

...When (at length) the order for fighting was issued to them, behold! A section of them feared men as - or even more than - they should have feared Allah. They said: "Our Lord! Why have you ordered us to fight? Could you not grant us a brief respite?"...

(An-Nisa, 77)

Apart from the feelings of love and fear, there are other attitudes leading man to idolatry.

The basis of idolatry is the preference for a person, or a thing over Allah, for instance, to prefer somebody's approval to Allah's, to fear somebody as one fears Allah or to love him as one loves Allah...Or to do for an idol what he doesn't do for Allah, or to make a sacrifice which he does not do for Allah's approval.

Given the foregoing arguments, it would be a shallow interpretation indeed to define idolatry as the worship of statues. This is surely an argument used by unbelievers to justify their stance. According to their explanation, idolatry ceased when the idols in the Ka'ba were broken at the time the message of Islam was communicated. If this argument were true, then the hundreds of verses warning believers against idolatry, and providing a detailed explanation about it, would have relevance only to a few primitive tribes in our day—a piece of a reasoning quite contradictory to the essence of the Qur'an. Furthermore from the Qur'an which will prevail until the Day of Judgement we understand that, in every age, pagans lived together side by side with believers. The related verse follow:

Strongest among men in enmity to the believers you will find the Jews and Pagans...

(Al-Maeda, 82)

Turn back in repentance to Allah, and fear Him: establish regular prayers, and do not be among those who associate other gods with Allah Turn to Him, be careful of your duty to Him, be steadfast in prayer and do not be of the polytheists, who split up their religion, and become (mere) sects, each party rejoicing in its own beliefs!

(Ar-Rum, 31-32)

As the verses suggest, one of the most significant characteristics of polytheistic societies is their approach to true religion; they reject some commandments of the religion revealed by Allah and hence form divisions within the religion. The members of these divisions assume themselves to be on the right path and fight with one another. However, it should be kept in mind that even a minor diversion from the Qur'an is an addition or alteration to what Allah has revealed, and consequently a source of polytheism.

In the verses below it is stated that no deed of the pagans is accepted by Allah; even their prayers and worship:

But it has already been revealed to you, as it was to those who went before you, "If you were to associate other gods with Allah, truly fruitless would your work in life be," and you would surely be in the ranks of those who lose all spiritual good".

(Az-Zumar, 65)

Out of what Allah has produced in abundance in tilth and in cattle, they assigned Him a share: they say, according to their fancies: "This is for Allah, and this for our partners!" But the share of their "partners" does not reach Allah, whilst the share of Allah reaches their "partners" ! Evil and unjust is their judgement!

(Al-Anaam, 136)

A believer may commit various sins. However, behind these sins, there is no question of a revolt or a similar intention or act against Allah. What makes idolatry different from other sins is that, in contrast to the other sins, idolatry assigns another god besides Allah and invents a lie against Him. Thus idolatry is the greatest sin. It is in a way a manifestation of disrespect to Allah.

Accordingly, Allah mentions in the Qur'an that He will forgive any sin except idolatry:

Allah does not forgive those who set up partners with Him; but He forgives to whom He pleases; for anything else; to set up partners with Allah is to devise a sin most heinous indeed.

(An-Nisa, 48)

Allah does not forgive the sin of associating other gods with Him; but He forgives whom He pleases for sins other than this: one who associates other gods with Allah, has strayed far, far away (from the right).

(An-Nisa, 116)

Therefore in many verses of the Qur'an, Allah warns believers against idolatry and deters them from this greatest sin. The Qur'an explains idolatry in detail:

O you who believe! Truly, the Pagans are unclean...

(At-Tawba, 28)

Being true in faith to Allah, and never assigning partners to Him: if anyone assigns partners to Allah, it is as if he had fallen from heaven and been snatched up by birds, or the wind had swooped (like a bird on its prey) and carried him off to far-distant place.

(Al-Hajj, 31)

Turn back in repentance to Allah, and fear Him: establish regular prayers, and do not be among those who associate other gods with Allah.

(Ar- Rum, 30)

Behold, Luqman said to his son by way of instruction: "O my son! Serve no other deity besides Allah: for false worship is indeed the greatest wrong-doing."

(Luqman, 13)

Say: "I am but a man like yourselves, (but) the inspiration has come to me, that your Allah is one Allah: whoever expects to meet his Lord, let him do what is right, and, in the worship of his Lord, admit no one as partner."

(Al-Kahf, 110)

Anything, living or non-living, which the pagans assign as partners to Allah by no means possess any divine attributes.

Allah states in the Qur'an that these partners can neither harm them nor profit them (Jonah, 18), cannot create anything (Jonah, 34, Al-Araf, 191), they cannot help anyone, not even themselves (Al-Araf, 192), and cannot lead to the righteous way (Jonah, 35). Despite their all being inherently weak, these "partners with Allah" are set up by pagans. The main reason for such an attitude is the fact that Allah bestows some of His attributes upon these beings.

The authority, sovereignty, supremacy, and prosperity a person possesses, for instance, truly belong to Allah. As a trial, Allah grants some of his attributes to some people in this life. Attributing all the power, possessions, etc. to a person's personality, and thus showing fear for him, would be merely associating partners with Allah. That person is neither a divine being nor

someone who possesses the power to attain anything by himself. At this point, we hardly need mention that these are only imaginary beings one creates in one's own mind. In the Qur'an it is described thus:

Behold! Truly to Allah belong all creatures, in the heavens and on earth. What do they follow who worship as His "partners" other than Allah? They follow nothing but fancy, and they do nothing but lie.

(Jonah, 66)

A person who worships someone other than Allah will live to regret his delay in understanding that those partners had no virtues whatsoever. Those partners, whom they preferred to Allah in this life, will lead them to a great grief in the hereafter. Those partners are also the main reasons why pagans take Allah, Who has the sole power, honour, and glory, and Who is also the only One to be taken as the Protector, as their enemy. On the day of judgment, their fate will be as narrated in the following verses:

One day shall We gather them all together. Then we shall say to the idolaters, "To your place! You and those you associated with us as 'partners'. We shall separate them, and their "partners" will say: "It was not us that you worshipped! Allah is sufficient for a witness between us and you: we certainly knew nothing of your worship of us!" There every soul will prove the fruits of the deeds it sent before it: they will be brought back to Allah their rightful Lord, and their invented falsehoods will leave them in the lurch.

(Jonah, 28-30)

Then they will be asked: "Where are the deities to which you gave part-worship in derogation of Allah?" They will reply: "They have left us in the lurch: Nay, we did not invoke of old, anything that had real existence." Thus Allah leaves the unbelievers to stray.

(Al-Ghafir, 73-74)

The Qur'an defines the end of the pagans as follows:

But when they saw Our punishment, they said: "We believe in Allah, the one Allah and we reject the partners we used to associate with Him." But their professing the faith when they actually saw Our punishment was not going to profit them. Such has been Allah's way of dealing with His servants from the most ancient times. And so the rejecters of Allah perished utterly!

(Al-Ghafir, 84-85)

Oppression (Fitnah)

Just as in English and all other languages, in Arabic some words have various connotations. The word “fitnah”, the equivalent of “oppression”, has more than one meaning in Arabic.

“Fitnah” is primarily the process by which gold is purified of other elements. As used in the Qur’an however, the word implies the trials through which believers are separated from unbelievers or hypocrites. These trials have a basic feature: they may lead a person astray. Put briefly, the fact that the individual can both be guided to the true path or be led astray during these trials entirely depends on the type of attitude he assumes towards religion. The prayer of Moses addresses this feature of fitnah:

And Moses chose seventy of his people for Our place of meeting: when they were seized with violent quaking, he prayed: “O my Lord! If it had been Your will, You could have long before destroyed both them and me: would you destroy us for the deeds of the foolish ones among us? This is no more than Your trial: by it you cause whom You will to stray, and You lead whom You will to the right path. You are our Protector: so forgive us and give us Your mercy; for You are the best of those who forgive.

(Al-Araf, 177)

Many verses imply that the earth is a place of trial and men will certainly be tested whether they really believe or not:

Do men think that they will be left alone on saying, “We believe”, and that they will not be tested? We tested those who went before them, and Allah will certainly know those who are true from those who are false.

(Al-Ankabut, 1-3)

In another verse it is explained that this trial is of two different kinds:

Every soul shall have a taste of death: and We test you all by evil and by good by way of trial. To Us you must return.

(Al-Anbiya, 35)

If an individual complies with the commandments of Allah, albeit the owner of substantial possessions and living in very favourable circumstances, this is, in reality, a way to feel closer to Allah. Yet if he does not spend what he owns in such a way as to obtain the approval of Allah, he may go astray. Such a person fails the test and “suffers a manifest loss” in the hereafter.

In the same way, a trouble, distress, disease, loss of one’s house or family may be cited as examples of the trials an individual is likely to encounter. His reaction to these trials reveals whether he is a true believer or not. No alteration ever occurs in the attitude of a believer when he faces trouble. Rebellion, hopelessness, despair, or distress evinced towards the trials indicate that the person in question is not a true believer.

A believer is always conscious that each incident occurs by the Will of Allah. He, therefore, puts his trust in Allah and faces even the gravest trouble with maturity. Loss of any property never affects him since he does not allow worldly passions to control him. He is confident that this is the attitude by which he can please Allah.

Fitnah: Straying From the True Way

Some incidents are specially designed by Allah to reveal the attitude of unbelievers. Some verses in the Qur'an relate this fact:

Thus We tried some of them by comparison with others, so that they should say: "Is it these then that Allah has favored from amongst us?" Does not Allah know best those who are grateful?

(Al-Anaam, 53)

A similar verse follows:

Never did We send a messenger or a prophet before you, but, when he framed a desire, Satan tampered with it. But Allah will cancel any vain intervention by Satan, and will confirm (and establish) His signs: for Allah is full of knowledge and wisdom: He makes Satan's interjections a trial for those in whose hearts there is a disease and who have become hardened truly, the wrong-doers are in open schism and far from the truth.

(Al-Hajj, 52-53)

In the verse below it is remarked that in some cases property is given to people to test them:

Do not strain your eyes in longing for the things We have given for enjoyment to some of them, or for the splendour of the life of this world, for with these We seek only to test them: but the provision of your Lord is better and more enduring.

(Ta-Ha, 131)

Rather than just the testing of human faith, these trials are created to verify the rebellion of certain people, as well as disclosing the truth about them. This is explained in another verse:

Let neither their wealth nor their (following in) sons dazzle you; in reality, Allah's plan is to punish them with these things in this life, so that their souls may perish in their (very) denial of Allah.

(Al-Tawba, 55)

Allah states in the Qur'an that He has left some people astray:

Then do you see such a person as takes as his god his own vain desire? Allah has, knowing (him as such), left him astray, and sealed his hearing and his heart (and understanding), and put a veil over his eyes. Who, then, will guide him after Allah has withdrawn His guidance? Will you not then receive admonition?

(Al-Jathiya, 23)

There is no other recourse for the people whom Allah has left astray:

Why should you be divided into two parties about the hypocrites? Allah has upset them for their (evil) deeds. Would you guide those whom Allah has confounded? For those whom Allah has confounded, there can be no guidance.

(An-Nisa, 88)

Straying With Fitnah

From the foregoing we know that fitnah, in certain cases and at certain times, might lead people astray. The Qur'an repeatedly recalls the stories of people in the past who went astray. For instance, when Moses was away from his people, they followed Samiri, who made a statue of a calf, and worshipped it. This is recounted in the Qur'an: as "being led astray"

(Allah) said: "We have tested your people in your absence: the Samiri has led them astray."

(Ta-Ha, 85)

“Then he brought out (of the fire) before the (people) the image of a calf. It seemed to low; so they said: “This is your god, and the god of Moses, but (Moses) has forgotten!”

Could they not see that it could not return them an answer, and that it had no power either to harm them or to do them good?

Aaron had already, before this said to them:

“O my people! you are being tested in this: for truly, your Lord is Allah Most Gracious; so follow me and obey my command.”

(Ta-Ha, 88-90)

Another verse confirming that fitnah leads the unwary astray is as follows:

Soon you will see, and they will see, which of you is afflicted with madness. Truly, it is your Lord who knows best, which of you have strayed from His path: and He knows best those who receive true guidance.

(Al-Qalam, 5-7)

Fitnah As A Test

The positive attitude one takes at the time of a fitnah is a means by which one can feel closer to Allah. Fitnah is surely a way by which a believer demonstrates his perseverance and commitment to Allah and is a means of attaining personal maturity in His sight.

For instance all-out war is a time of great trial. No matter what the circumstances are, believers, and only believers, display the attitude explained in the Qur’an:

When the Believers saw the confederate forces, they said: “This is what Allah and His messenger had promised us, and Allah and His Messenger told us what was true.” And it only added to their faith and their zeal in obedience.

(Al-Ahzab, 22)

Men said to them: “A great army is gathering against you, therefore fear them.” But it only increased their faith. They said: “For us Allah suffices, and He is the best disposer of affairs.”

(Al-Imran, 173)

No matter how hard a trial may be, believers always conduct themselves in such a way as to merit the pleasure of Allah.

What seems to be fortunate and good for believers may well be a reason to go astray for unbelievers. The verse below points to another trial, a trial regarding the number of angels in hell. What becomes a matter of going astray for unbelievers, may be good news for believers and may strengthen their faith.

Over it are nineteen. And We have appointed none but angels as guardians of the fire; and We have fixed their number only as a trial for unbelievers, in order that the people of the book may arrive at certainty, and the believers may increase in faith, and that no doubts may be left for the people of the book and the believers, and that those in whose hearts is a disease and the unbelievers may say, “What symbol does Allah intend by this?” Thus Allah leaves to stray whom He pleases, and guides whom He pleases: and none can know the forces of your Lord, except Himself and this is no more than a warning to mankind.

(Al-Muddaththir, 30-31)

The Effort To Lead People Into Fitnah

Some people concentrate all their efforts on making believers go astray. Their main purpose is to make them adopt their own unreasonable way of thinking and beliefs. The Qur'an informs us that, throughout history, against almost all believers assaults were carried out for this purpose. All these attacks were planned to weaken the commitment of believers to the commandments of the Qur'an. Allah states that believers would fall into fitnah if they ever complied with this plan.

And their purpose was to tempt you away from what We had revealed to you, to substitute in Our name something quite different; (in that case), behold! They would certainly have made you (their) friend!

(Al-Isra, 73)

And this (He commands): Judge between them by what Allah has revealed, and do not follow their vain desires, but beware of them lest they lure you away from any of that (teaching) which Allah has sent down to you. And if they turn away, be assured that for some of their crime it is Allah's purpose to punish them. And truly most men are rebellious.

(Al-Maeda, 49)

For, truly, neither you nor those you worship can lead (any) into temptation concerning Allah, except such as are (themselves) going to the blazing fire!

(As-Saaffat, 161-163)

Causing Fitnah

In Surat Al-Baqara verses 191 and 217, Allah states fitnah to be "worse than slaughter". To have a better understanding of fitnah as an offense, it would be helpful to examine the case of "killing a man", an offense described by the Qur'an.

If a man kills a believer intentionally, his recompense is Hell, to abide therein (forever): And the wrath and the curse of Allah are upon him, and a dreadful penalty is prepared for him.

(An-Nisa, 93)

Actually here fitnah has a meaning other than "trial". It is used for all acts and deeds leading man astray.

The Qur'an especially refers to hypocrites as the ones who "cause fitnah". Allah informs us that hypocrites practise many forms of fitnah; they basically try to prevent believers from involving themselves in war, hatch plans against the messenger and believers, and try to make them lose their sense of commitment.

Hypocrites misinterpret the verses, or rather distort the interpretation of verses and only comply with them, if they are of benefit to them. Believers, on the other hand, assume a totally different attitude; they demonstrate complete submission whatever the circumstances may be.

He it is Who has sent down the Book to you: In it are verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning); they are the foundation of the Book: others are allegorical. But those who have perversity in their hearts follow the part of it that is allegorical, seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings, but no one knows its hidden meanings except Allah. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: "We believe in the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord." And none will grasp the message except men of understanding.

(Al-Imran, 7)

The basic characteristic of hypocrites is their indulgence in fitnah. The Arabic version of the word “hypocrite” is “munafiq”, which means “the one who makes a division.” Dividing believers is a fitnah as well as a great sin. There are verses in the Qur’an stating that hypocrites try to practise fitnah among believers:

If they had come out with you, they would not have added to your (strength) but only (made for) disorder, hurrying to and fro in your midst and sowing sedition among you, and there would have been some among you who would have listened to them. But Allah knows well those who do wrong.

(Al-Tawba, 47)

And if an entry had been effected to them from the sides of the (city), and they had been incited to sedition, they would certainly have brought it to pass, but with a brief delay!

(Al-Ahzab, 14)

Indeed they had plotted sedition before, and upset matters for you, until the truth arrived, and the decree of Allah became manifest, much to their disgust.

(Al-Tawba, 47-48)

Should their plans be disclosed to believers, hypocrites plotting against the messenger and believers try to convince believers of their innocence. They make an effort to reduce such treachery to insignificance. They surely go in great fear of believers and punishment, and thus conduct themselves as if they have never committed an offense. Moreover, they ask believers not to treat them like other hypocrites and demand the continuance of their relations.

Among them is (many) a man who says: “Grant me exemption and do not expose me to temptation. Have they not succumbed to temptation already?” And indeed hell surrounds the unbelievers on all sides.

(Al-Tawba, 49)

The verse asserts that hypocrites are liars and are involved in fitnah, just like others. Allah warns believers not to be deceived by their fraud.

Unbelievers and hypocrites will suffer the most grievous penalty in the hell in return to the *fitnah* they have caused:

“Taste this your trial, the punishment which you have sought to hasten!”

(Adh-Dhariyat, 14)

Dispute Among Believers Causes Fitnah

Oppression prevails on earth unless believers provide protection to one another. This fact is stated in the following verse:

The unbelievers are protectors, one of another: Unless you do this, (protect each other), there will be tumult and oppression on earth, and great mischief.

(Al-Anfal, 73)

Believers conduct themselves with caution, taking care not to become involved in any issue which is likely to foment oppression. Certain attitudes and behaviour, albeit unintentional, may well underlie such injustice. As mentioned in the verse above, failure to protect one another or allowing disputes to arise among believers can also be causes of oppression, in which case the responsibility would rest also with the believers. True believers, therefore pay the utmost attention to giving each other comfort, care and protection.

Factors of Fitnah

In the Qur'an, Allah, the Creator of man, informs us in detail how a man should lead his life. If the individual follows his own desires in this world, it is more likely that he will hold his desires and his own expectations above the good pleasure of Allah. In such a spirit, he will display a heedless attitude towards pleasing Allah and the benefits of Islam. In such a case, one can expect him not to be cautious in observing the limits set by Allah.

Allah repeatedly reminds man that this world is a temporary place in which to reside and a setting for trial. Knowing this, people can still see it as an eternal place to stay and turn their faces away from the afterlife.

Anyone refusing to embrace the Qur'an as a guide is bound to have ambitions for this life. He is therefore prone to suffer great distress about everything related to daily life. Possessions and children are also referred to as fitnah in the verse below:

Your riches and your children may be but a trial: but in the presence of Allah is the highest reward.

(At-Taghabun, 15)

The use of the word 'trial' here is indeed striking. Pretending not to understand the main task of man in this life, people are generally carried away by certain false aims and embrace them as "a law of this world". Due to the indoctrination of an ignorant society, people believe marriage, having children and possessions to be the immutable law of worldly life. The majority of people evince a strong interest in getting married, having possessions and children while they remain rather indifferent to complying with the commandments of Allah and observing His limits.

The criterion that creates the need to have children is also provided in the Qur'an. Accordingly, such an intention is acted upon not simply out of custom, but only when it is in compliance with the pleasure of Allah. The prayer of Prophet Imran is given as example for this case:

Behold! A woman of 'Imran said: "O my Lord! I dedicate to you what is in my womb for your special service: So accept this of me: for you hear and know all things."

(Al-Imran, 35)

The Qur'an relates similar prayers of the prophets and leads the believers to the true way:

There Zakariya prayed to his Lord, saying: "O my Lord! Grant to me from You progeny that is pure: for You are the one Who hears all prayers!

(Al-Imran, 38)

Abraham's prayer is as follows:

"Our Lord! make of us Muslims, bowing to your will, and of our progeny a Muslim people bowing to your will; and show us our place for the celebration of due rites; and turn to us in mercy; for you are the Oft-Returning, Most Merciful.

(Al-Baqara, 128)

Possessions, too, would enable the individual to attain the mercy of Allah and an eternal salvation, provided that they were used in the cause of Allah. Otherwise, they would be fitnah. The attitude of the Prophet Solomon towards possessions sets an example for all believers. Rather than avoiding possessions, believers regard possessions as a way to remember the word of Allah. The conduct of Sulayman is recounted as follows in the Quran :

Behold, there were brought before him one evening steeds of the highest breeding, and swift of foot; and he said, "Truly, I love the love of good, with a view to the glory of my Lord," -until (the sun) was hidden in the veil (of night): "Bring them back to me." Then he began to pass his hand over their legs and their necks.

(Sad, 31-33)

About possessions and children, Allah gives other warnings to believers in the Qur'an. Constant vigilance is essential to avoid this fitnah:

Wealth and children of this world by no means ensure salvation from a disastrous end, unless they are made for the good pleasure of Allah:

O you who believe! Let not your riches or your children divert you from the remembrance of Allah. If any act thus, the loss is their own.

(Al-Munafiqoon, 9)

The property and the children they possess will do them no good in the hereafter: Of no profit whatever to them, against Allah, will be their riches or their sons: they will be companions of the fire, to dwell therein for ever!

(Al-Mujadila, 17)

Oppression, Torture and Burden

Oppression, torture and burden are also referred to as fitnah (trial) in the Qur'an.

But none believed in Moses except some children of his people, because of the fear that Pharaoh and his chiefs, would persecute them; and certainly Pharaoh was mighty on the earth and one who transgressed all bounds.

(Jonah, 83)

Those who persecute (or draw into temptation) the Believers, men and women, and do not turn in repentance, will have the penalty of hell. They will have the penalty of the burning fire.

(Al-Burooj, 10)

Do not deem the summons of the messenger among yourselves like the summons of one of you to another: Allah knows those of you who slip away under shelter of some excuse: then let those who disobey the messenger's order beware, lest some trial befall them, or a grievous penalty be inflicted on them.

(Al-Noor, 63)

And this (He commands): Judge between them by what Allah has revealed, and do not follow their vain desires, but beware of them lest they turn you away from any of that (teaching) which Allah has sent down to you. And if they turn away, be assured that for their sins, it is Allah's purpose to punish them. And truly most men are rebellious.

(Al-Maeda, 49)

In their prayers to avoid the oppression of unbelievers, believers again use the word fitnah (trial):

They said: "In Allah we have put our trust. Our Lord! Do not make us a trial for those who practise oppression."

(Jonah, 85)

"Our Lord! Do not make us a (test and) trial for the unbelievers, but forgive us, our Lord! For you are Exalted in Might, and Wise."

(Al-Mumtahina, 5)

Also the Qur'an names distress, disasters, and catastrophes as fitnah (trial):

Do they not see that they are tried every year once or twice? Yet they do not turn in repentance, and they take no heed.

(Al-Tawba, 126)

The two Aspects of the Soul

The “soul”, (in Arabic, nafs) as commonly used in the Qur’an, means “ego” or “one’s personality.” In the Qur’an, Allah explains the two aspects of soul: the one inspiring evil and wicked deeds, and the other, guarding against every inculcation of evil. As the Qur’an makes it clear in Surat’ Ash-Shams:

By the Soul, and the proportion and order given to it; And its enlightenment as to its wrong and its right; Truly he succeeds that purifies it, and he fails that corrupts it!
(Ash-Shams, 7-10)

The information provided in the verses about soul is of great importance: in the creation process of man, Allah inspired wickedness in the human soul. Wickedness, that is ‘fucur’ in Arabic, means “tearing apart the limits of righteousness.” As a religious term it means “committing sin and stirring up rebellion, telling lies, disobedience, transgression, adultery, moral corruption...”

Apart from the wicked side of the soul, from the Surat Ash-Shams we know that Allah also inspired in the soul a conscience i.e. a sense of what is wrong and right for it. In the second part of the ayah we learn that one who sincerely accepts the wickedness of his soul and purifies it by the guidance of the inspiration of Allah, will attain salvation for all eternity. This is indeed a certain and true salvation; earning the approval, mercy and heaven of Allah. Those, on the other hand, who fail to banish the wickedness from their souls will face a fearsome end.

At this point an important conclusion may be drawn: every soul has wickedness in itself; the only way to purify it is to accept it and to observe the limits of Allah by the guidance of Allah.

The difference between believers and unbelievers becomes quite clear at this point. Only Qur’anic teaching provides an inner understanding of the wicked side of the soul and the ways to remedy it. Identifying the evil of the soul and purifying it are characteristic of the true religion and the messengers communicating it.

In the 87th verse of Surat’Al-Baqara, the Jews are addressed as follows: “...Is it that whenever there comes to you a messenger with what you yourselves do not desire, you are puffed up with pride? Some you called impostors, and others you slay!”

As the verse suggests, unbelievers simply surrender themselves to the evil of their souls and thus always challenge the true religion and its messengers. Such individuals fail to save their souls from greed, as explained in the Surat Ash-Shams.

This being so, we may well observe that all unbelievers demonstrate an absolute submission to the evil of their souls. That is to say that they are devoid of understanding. The life they lead is one of instinct life; to all thoughts and behaviours are inspired by the wicked side of the soul. This is also one of the reasons why analogies between unbelievers and animals are made in the Qur’an.

Believers, on the contrary, are conscious of the existence of Allah. They fear Him and thus they take care to observe His limits. They are always guided by the inspiration of Allah. They never surrender to the evil in their soul, they do not cover it, but disclose it and guard against it as Allah inspires. The words of the Prophet Joseph guides believers towards typical righteous conduct: “Nor do I absolve my own self (of blame): the (human) soul is certainly prone to evil,

unless my Lord bestows His Mercy: but surely my Lord is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.” (Joseph, 53). Knowing that the soul is always prone to evil, a believer should be ever alert to the misdeeds in which his soul is likely to become involved.

From the foregoing we have a clear understanding of the “evil” side of the soul. However, the soul is also open to the instigation of righteousness, in other words, to the inspiration of Allah. This inspiration makes a person turn to himself and restrain his soul from fulfilling lower desires. This inspiration leading man to righteousness, this faculty of judging between right and wrong is commonly referred to as “conscience.”

Conscience is an infallible compass within the human soul continuously calling man to righteousness. On that account, conscience is, in a way, the whispering voice of Allah. Provided that a person listens to this voice and embraces the basic principles of the Qur’an, he will always proceed in the right way.

As long as the individual follows the voice of his conscience, he will be a model displaying the attributes of Allah in his personality. Allah is infinitely compassionate and merciful; a person submitting himself to Him will also have mercy on others. Allah is infinitely intelligent, so that a believer who serves Him will also be intelligent. The closer he feels to Allah and the more he surrenders himself to Him, the purer he becomes in the presence of Allah:

“Those who have faith and do righteous deeds, they are the best of creatures.”
(Al -Bayyina. 7)

The human conscience functions in compliance with all of Allah’s commandments. However the criteria of the conscience given in the Qur’an are quite different from those adhered to by society. Feeding stray dogs or giving charity to a beggar are typical examples reflecting the inherent understanding of conscientiousness in society. The conscience of a believer, on the other hand, demands complete compliance with the commandments and prohibitions of the Qur’an. Furthermore, one comprehends and implements the details of many issues stated in general terms in the Qur’an by the guidance of one’s conscience.

For instance, Allah commands man to spend whatever is in excess of his needs. The individual can determine the extent of his needs only through his soul. One who lacks the sensitivity of conscience, surely fails to arrive at a fair judgment of his needs and cannot comply with the commandments of Allah in the best way possible.

In the course of daily life, a person continuously meets situations which require him to make choices. Only one of these choices, however, best suits the will of Allah. Believers are held responsible for making the right choice; the choice led by the whisper of Allah. This is actually what one initially hears at the moment of making one’s choice, the voice guiding one to the true path. Only then, at the second stage, does the soul come on the scene, diverting one to other unacceptable alternatives. At this stage the soul whispers some excuses to justify the wrongful options. The Qur’an gives a considerable account of these “excuses” in many verses.

Believers should know to cope with these whisperings, simply by showing no interest to them, not listening to them, and going on their way, inspired by conscience. The examples provided by the Qur’an about the conscience should lead man to ponder upon this issue. In the following verse, the case of believers who are deeply grieved at not finding a way to fight is related:

There is no blame on those who are infirm, or ill, or who find no resources to spend (on the cause), if they are sincere (in duty) to Allah and His Messenger: no ground (of complaint) can there be against such as do right: and Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful. Nor (is there blame) on those who came to you to be provided with mounts, and when you said, "I can find no mounts for you," they turned back, their eyes streaming with tears of grief that they had no resources with which to contribute.

(Al-Tawba, 91-92)

Fighting against enemies obviously involves danger. One who decides to take part in a war surely risks his life or health. Despite this fact, in the times of our prophet, believers had shown an intense eagerness to fight in the cause of Allah and furthermore, suffered deep grief at not finding a way to fight. This is indeed a striking example of conscience, as explained in the Qur'an.

The evil side of the soul cannot lead a believer astray all of a sudden. Rather, it encourages neglectfulness of the responsibilities he has to fulfill in the cause of Allah. By making excuses, the soul tries to shake one's commitment to observing the limits of Allah. The influence of the soul becomes more profound wherever one appeases the desires of his soul. The resultant effects of such an approach would be detrimental to his faith. He may even drift into disbelief. Whatever the circumstances, he is obliged to comply with the commandments of Allah, and invariably to curb his selfish desires and whims. Allah addresses His servants thus:

So fear Allah as much as you can; listen and obey and spend in charity for the benefit of your own soul. Those saved from the covetousness of their own souls, they are the ones that achieve prosperity.

(Al-Taghabun, 16)

In this verse Allah commands believers to fear Him, obey Him and to listen to His judgements. They are also required to spend for the cause of Allah, since this will save believers from "the covetousness of their own souls" and make them attain real prosperity. Another verse declares:

And for such as had entertained the fear of standing before their Lord's (tribunal) and had restrained (their) soul from lower desires, their abode will be the Garden.

(Al-Naziat, 40-41)

A soul purified of selfish desires, and thus earning the pleasure and the heaven of Allah, is referred to as "the soul in complete rest and satisfaction" in the Qur'an.

(To the righteous soul it will be said:) "O (you) soul, in (complete) rest and satisfaction! Come back to your Lord, well pleased yourself, and well-pleasing to Him! Enter then, among My devotees! You, enter My Heaven ! " (Al-Fajr, 27-30)

Those, on the other hand, who fail to purify their souls and thus attain Hell are full of remorse for what they have done. The remorse felt by the billions of people that have ever lived on earth is horrible to witness. This is an inescapable truth awaiting unbelievers. This is a real day; so real that Allah calls to witness "the self-reproaching spirit" right after the resurrection day:

I call to witness the resurrection day; and I call to witness the self-reproaching spirit.

(Al-Qiyama, 1-2)

Those who Take Vain Desires and Passions as god

In the previous section, we analyzed the two aspects of the soul: the one inspiring evil, and wicked deeds, and the other guarding against every inculcation of evil. In the Qur'an the word "hewa" is used to express the evil side of the soul. Hewa is defined as "desire, passion, sexual desire, lust, and all negative internal factors spoiling man".

The unique guidance for unbelievers is this negative and evil side of the soul, namely the hewa. Satisfying vain desires and passions becomes a way of living for them. Consequently, all their mental faculties and efforts are focused on the gratification of whims. In such a state of mind, it becomes almost impossible for an unbeliever to comprehend the teachings of religion. The Qur'an recounts this fact:

And among them are men who listen to you, but in the end, when they leave you, they say to those who have received knowledge, "What is it he said just then?" Such are men whose hearts Allah has sealed, and who follow their own lusts.

(Muhammad, 16)

One who surrenders himself to the evil side of his soul turns to his soul whenever he needs to arrive at a judgment. In this sense, whims and desires become the basis upon which to judge between right and wrong. This is also a clear manifestation that a person worships his own soul, or to put it another way, his ego. In the Quran this state is called "taking one's own vain desire as one's god" in the following verse:

Then do you see such a person as takes as his god his own vain desire? Allah has, knowing (him as such), left him astray, and sealed his hearing and his heart and understanding and put a veil over his eyes. Who, then, will guide him after Allah has withdrawn His guidance? Will you not then receive admonition?

(Al-Jathiya, 23)

In the Qur'an, one who is guided by his passions and desires, and is thus lacking in a sound mind capable of thinking, is characterized as "deaf and blind." Believers, on the other hand are endowed with a sound mind, with which they can judge between right and wrong, and an insight with which they have a full grasp of all happenings around them. In the following verses people and societies devoid of understanding due to their following their own lusts as mentioned:

Say: "O people of the Book! Exceed not in your religion the bounds (of what is proper), trespassing beyond the truth, nor follow the vain desires of people who went wrong in times gone by, who misled many, and strayed (themselves) from the straight path.

(Al-Maeda, 77)

Say: "I am forbidden to worship those - others than Allah - whom you call upon." Say: "I will not follow your vain desires: If I did, I would stray from the path, and would not be of the company of those who receive guidance."

(Al-Anaam, 56)

Why should you not eat meat on which Allah's name has been pronounced, when He has explained to you in detail what is forbidden to you - except under compulsion of necessity? But many people are misled by their appetites through ignorance. Your Lord knows best those who transgress.

(Al-Anaam, 119)

Thus We have revealed it to be a judgment of authority in Arabic. Were you to follow their (vain) desires after the knowledge which has reached you, you would find neither protector nor defender against Allah.

(Al-Rad, 37)

Do you see such a one as takes for his god his own passion (or impulse)? Could you be a disposer of his affairs?

(Al-Furqan, 43)

O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor: for Allah can best protect both. Do not follow the lusts (of your hearts), lest you swerve from the truth; and if you distort (justice) or decline to do justice, truly, Allah is well-acquainted with all that you do.

(An-Nisa, 135)

No, the wrong-doers (merely) follow their own lusts, being devoid of knowledge. But who will guide those whom Allah leaves astray? For them there will be no helpers.

(Al-Room, 29)

“Therefore, let not such as do not believe therein but follow their own lusts, divert you therefrom, lest you perish!”

(Ta-Ha, 16)

If the Truth had been in accord with their desires, truly the heavens and the earth, and all beings therein would have been in confusion and corruption! No, We have sent them their scriptures, but they turn away from their admonition.

(Al-Momenoon, 71)

To you We sent the Scripture in truth, confirming the scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety: so judge between them by what Allah has revealed, and do not follow their vain desires, diverging from the truth that has come to you. For each among you we have prescribed a law and an open way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He has given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of all of you is Allah; it is He who will show you the truth of the matters in which you dispute; and this (He commands): Judge between them by what Allah has revealed, and do not follow their vain desires, but beware of them lest they turn you away from any of that (teaching) which Allah has sent down to you. And if they turn away, be assured that for their sins it is Allah's purpose to punish them. And truly most men are rebellious.

(Al-Maeda, 48-49)

Following lusts and vain desires makes the individual blind to his faults. Such a person rapidly meets with eternal disaster.

Spirit, Conscience and Soul

(To the righteous soul it will be said:) "O (you) soul, in (complete) rest and satisfaction! Come back to your Lord,- well pleased (yourself), and well-pleasing to Him!

(Al-Fajr, 27-28)

We are already aware of the two aspects of the soul: the one inspiring evil, and wicked deeds, and the other guarding against every inculcation of evil. The latter guides man to righteousness, as explained in the Qur'an. Allah breathed into him something of His spirit; this is the spirit, the conscience.

In Surat As-Sajda, Allah informs us about this:

He Who has made everything which He has created most good: He began the creation of man with (nothing more than) clay, and made his progeny from a quintessence of the nature of a fluid despised: But He fashioned him in due proportion, and breathed into him something of His spirit. And He gave you (the faculties of) hearing and sight and feeling (and understanding): little thanks do you give!

(As-Sajda, 7-9)

As long as the individual follows the voice of his conscience, he will be like a model displaying the attributes of Allah in his personality.

Man's conscience is in compliance with all the commandments of Allah. Two verses in the Surat Ar-Rum are quite explanatory:

No, the wrong-doers (merely) follow their own lusts, being devoid of knowledge. But who will guide those whom Allah leaves astray? For them there will be no helpers.

So you face steadily and truly to the Faith: (establish) Allah's handiwork according to the pattern on which He has made mankind: no change (let there be) in the work (wrought) by Allah: that is the standard Religion: but most among mankind do not understand.

(Ar-Rum 29-30)

According to the verses, unbelievers go astray by following their own lusts. What believers, on the other hand, must do is to follow the religion Allah communicates to man through revelation. This religion offers a life style which is most suitable to the nature of man and his conscience, that is, to the spirit Allah has breathed into him.

Heart, Wisdom and Intelligence

We already know that there are two different aspects of the human soul; the one inspiring the evil, and wicked deeds, and the other guarding against every inculcation of evil. Wisdom and non-wisdom are closely related to these two aspects of the soul. The Qur'an informs us that the consequence of following whims and desires is non-wisdom. Adhering to the better side of the soul, on the other hand, brings wisdom.

A person who becomes the slave of his wishes and desires and thus does not keep himself occupied with the remembrance of Allah, very soon loses his faculty of wisdom. The Qur'an refers to these people as "people devoid of wisdom." (Al-Hashr, 14) At first sight, this may seem incomprehensible. The majority of people take it for granted that everyone has wisdom, constant and at the same level, never undergoing changes with time or circumstances. There is, however, some confusion due to the interchangeable use of the concepts of intelligence and wisdom. Contrary to the common conviction, intelligence and wisdom are quite different concepts. Everyone can be intelligent, but wisdom is only possessed by those who have faith.

Knowing that following the wicked side of the soul leaves a man deprived of wisdom, what should be the ways to acquire it? The answer is apparent: man attains wisdom when he obeys his conscience, which inspires in him ways of hindering the evil of his soul.

Wisdom, as is referred in the Quran, is a spiritual tenet experienced in the soul. In more than one verse there is an explicit reference to "the hearts that learn wisdom". Accordingly, we can plainly resolve that real wisdom is far different from intelligence, a mere function of the brain. Wisdom is in the heart, in the soul of man. The Qur'an points to the fact that wisdom is in the heart, and people devoid of wisdom are lacking in understanding solely because their hearts are sealed:

Do they not travel through the land, so that their hearts (and minds) may thus learn wisdom and their ears may thus learn to hear? Truly, it is not their eyes that are blind, but their hearts which are in their breasts.

(Al-Hajj, 46)

Many are the Jinns and men we have made for hell. They have hearts with which they do not understand, eyes with which they do not see and ears with which they do not hear. They are like cattle,- no, indeed, more misguided: for they are heedless (of warning).

(Al-Araf, 179)

They prefer to be with (the women), who remain behind (at home): their hearts are sealed and so they do not understand.

(Al-Tawba, 87)

And We cast a veil upon their hearts (and minds) lest they should understand the Qur'an, and made them hard of hearing: when you commemorate your Lord and Him alone in the Qur'an, they turn their backs, fleeing (from the Truth).

(Al-Isra, 46)

In the Qur'an it is stated that only the people who "have hearts" will take heed and have faith.

Truly, in this is a Message for anyone who has a heart and understanding, or who listens and earnestly witnesses (the truth).

(Qaf, 37)

Therefore, the wisdom referred to in the Qur'an is directly related to the heart and the soul.

One point deserves mention here: wisdom is not constant; it varies. Intelligence, a function of the brain, does not, however, change except in case of an injury or mental disease. Everyone has a constant "IQ". Wisdom, on the other hand, can increase or decrease, a feature closely related to the strengthening of the soul and fear of Allah (taqwa). In this way, the individual acquires a criterion by which to judge between right and wrong. This feature, which is an entirely metaphysical one, is communicated to man in the following verse:

O you who believe! If you fear Allah, He will grant you a criterion (to judge between right and wrong), remove from you (all) evil (that may afflict) you, and forgive you: for Allah is the Lord of grace unbounded.

(Al-Anfal, 29)

One who does not fear Allah is entirely deprived of this criterion to judge between right and wrong. A person may be very intelligent; he may be an outstanding physicist, sociologist or a "distinguished" person in society. He may have remarkable achievements to his credit. However, if he has no conscience, he surely lacks the true spirit and thus, the true wisdom. Being a renowned scientist, he may discover the mysteries of the human body. Still he does not possess the spirit and the understanding to conceive of the Creator of that body. Rather than expressing his astonishment at the marvels of creation and praising the Creator, he turns to himself and praises himself for his discovery. This scientist is surely the one who has "taken as his god his vain desire, and Allah has knowingly left him astray."

However, as stated in Surat'al-Rad, the believers are "Those who believe, and whose hearts find satisfaction in the remembrance of Allahfor without doubt in the remembrance of Allah hearts find satisfaction."

(Al-Rad, 28)

The state of the hearts of unbelievers, on the other hand, is described in the following verse:

Allah has set a seal on their hearts and on their hearing, and on their eyes is a veil; great is the penalty they (incur).

(Al-Baqara, 7)

And as for the Hypocrites, when they were told: "Come, fight in the way of Allah, or (at least) drive (The foe from your city)," they said: "Had we known how to fight, we should certainly have followed you." They were that day nearer to unbelief than to faith, saying with their lie what was not in their hearts, but Allah has full knowledge of all they conceal.

(Al-Imran, 167)

An intelligent person can be lacking in understanding and the faculty of distinguishing between right and wrong. He may devise an ingenious invention, he may be a good businessman, or may excel in politics. In doing these, however, he totally lacks the awareness of right and wrong. Though he is communicated with repeatedly, he remains blind and deaf to the message of the Qur'an. This is a glaring manifestation of his lack of understanding.

"..Their hearts are sealed and so they do not understand" is an important statement in the Qur'an, indicating the significance of the heart for understanding.

In the Qur'an considerable space has been allocated to analyzing the relation between the heart and human behaviour. This relation comes under several headings.

Allah comes in between the man and his heart

O you who believe! Give your response to Allah and His Messenger, when He calls you to that which will give you life; and know that Allah comes in between a man and his heart, and that it is He to Whom you shall (all) be gathered.

(Al-Anfal, 24)

Affection Between Hearts

And (moreover) He has put affection between their hearts: not if you had spent all that is on the earth, could you have produced that affection, but Allah has done it: for He is Exalted in might, and Wise.

(Al-Anfal, 63)

And hold fast, all together, by the rope which Allah (stretches out for you), and do not be divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude Allah's favour to you; for you were enemies and He joined your hearts in love, so that by His grace, you became brethren; and you were on the brink of the pit of fire, and He saved you from it. Thus Allah makes His signs clear to you, so that you may be guided.

(Al-Imran, 103)

Permeating the Hearts

And remember We took your covenant and We raised above you (the towering height) of Mount (Sinai): (Saying): "Hold firmly to what We have given you, and hearken (to the Law)." They said: "We hear, and we disobey." And they had to drink into their hearts (of the taint) of the calf because of their faithlessness. Say: "Vile indeed are the behests of your faith, if you have any faith!"

(Al-Baqara, 93)

Piety of the Hearts

Such (is his state): and whoever holds in honour the symbols of Allah, (in the sacrifice of animals), such (honour) should come truly from piety of heart.

(Al-Hajj, 32)

Hearts to be Reconciled

Alms are for the poor and the needy, and those employed to administer the (funds); for those whose hearts have been (recently) reconciled (to Truth); for those in bondage and in debt; for the cause of Allah; and for the wayfarer: (thus is it) ordained by Allah, and Allah is full of knowledge and wisdom.

(Al-Tawba, 60)

Satisfaction of the Hearts

Allah leaves in error whom He will, and guides those who repent and who believe, and whose hearts find satisfaction in the remembrance of Allah: for without doubt in the remembrance of Allah all hearts find satisfaction.

(Al-Rad, 28)

The disciples of Jesus said: "We only wish to eat thereof and satisfy our hearts, and to know that you have indeed told us the truth; and that we ourselves may be witnesses to the miracle."

(Al-Maeda, 113)

Those on whom knowledge has been bestowed may learn that the (Qur'an) is the Truth from your Lord, and may thus believe therein, and their hearts may be made humbly (open) to it: for, truly, Allah is the Guide of those who believe, to the Straight Way.

(Al-Hajj, 54)

Allah made it but a message of hope for you, and an assurance to your hearts: (in any case) there is no help except from Allah, the Exalted, the Wise One.

(Al-Imran, 126)

Hearts becoming firm

All that we relate to you of the stories of the messengers,- with it We make firm your heart: in them there comes to you the Truth, as well as an exhortation and a message of remembrance to those who believe.

(Hud, 120)

A void in the heart

Never think that Allah is unaware of the wrongdoers' actions. He only gives them respite till the day on which the eyes will fixedly stare in horror as they come running forward with necks outstretched, their heads uplifted, their gaze not returning towards them, and their hearts a gaping void!

(Abraham, 42-43)

Casting terror into the hearts of the unbelievers

Soon shall We cast terror into the hearts of the unbelievers, because they associated companions with Allah, for which He had sent no authority: their abode will be the fire: And evil is the home of the wrong-doers!

(Al-Imran, 151)

Hearts filled with disgust and horror

When Allah, the One and Only, is mentioned, the hearts of those who do not believe in the hereafter are filled with disgust and horror; but when (gods) other than Allah are mentioned, behold, they are filled with joy!

(Az-Zumar, 45)

The Heart's inclination

To such (deceit) let the hearts of those incline, who have no faith in the hereafter: let them delight in it, and let them earn from it what they may.

(Al-Anaam, 113)

The cause of sighs and heartfelt regret

O you who believe! Do not be like the Unbelievers, who say of their brethren, when they meet death abroad or engaged in fighting: "If they had stayed with us, they

would not have died, or been slain."Allah will cause them to sigh and have regrets in their hearts. It is Allah who gives Life and Death, and Allah sees well all that you do.
(Al-Imran, 156)

Saying things that are not in the heart

When the hypocrites were told: "Come, fight in the way of Allah, or (at least) drive (the foe from your city)," they said: "Had we known how to fight, we should certainly have followed you." They were that day nearer to unbelief than to faith, saying with their lips what was not in their hearts, but Allah has full knowledge of all that they conceal.

(Al-Imran, 167)

Keeping secrets in the heart

Those men, Allah knows what is in their hearts; so keep clear of them, but admonish them, and speak to them a word to reach their very souls.

(An-Nisa, 63)

Hearts being cut into pieces

The edifice of those who so build (i.e. not founded on fear of God) is never free from suspicion and fills their hearts with doubt, until their hearts are cut to pieces. And Allah is All-Knowing and Wise.

(At-Tawba, 110)

Hearts Deviating

"Our Lord!" (they say), "Let not our hearts deviate now after you have guided us, but grant us mercy from your own presence; for you are the giver of bounties without measure."

(Al-Imran, 8)

Allah turned with favour to the Prophet, the Muhajirs, and the Ansar, who followed him in a time of distress, after the hearts of them had nearly swerved (from duty); but He turned to them (also): for He is Most Kind and Most Merciful to them.

(Al-Tawba, 117)

Hearts being alike

Those without knowledge ask: "Why does Allah not speak to us? or give us a sign?" So said the people before them in words of similar import. Their hearts are all alike. We have indeed made clear the signs to any people who hold firmly to faith (in their hearts).

(Al-Baqara, 118)

Hearts that refuse

How can you trust them (i.e. the idolaters), seeing that if they get an advantage over you, they do not respect in you the ties either of kinship or of covenant? With (fair words from) their mouths they entice you, while their hearts refuse. And most of them are rebellious and wicked.

(Al-Tawba, 8)

Faith not entering into the heart

The desert Arabs say, "We believe." Say, "You have no faith; but you (only) say, 'We have submitted our wills to Allah,' for Faith has not yet entered your hearts. But if you obey Allah and His Messenger, He will not deny you the reward of your labours: for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."

(Al-Hujraat, 14)

Disease in the heart

In their hearts is a disease; and Allah has aggravated their disease: And grievous is the penalty they (incur), because they are false (to themselves).

(Al-Baqara, 10)

Those in whose hearts is a disease - you see how eagerly they run about amongst them, saying: "We fear lest a change of fortune bring us disaster." Ah! perhaps Allah will give (you) victory, or a decision according to His will. Then will they repent of the thoughts which they secretly harboured in their hearts.

(Al-Maeda, 52)

Allah makes the suggestions thrown in by Satan a trial for those in whose hearts is a disease and who are hardened of heart: truly, the wrong-doers are in open schism, far (from the Truth):

(Al-Hajj, 53)

Hearts becoming hardened

Thenceforth were your hearts hardened: they became like a rock and even worse in hardness. For among rocks there are some from which rivers gush forth; others there are which when split asunder send forth water; and others which sink for fear of Allah. And Allah is not unmindful of what you do.

(Al-Baqara, 74)

When our scourage reached them, why then did they not learn humility? On the contrary, their hearts became hardened, and Satan made their (sinful) acts seem alluring to them.

(Al-Anaam, 43)

Is one whose heart Allah has opened to Islam, so that he has received Enlightenment from Allah, (no better than one who is hard-hearted)? Woe to those whose hearts are hardened against celebrating the praises of Allah! They are manifestly wandering (in error)!

(Az-Zumar, 22)

A seal on the hearts

They incurred divine displeasure in that they broke their covenant; they rejected the signs of Allah; they slew the Messengers in defiance of right; and they said, "Our hearts are the wrappings (which preserve Allah's Word; we need no more)"; No, indeed, Allah set the seal on their hearts for their blasphemy. They have no faith; except a few of them.

(An-Nisa, 155)

Do they not then earnestly seek to understand the Qur'an, or are there locks upon their hearts?

(Muhammad, 24)

To those who inherit the earth in succession to its (previous) possessors, is it not a guiding, (lesson) that, if We so willed, We could punish them (too) for their sins, and seal up their hearts, so that they could not hear?

(Al-Araf, 100)

Allah has set a seal on their hearts and on their hearing, and on their eyes is a veil; great is the penalty they (incur).

(Al-Baqara, 7)

“(Such) as dispute the Signs of Allah, without any authority vouchsafed them, grievous and odious is their conduct in the sight of Allah and of the believers. Thus Allah seals up every heart - of every arrogant and obstinate transgressor.”

(Al-Ghafir, 35)

O Messenger! let not those grieve you, who race each other into unbelief: (whether it be) among those who say “We believe” with their lips but whose hearts have no faith; or it be among the Jews, men who will listen to any lie, will listen even to others who have never so much as come to you. They change the words from their (right) times and places: they say, “If you are given this, take it, but if not, beware!” If anyone’s trial is intended by Allah, you cannot help him against Allah. For such - it is not Allah’s will to purify their hearts. For them there is disgrace in this world, and in the Hereafter a severe punishment.

(Al-Maeda, 41)

Then after him We sent (many) messengers to their peoples: they brought them clear signs, but they would not believe what they had already rejected beforehand. Thus do We seal up the hearts of the transgressors.

(Jonah, 74)

Such were the towns whose story We (thus) relate to you: There came indeed to them their messengers with clear (signs): yet they persisted in their unbelief. Thus Allah seals up the hearts of those who reject faith.

(Al-Araf, 101)

The ground (of complaint) is against such as claim exemption, although they are rich. They prefer to stay with the (women) who remain behind: Allah has sealed their hearts; so they do not know (what they miss).

(Al-Tawba, 93)

Say: “Think , if Allah took away your hearing and your sight, and sealed up your hearts, could any but Allah restore them to you?” See how We explain the signs by various (symbols); yet they turn aside.

(Al-Anaam, 46)

The foregoing verses reveal an important reality: Faith is something related to the sensitivity of the heart. A person with a heart not hardened, or “sealed” has already a tendency to know Allah and obey Him. When the message of the Qur’an is communicated to him, the comprehension of his heart makes him see the truth and he believes immediately. However, unbelievers are of a different nature. Their hearts are dead and “sealed”. Nor can they acquire wisdom since their hearts do not have any kind of sensitivity. In such a state there is also no possibility of belief. In different verses of the Qur’an, those who are inclined towards faith are told to believe as soon as they hear the message. Unbelievers, on the other hand, never show a propensity for faith:

The Word is proved true against the greater part of them: for they do not believe. We have put yokes round their necks right up to their chins, so that their heads are forced

up (and they cannot see). And We have put a bar in front of them and a bar behind them, and We have covered them up, so that they cannot see. It is the same to them whether you admonish them or you do not admonish them: they will not believe. You can only admonish such a one as follows the Message and fears the (Lord) Most Gracious, unseen: give such a one, therefore, good tidings, of Forgiveness and a Reward most generous.

(Yaseen, 7-11)

As to those who reject faith, it is the same to them whether you warn them or do not warn them; they will not believe. Allah has set a seal on their hearts and on their hearing, and on their eyes is a veil; great is the penalty they (incur).

(Al-Baqara, 6-7)

Truly you cannot make the dead listen, nor can you make the deaf hear the call, (especially) when they turn back in retreat. Nor can you be a guide to the blind, (to prevent them) from straying; only those will you get to listen who believe in Our Signs, and bow in surrender to Us.

(Al-Naml, 80-81)

Besides unbelievers whose hearts are hardened and who have lost their wisdom, there are some people, whose hearts are sensitive, yet they are ignorant of religion. When religion is communicated to them, these people instantly recognize the truth and believe in Allah and His religion. These two groups of people are distinguished from each other by their respective arrogance and modesty. (In the following pages, modesty and arrogance will be studied in detail). Jews and their arrogance are mentioned in the Qur'an as an example. On the other hand there are Christians who are modest. On this the Qur'an says:

Strongest among men in enmity to the believers you will find the Jews and Pagans; and nearest among them in love to the believers you will find those who say, "We are Christians": that is because amongst them are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant. And when they listen to the revelation received by the Messenger, you will see their eyes overflowing with tears, for they recognise the truth: they pray: "Our Lord! we believe; write us down among the witnesses".

(Al-Maeda,82-83)

When the message of the Qur'an is communicated to people with a natural inclination towards religion, they merely say, "Our Lord! we have heard the call of one calling (Us) to Faith: 'Believe in the Lord,' and we have believed..." (Al-Imran, 193). Unbelievers, on the other hand, oppose believers and even feel enmity towards them.

Men of Understanding and the facts that hinder wisdom

Wisdom is granted to man by Allah, and can be taken back whenever He wills. (Intelligence is also bestowed by Allah; yet it is constant, it does not change with time) The increase in wisdom is in proportion to one's closeness to Allah. Whoever occupies himself with the remembrance of Allah, acquires more wisdom.

(Al-Rad, 19)

What does "the men of understanding" mean, then? The answer to this question is provided in the Qur'an. Vain desires and passions are the major factors that hinder one's heart from understanding. Envy is an example. One cannot expect one whose mind is occupied with the feeling of envy to have wisdom. Under the influence of jealousy, he feels too distracted. He cannot keep himself from thinking about the person he is jealous of, he becomes angry and has a feeling of rancour towards him. In this state of envy, his mind is riven by jealousy, and he remains deprived of the ability to think clearly, or make sound assessments.

All other ambitions and passions are also a hindrance to wisdom. The allure of possessions and wealth greatly influences a man. An unbridled passion for possessions enslaves him willy nilly. All mental capabilities are concentrated on ways of gaining more possessions and more money.

Fear about the future is the main characteristic of an unbeliever. He lives a troubled life, one fraught with concerns and fears of getting sick or losing possessions. Unbelievers spend hours planning their future, surely a major hindrance to clear thinking. Fears and concerns make them feel under pressure and block their mental capabilities to a great extent. Fear of death influences man in the same way. Its thought fills the hearts of unbelievers with grief and sorrow. Death comes in a moment, however. Despite this fact, it remains a source of pain for unbelievers all throughout their lives. For believers, however, death is not an issue to feel sad about.

These are the fears and passions that are a hindrance to understanding. Man, becoming a slave to these passions, can never focus his attention on the main issues that he has to consider. A person should divert all his thinking abilities to his Creator, who brought him from nonexistence to glorious creation. However, a heart full of worldly ambitions fails to occupy itself with the remembrance of Allah. Only those who are "endued with understanding", in other words, those who are purified of ambitions, fear and selfish greed can have a profound understanding of Allah and obey Him.

The men of understanding are the people who take warning from Allah and who readily accept the truth communicated to them. They never demonstrate arrogance. They do not insist on their misdeeds; they change as soon as they feel something is erroneous. Their purpose in an argument is to find out the truth; not to impose their opinion on others. That is why Allah states that they are "those who listen to the Word, and follow the best (meaning) in it: those are the ones whom Allah has guided, and those are the ones endued with understanding." (Az-Zumar, 18)

Since unbelievers are devoid of wisdom and understanding, they cannot see the great signs surrounding them. The heavens, the earth, and all that is in between are the signs of Allah. However, an unbeliever can never see them; his sight is blurred with ambitions and worldly

pleasures. He puts his mind to his minor benefits and selfish desires. His mind has surely a poor grasp of Allah. That is why Allah calls on “men of understanding” to believe in Him:

(Moses) said :Lord of the east and the west, and all between ! If you only had sense!

(Ash-Shura, 28)

It is interesting how the unbelievers are addressed to in the Quran; Allah and His messengers call them to wisdom in the first step. “Nor did We send before you (as messengers) any but men, whom we inspired - men living in human habitations. Did they not travel through the land, and see what was the end of those who disbelieved before them? But the home of the hereafter is best, for those who do right. Will you not then understand? (Joseph, 109)

People of the Book! Why do you dispute about Abraham, when the Law and the Gospel were not revealed till after him? Have you no understanding? (Al-Imran, 65)
We have revealed for you (O men!) a book in which is a Message for you: will you not then understand?

(Al-Anbiya, 10)

Say:

“Come, I will tell you what Allah has really prohibited you from doing: There are no other gods besides Him; be good to your parents; do not kill your children on the plea of destitution;- We provide sustenance for you and for them;- do not commit shameful deeds, whether openly or in secret; do not take life, which Allah has made sacred, except by way of justice and law: thus He commands you, so that you may learn wisdom.”

(Al-Anaam, 151)

After them came an evil generation: They inherited the Book, but they chose for themselves the vanities of this world, saying for excuse: “(Everything) will be forgiven us.” Even so, if similar vanities came their way, they would again indulge in them. Was not the covenant of the Book taken from them, that they would not ascribe to Allah anything but the truth? And they have studied what is in the Book. But best for the righteous is the home in the Hereafter. Will you not understand?

(Al-Araf, 169)

Say:

“If Allah had so willed, I should not have recited it (i.e. the Qur’an) to you, nor would He have made it known to you. A whole life-time before this have I tarried amongst you before it was revealed: will you not then understand?”

(Jonah, 16)

What is the life of this world but play and amusement? But best is the home in the Hereafter, for those who are righteous. Will you not then understand?

(Al-Anaam, 32)

The only people who can grasp and understand the evidence of the creation of Allah and the existence of Allah are men of understanding:

And in the earth are neighbouring tracts (diverse though) and gardens of vines and fields sown with corn, and palm trees - growing out of single roots or otherwise: watered with the same water, yet some of them We make more excellent than others to eat. Behold, truly, in these things there are signs for those who understand!

(Al-Rad, 4)

Say:

“He has the power to send down calamities upon you, from above and below, or to cover you with confusion in party strife, giving you a taste of mutual vengeance - each from the other.” See how We explain the signs by various (symbols); so that they may understand.

(Al-Anaam, 65)

It is He Who has produced you from a single person: here is a place of sojourn and a place of departure: We have made plain Our signs for people who understand.

(Al-Anaam, 98)

...Thus Allah makes clear his signs to you: so that you may understand.

(Al-Noor, 61)

And from the fruit of the date-palm and the vine, you derive wholesome drink and food: behold, in this also is a sign for those who are wise.

(An-Nahl, 67)

He has made subject to you the Night and the Day; the sun and the moon; and the stars are in subjection by His Command: truly, in this are signs for men who are wise.

(An-Nahl, 12)

He propounds to you a comparison from your own (experience). Do you have partners among those whom your right hands possess, to share as equals in the wealth We have bestowed on you? Do you fear them as you fear each other? Thus we explain the Signs in detail to a people who understand.

(Al-Room, 28)

Moses said (to the Pharaoh): “He is the Lord of the east and the west, and all between that lies! if you only had sense!”

(Al-Shuara, 28)

And among His signs, He shows you the lightning, by way both of fear and of hope, and He sends down rain from the sky and with it gives life to the earth after it is dead: truly in that are signs for those who are wise.

(Al-Room, 24)

There are also different levels of wisdom. The extent by which one purifies his heart of worldly desires and selfishness determines the level of wisdom. The attachment one feels for this life and following vain desires are also major factors in determining the level of wisdom.

Man will either obey Allah, or his vain desires. When he obeys Allah, he is saved from the limitations of his desires and attains wisdom. The reverse is also true; worshipping desires means reprogramming all of one's thoughts and behaviour to accord with the unlimited wishes of the soul.

In case desires have control over one's soul, the heart also becomes sealed. It becomes blunted towards divine enlightenment. Thus the heart loses its properties of “understanding” (At-Tawba, 87), “knowing” (At-Tawba, 93), and becomes dull and loses its sensitivity. The heart loses its light.

In the process, the individual can never realize that he has lost his understanding, since he has also lost the criteria by which to judge between right and wrong. Although one acquiring wisdom is always aware of this positive change in himself, the same does not hold true for the opposite. This is just like the case of a man who falls into a faint or slips into a coma; in both cases he would never know what state he had been in until he recovered.

In the Qur'an, the state of those who are devoid of wisdom is also explained:

The parable of those who reject faith is that of one shouting like a goat-herd, to beasts that can hear nothing but calls and cries: Deaf, dumb, and blind, they are void of wisdom.

(Al-Baqara, 171)

Wisdom and Sentimentalism

One of the greatest factors which can blur one's wisdom is sentimentalism. This is a quite harmful state of mind which is inimical to the proper functioning of human reason.

Indeed sentimentalism is an explicit danger to reason. It exercises control over the faculty of reason to the point of negative sensible judgments. Under the sway of emotions, a sentimental person can easily engage in unwise and imprudent deeds. A believer, on the other hand, always keeps his emotions under the command of reasoning.

The concept of love, for instance, may have two separate dimensions; it may be either emotional or rational. The sentimental person feels a profound attachment for people or objects who truly do not deserve affection. As is prevalent in many cultures - especially the eastern cultures- a deep devotion is demonstrated to those who pay no respect to one's devotion or who give pain in return for sincere love.

On the contrary, the love of a believer is always based on solid grounds. In the object of his love he primarily identifies the existence of "attributes of faith" or "attributes of a believer" as defined in the Qur'an. A believer never shows affection to anyone who is unworthy of being loved.

Allah in many verses, attracts our attention to the dangers exposed inherent in sentimental love:

O you who believe! Do not take My enemies and yours as friends (or protectors), offering them (your) love, even though they have rejected the truth that has come to you, and have (on the contrary) driven out the Prophet and yourselves (from your homes), (simply) because you believe in Allah your Lord! If you have come out to strive in My way and to seek My good pleasure, do not take them as friends, holding secret converse of love (and friendship) with them: for I know full well all that you conceal and all that you reveal. And any of you that does this has strayed from the straight path.

If they were to get the better of you, they would behave to you as enemies, and stretch forth their hands and their tongues against you for evil: and they desire that you should reject the truth.

There is for you an excellent example (to follow) in Abraham and those with him, when they said to their people: "We are clear of you and of whatever you worship besides Allah: we have rejected you, and there has arisen, between us and you, enmity and hatred for ever, unless you believe in Allah and Him alone..."

(Al-Mumtahina, 1-4)

The above words of Allah explain the grounds for it being irrational to feel love for unbelievers. Such an attitude can be explained only by sentimentalism.

Many other verses in the Qur'an advise giving careful consideration to the dangers of feeling love for unbelievers. The story of Prophet Noah sets an example for this subject; Noah asked for forgiveness of Allah for his son who did not worship Him and prayed that he be saved from the flood. Allah told Noah that his son was also among the unbelievers and that he (Noah) should not offer him his love:

So the Ark floated with them on the waves (towering) like mountains, and Noah called out to his son, who had separated himself (from the rest): "O my son! Embark with us, and do not be with the unbelievers!" The son replied: "I will take myself to some mountain: it will save me from the water." Noah said: "This day nothing can save from the command of Allah but those on whom He has mercy! "And the waves came between them, and the son was among those overwhelmed in the Flood.

...And Noah called upon his Lord, and said: "O my Lord! Surely my son is of my family! And Your promise is true, and You are the most just of Judges!"He said: "O Noah! He is not of your family: For his conduct is unrighteous. So do not ask of Me for that of which you have no knowledge! I give you counsel, lest you act like the ignorant!"Noah said: "O my Lord! I do seek refuge with You, lest I ask You for that of which I have no knowledge. And unless you forgive me and have mercy on me, I shall indeed be lost!"

(Hud, 42-47)

The message of the verse is apparent: Even if the immediate family members are in question, the believers do not feel an attachment for unbelievers. It is only wise to love people who really deserve love. Moreover, a believer never develops a feeling deep in his heart for someone who goes astray.

The wives of Noah and Lut were also among the unbelievers who deserved to be severely penalized by Allah. The people of Lut went astray and, hence, they were utterly destroyed. Just before the destruction, the angels came to Lut telling him to abandon the city and to leave his wife behind. Without a moment's hesitation, Lut obeyed the command:

(The Messengers) said: "O Lut! We are messengers from your Lord! By no means shall they reach you! Now travel with your family in the remaining hours of the night, and let not any of you look back: but your wife (will remain behind): To her will happen what happens to the people. Morning is their time appointed: Is not the morning nigh?"

(Hud, 81)

Lut had fully obeyed the command of Allah. This is exactly the type of behaviour that one can expect from a believer. Having a sentimental attachment for those who disobey the judgement of Allah is not an attribute that one can see among believers:

You will not find any people who believe in Allah and the last day, loving those who resist Allah and His messenger, even though they were their fathers or their sons, or their brothers, or their kindred. For such He has inscribed the faith in their very hearts, and strengthened them with a spirit of His own. And He will admit them to Gardens beneath which rivers flow, to dwell therein (for ever). Allah will be well pleased with them, and they with Him. They are the party of Allah. Truly, it is the party of Allah that will achieve felicity.

(Al-Mujadila, 22)

The essence of this attitude, so purified of emotion, is no doubt the understanding of love which is peculiar only to believers. Allah informs us about the different concepts of love held by believers and unbelievers in the following verse:

Yet there are men who take (for worship) others besides Allah, as equal (with Allah): They love them as they should love Allah. But those of faith are overflowing in their love for Allah. If only the unrighteous could see, they would know that to Allah belongs all power, and Allah will be stern in retribution.

(Al-Baqara, 165)

As Allah states in the verse, believers truly love Allah. The affection they feel for people is merely a reflection of their love for Allah. They love only believers, because believers are those

people “who truly adopt the moral framework the Qur’an presents man with.” Unbelievers, on the other hand, live according to their whims and desires. In this sense, they follow the path of Satan. Hence, it is impossible for believers to feel close to them. Unbelievers, on the other hand, are inclined to have affection for people or objects individually. They assume everything to have an existence independent of Allah. In the Qur’an, this is called “associating partners with Allah”, or in other words, paganism.

In the Qur’an, non-emotive behaviours demonstrated by believers is not limited only to love. There are many other rational kinds of behaviours recounted in the Qur’an. The following are all examples to such kinds of behaviours ; the mother of Moses left her baby floating in the river without any hesitation when she received inspiration from Allah (Al-Qasas, 7); the believers restrain their anger and pardon men (Al-Imran, 134); and do not despair over matters that pass them by (Al-Hadid, 23); and spend from what they most dearly love.(Al-Imran, 92).

However, one point needs further clarification here: not being sentimental does not in any way mean being insensitive. On the contrary, believers are tender-hearted people. The attributes of the Prophet Abraham are related in the Qur’an: “Abraham was most tender-hearted, and forbearing.” (At-Tawba, 114). What is criticized about sentimentalism here is its negative aspect prevalent in the culture of an ignorant society. In a sentimental way of thinking, emotions completely cloud the faculty of judgment and make one develop unsound reasoning contrary to the principles of the Qur’an. In this culture, not the spirit but the negative side of the soul stirs up these emotions.

In a community, various examples of such an attitude can be observed: sentimentalism displayed by young girls is a typical example. Being under the influence of emotions, a young girl loves the image of a man rather than his character and spirit. This is no doubt due to the mentality indoctrinated in her by the society. However, lessons drawn from experience lead eventually to wisdom. Mostly after spending only a short time with him, the young girl realizes the negative, or inhumane side of the man she loves.

Sources of Wisdom

Allah indicates in the Qur'an those to whom He grants wisdom. According to what is related in the Qur'an, the main source of wisdom is the fear of Allah:

O you who believe! If you fear Allah, He will grant you a criterion (to judge between right and wrong), remove from you (all) evil (that may afflict) you, and forgive you: for Allah is the Lord of grace unbounded.

(Al-Anfal, 29)

The starting point of fearing Allah is having a conception of the attributes of Allah and of the judgement Day. Allah grants man the sense to judge between right and wrong only when man fears Him. This is actually a kind of comprehension attained as a result of the softening heart with the fear of Allah:

Allah has revealed (from time to time) the most beautiful Message in the form of a Book, consistent with itself, (yet) repeating (its teaching in various aspects): the skins of those who fear their Lord tremble there at; then their skins and their hearts soften at the celebration of Allah's praises. Such is the guidance of Allah: He guides therewith whom He pleases, but such as Allah leaves to stray, can have none to guide him.

(Az-Zumar, 23)

Man should always strive to have more of this fear. To this end, he should pray, reflect on Allah's power, might and punishment, and endeavour to have a deeper comprehension of Him.

So fear Allah as much as you can; listen and obey and spend in charity for the benefit of your own soul. Those saved from the covetousness of their own souls are the ones that achieve prosperity.

(At-Taghabun, 16)

Possessing the sense to judge between right and wrong is an indication of the wisdom of a person. Such a person is surely endowed with the capacity to ponder. This gift of comprehension is called (insight) or "vision" in the Qur'an. Etymologically, in Arabic the origin of the word *basirah* "insight" is "to see." Yet this is quite different from the normal act of seeing. A person lacking insight is described as one whose heart and mind is covered lest he should understand the Qur'an."

And We cast a veil upon their hearts (and minds) lest they should understand the Qur'an, and made them hard of hearing. When you commemorate your Lord and Him alone in the Qur'an, they turn on their backs, fleeing (from the truth).

(Al-Isra, 46)

The word "understand" in the verse above is of great significance. In many other verses, the lack of understanding prevalent among people is mentioned. This conveys a message: in the physical sense, unbelievers perceive (in other words, they hear) what they are told by believers, yet they fail to comprehend the meaning and content of the message. This is a state of inebriation, a shift of consciousness and a metaphysical fact. Allah informs us about a "veil cast over their hearts:"

And who is more wrong than one who is reminded of the signs of his Lord, but turns away from them, forgetting the (deeds) which his hands have sent forth? Truly, We have cast veils over their hearts lest they should understand this, and made them hard of hearing. If you called them to guidance, even then would they never accept guidance.

(Al-Anfal, 57)

Unbelievers, every now and then, confess their inherent lack of understanding of the religion communicated to them. This is straightforwardly manifested in the verse where the people of Midian dare to say to Shu'aib, "O Shu'aib! much of what you say we do not understand! In fact, among us we see that you have no strength! Were it not for your family, we should certainly have stoned you! for you have among us no great position!"

(Hud, 91)

No man devoid of understanding can be guided to the true path, except by the will of Allah. Allah states in the following verse:

Among them are some who (pretend to) listen to you: But can you make the deaf hear, incapable as they are of understanding? And among them are some who look at you : but can you guide the blind, bereft as they are of sight?

(Jonah, 42-43)

Consequently, those who turn to faith are solely those who are endowed with wisdom and insight. Correspondingly, believers are under obligation to "call on Allah resting upon conscious insight:"

Say "This is my way: Resting upon conscious insight accessible to reason, I am calling (you all) unto God—I and whosoever follows me. Glory to Allah! I am not of the idolaters.

(Joseph, 108)

"Now have come to you, from your Lord, proofs (to open your eyes): if any will see, it will be for (the good of) his own soul; if any will be blind, it will be to his own (harm): I am not (here) to watch over your doings."

(Al-Anaam, 104)

Being deprived of insight and wisdom, unbelievers think it of benefit to themselves to avoid any struggle in the way of Allah. With such an attitude, they commit themselves to dwelling in Hell for all eternity:

Those who were left behind rejoiced in their inaction behind the back of the messenger of Allah: they had no wish to strive and fight, with their wealth and their persons, in the cause of Allah. They said, to each other, "Do not go forth to war in the heat." Say, "The fire of Hell is fiercer in heat." If only they could understand!

(At-Tawba, 81)

When a Sura comes down, enjoining them to believe in Allah and to strive and fight along with His Messenger, those with wealth and influence among them ask you for exemption, and say: "Leave us (behind): we would rather be with those who sit (at home)." They prefer to be with (the women), who remain behind (at home): their hearts are sealed and so they do not understand.

(At-Tawba, 86-87)

Heedlessness and Attention

In the Qur'an, Allah gives a detailed account of unbelievers who are devoid of understanding. Allah explains in the Qur'an that the most striking characteristic of unbelievers is the state of "heedlessness" they are in.

Many are the Jinns and men we have made for Hell: They have hearts with which they do not understand, eyes with which they do not see, and ears with which they do not hear. They are like cattle,- nay more misguided: for they are heedless (of warning).

(Al-Araf, 179)

Such are those whose hearts, ears, and eyes have been sealed up by Allah, and they take no heed.

(An-Nahl, 108)

Rather than acknowledging what is wrong with his behaviour, the individual who is heedless of Allah's wishes makes an all-out effort to disregard his misdeeds or to cover them up. This resolute resistance and insistence on following vain desires, and hence not being wary of them lest they lead him astray from what Allah has sent down to living is in fact, a vain attempt to manifest his "so-called" innocence. Making up excuses for one's mistakes is, by no means, a way of exonerating oneself from faults, as is also evident from the verse that follows: "Indeed, man will be evidence against himself, plead as he may with his excuses." (Al-Qiyama, 14-15)

Excuses are only futile attempts to hide the decisions taken or actions made under the influence of desires and lusts. The Qur'an especially refers to some of these pretexts:

But when they see some bargain or some amusement, they disperse headlong to it, and leave you (i.e. the Prophet) standing. Say: "The (blessing) from the Presence of Allah is better than any amusement or bargain! And Allah is the Best to provide (for all needs)."

(Al-Jumua, 11)

Rather than putting forward pretexts, trying to have a deeper understanding of his misdeeds would free man from the unheeding state he is in. Otherwise, persistence in this attitude will lead man astray. In the Quran Allah states the heedless state of people and the regret they will have in the hereafter;

Closer and closer to mankind comes their reckoning: yet they do not heed and they turn away.

(Al-Anbiya, 1)

Then the true promise will draw near fulfillment: then behold! the eyes of the unbelievers will fixedly stare in horror: "Ah! Woe to us! we were indeed heedless of this; indeed, we truly did wrong!"

(Al-Anbiya, 97)

And keep your soul content along with those who call on their Lord morning and evening, seeking His pleasure! and do not let not your eyes pass beyond them, seeking the pomp and glitter of this Life; nor obey any whose heart We have permitted to neglect the remembrance of Us, one who follows his own desires, whose case has gone beyond all bounds.

(Al-Kahf, 28)

Unlike the indifferent mood of unbelievers, an absolute alertness, awareness and attention towards the outer world and the things happening around them are displayed by believers.

The attention should essentially be focused on the fact that Allah encompasses everything, that He is aware of everything, and that He will call man to account in the hereafter. A believer who succeeds in devoting his attention to every facet of life becomes extremely aware of and alert to all incidents. Because Allah encompasses everything, and because every incident occurs at His command, nothing happens randomly or without a purpose. Every incident, every development conveys an inner message and a meaning. By giving his undivided attention, man can actually grasp the meaning and wisdom in these occurrences and conceive of the hidden aspects of events. On the contrary, the unbelievers are inattentive to the outer world. Being heedless of the fact that everything on earth serves a purpose, they display indifference towards the happenings around them and remain insensitive to the outer world. Their consideration is motivated solely by self interest; that is why they pay attention only to certain particular aspects of events. In such a frame of mind, they have a poor grasp of the truth and mostly arrive at erroneous conclusions.

Attention has various aspects. Taking lessons from events, being among men of understanding who take heed, perceiving the clear proofs surrounding man, performing a certain act by taking into consideration all the drawbacks, are among the signs of a mindful attitude. In the Qur'an, some particular examples are given of the attentive behaviours of believers. For instance, Moses recognizes the existence of the fire ahead before anyone else. In the same way, when he arrived at the place of the fire, he found it to be a chosen place where Allah communicated to Him. (Ta-Ha,10-16)

Weariness, indifference or dullness are then the typical characteristics of the unbelievers. Believers, on the other hand, are extremely careful, attentive and alert and also encourage other believers with their enthusiasm.

Acting Upon Conjecture

In the state of heedlessness, logic and reasoning are seldom resorted to. This is indeed a bizarre state of mind that can be defined as being half-asleep, half-awake. The heedless person easily becomes involved in irrational deeds. The life of such a person becomes a sequence of illogical deeds and the grave consequences he has to suffer.

One of the basic principles of logic is not to put implicit trust in anything, which is not based on sound reasoning. No man of intelligence bases his life on a system which is inherently of a dubious nature. For instance, no one randomly takes a pill assuming that "it might bring relief". All actions should rest on ascertainable facts.

However, unbelievers, or those who associate partners with Allah, assume this kind of unwise attitude. That is solely because their lives are entirely based on certain presumptions. For instance, almost all unbelievers presume that judgment will not be passed on them on judgment day. Or even if judgment is passed, they will be found innocent. All the systems and ideologies they embrace, likewise rest on unfounded beliefs. Their viewpoint about the world is not based on genuine grounds.

The Surat'Al-Kahf, tells the story of two men, one an unbeliever who bases his life on unfounded conjectures and suppositions, and the other a believer:

Set forth to them the parable of two men: for one of them We provided two gardens of grape-vines and surrounded them with date palms; in between the two We placed corn-fields. Each of those gardens brought forth its produce, and failed not in the least therein: in the midst of them We caused a river to flow. (Abundant) was the produce this man had : he said to his companion, in the course of an argument: I have more wealth than you, and more honour and power in (my following of) men." He went into his garden in a state (of mind) unjust to his soul: He said, "Surely this will never perish, Nor do I believe that the hour (of judgment) will (ever) come. Even if I am brought back to my Lord, I shall surely find (there) something better in exchange."

(Al-Kahf, 32-36)

The statements in the above verses are striking. The unbeliever dares to say : "Surely this will never perish, Nor do I believe that the hour (of judgment) will (ever) come. Even if I am brought back to my Lord, I shall surely find (there) something better in exchange." This was a blatant assumption. He had no evidence whatsoever to verify his assumption. Yet, the owner of the garden persisted in voicing his groundless views. However, his end matched his attitude: his garden was utterly ruined. The story continues as follows:

His companion said to him, in the course of the argument: "Do you deny Him Who created you out of dust, then out of a sperm-drop, then fashioned you into a man? But (I think) for my part that He is Allah, My Lord, and none shall I associate with my Lord. Why did you not, as you went into your garden, say: 'Allah's will (be done)! There is no power but with Allah!' If you see me less than you in wealth and sons, it may be that my Lord will give me something better than your garden, and that He will send down on your garden thunderbolts (by way of reckoning) from heaven, making it (but) slippery sand!- Or the water of the garden will drain off underground so that you will never be able to find it." So his fruits (and enjoyment) were destroyed and he remained wringing his hands over what he had spent on his property, which had (now) tumbled to pieces to its very foundations, and he could only say, "Woe is me! Would that I had never ascribed partners to my Lord and Cherisher!" Neither had he anyone to help him against Allah, nor was he able to deliver himself. In such ordeals the (only) protection comes from Allah, the True One. He is the best to reward, and the best to give success. (Al-Kahf, 37-44)

As stated in this example, all the unbelievers follow their assumptions, rather than the true wisdom. The only information that is certainly true is what is revealed by Allah. Hence, those who want to base their life on certainty have to establish their criteria according to the Qur'an. Any other basis for moral judgement be it an ideology, philosophy, system, a thought process or science, cannot lead man to the truth. That is solely because, unless it is a revelation, every kind of thought indulged in human beings is a mere assumption. The Qur'an enjoins careful attention to this fact in numerous verses: "But they have no knowledge therein. They follow nothing but conjecture; and conjecture avails nothing against truth." (An-Najm, 28)

The Qur'an describes the state of those who follow nothing but conjecture and consequently turn away their faces from the way of Allah:

Woe to the falsehood-mongers, those who (flounder) heedless in a flood of confusion: They ask, "When will the day of judgment and justice be?" (It will be) a day when they will be tried (and tested) over the Fire! "Taste this, your trial! This is what you used to ask to be hastened!"

(Al-Dhariyat, 10-14)

The people who worship other gods besides Allah are, in reality, only a prey to conjecture. In the Qur'an, this fact is thus stated:

"These are nothing but names which you have devised - you and your fathers - for which Allah has sent down no authority (whatever). They follow nothing but conjecture and what their own souls desire! Even though there has already come to them guidance from their Lord!"

(An-Najm, 23)

Behold! Truly, to Allah belong all creatures, in the heavens and on earth. What do they follow who worship as His "partners" other than Allah? They follow nothing but fancy, and they do nothing but lie.

(Jonah, 66)

Were you to follow the common run of those on earth, you would be led away by them from the way of Allah. They follow nothing but conjecture: they do nothing but lie.

(Al-Anaam, 116)

But most of them follow nothing but fancy: truly, fancy can be of no avail against truth. Truly, Allah is well aware of all that they do.

(Jonah, 36)

Those who act on conjecture assume that they can make up excuses to protect themselves against the punishment of Allah. This is, in fact just an assumption that is not compatible with reality. Their excuses will not be accepted by Allah.

Those who ascribe partners (to Allah) will say: "If Allah had wished, we should not have given partners to Him, nor would our fathers; nor should we have had any taboos." So their ancestors falsely argued, until they tasted Our wrath. Say: "Have you any (certain) knowledge? If so, produce it before us. You follow nothing but conjecture: you do nothing but lie."

(Al-Anaam, 148)

Loyalty and Obedience

The Qur'an gives a detailed account of human nature. All the corruption and indecent personality traits of unbelievers are mentioned as well as the attributes of believers. The attributes of obedient believers oft-returning to Allah, and into whom Allah breathed His Spirit, are what make up an exalted standard of character.

Surely, such a high standard of moral values pertaining to believers is in sharp contrast to that of unbelievers. Sincerity and trustworthiness throw into sharp relief the insincere and hypocritical nature of the unbelievers. Likewise, the generous, brave and modest attitude of believers is very different from the arrogant, ruthless and selfish behaviours of unbelievers. One feature which clearly distinguishes between these two groups- that is, between believers and unbelievers - is a sense of loyalty, or its absence. In its real sense, unbelievers can never remain true, solely due to the fact that they are motivated by self-interest: It often takes them just a matter of moments to turn away from a lifelong friend or a close relative. Likewise, they easily give up struggling or fighting for something they think as right.

However, the believers assume a totally different attitude. The criteria they apply to their deeds and lives plainly manifest themselves in the verse. Say: "Truly, my prayer and my devotions, my life and my death, are (all) for Allah, the Cherisher of the Worlds." (Al-anam 162) Consequently, those who have faith are considerate in their behaviours, aiming to attend the will of Allah, and remain committed to their people and purpose at any cost. On account of minor benefits, they never leave the righteous path and they demonstrate an unshakable and unswerving loyalty to believers and especially to the leader of believers. Allah describes the loyalty shown by the believers in the Qur'an as follows:

Among the believers are men who have been true to their covenant with Allah: of them some have been true to their vows to the very end, and some still await their end: but they have never changed (their determination) in the least.

(Al-Ahzap, 23)

Loyalty keeps all believers who fight for their faith directed towards one goal. This attribute, the essential characteristic of determination, is vital for any community of believers that is steadfast. A believer would fail to keep his self-respect if even once he demonstrated a minor neglect in his loyalty. Once one loses self-respect completely, one gradually approach a point where one loses faith. Subsequently, things deteriorate very quickly and the backslider starts to behave in just the way an unbeliever or a hypocrite does. This is because unfaithfulness encourages a person to commit other significant kinds of deception. He first of all transgresses by trying to hide his disloyalty from other believers. Then he starts telling lies, making a sustained effort to deceive them. After a while, his 'talent' for telling lies, makes him feel that he can really dupe believers and starts to adopt a way of living based on deriving unfair benefits from them. This indicates a state of mind in which the deceiver feels no love for believers. In this mood, he seeks the pleasure of people rather than of Allah. That is why he strives after high prestige. He perceives anything likely to damage this prestige as a serious threat to his being and strives to protect himself by telling more lies. Meanwhile, as believers begin to detect his lies, he displays more of the traits of a hypocrite. At this point, he tries to exculpate himself. But

this effort, turns him entirely into the type of a person who does not hesitate to form alliances with unbelievers and hypocrites.

The aforementioned sequence of events is striking in the sense that it reveals how certain disloyal kinds of behaviour, which are assumed to be minor and insignificant, can cause the individual to drift into unbelief. The truthful believers, on the other hand, steadfastly persevere in righteousness till the day of their death, since they owe their obedience to nobody but Allah. This fact is noted in the following verse:

He who obeys the Messenger, obeys Allah: But if any turn away, We have not sent you to watch over their (evil deeds).

(An-Nisa, 80)

Being truthful is one of the most important subjects that a believer should be sensitive to. While informing us about hypocrites who are ever ready to escape from their obligations, Allah bids us give our attention to the pledge they take in the Qur'an about not turning their backs and accordingly states that such people bear a heavy responsibility.

And yet they had already sworn to Allah not to turn their backs in flight, and a covenant with Allah must (surely) be answered for.

(Al-Ahzap, 15)

A pledge made to Allah is indeed a heavy responsibility. Hence, Allah commands the believers:

Nor sell the covenant of Allah for a miserable price: for with Allah is (a prize) far better for you, if you only knew.

(An-Nahl, 95)

No doubt, the most significant sign of loyalty is obedience. Obedience is an essential attribute of believers, as stated in the Qur'an. It is actually the key to earning the mercy of Allah, to attaining Heaven and gaining a victory against unbelievers.

And obey Allah and the Messenger, so that you may obtain mercy.

(Al-Imran, 132)

Those are limits set by Allah: those who obey Allah and His Messenger will be admitted to Gardens with rivers flowing beneath, to abide therein for ever and that will be the supreme achievement.

(An-Nisa, 13)

You who believe! Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger, and those charged with authority among you. If you differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger, if you do believe in Allah and the Last Day. That is best, and most suitable for final determination.

(An-Nisa, 59)

We sent forth messengers, to be obeyed, by men in accordance with the will of Allah. If they had only, when they were unjust to themselves, come to you and asked Allah's forgiveness, and the Messenger had asked forgiveness for them, they would have found Allah indeed Forgiving and Most Merciful. But no, by the Lord, they can have no real faith, until they make you judge in all disputes between them, and find in their souls no resistance against Your decisions, but accept them with the fullest conviction.

(An-Nisa, 64-65)

All who obey Allah and the messenger shall dwell in the company of those whom Allah has favoured with His Grace: the prophets who teach, the sincere lovers of Truth, the witnesses who testify, and the Righteous who do good. Ah! what a beautiful companionship!

(An-Nisa, 69)

Under all circumstances, believers should be committed to obedience for all time. Hypocrites, too, can be obedient, but only when the conditions are not so tough and demanding. However, in times of difficulty and trouble, only true believers persevere in their obedience. In the Qur'an, Allah informs us that hypocrites living in the time of the Prophet find the fight for faith to be difficult. However, they join believers in their struggle when they find that it means "immediate gain and an easy journey".

Go forth, whether unarmed or well-equipped and strive and struggle, with your goods and your persons, in the cause of Allah. That is best for you, if you but knew. If there had been immediate gain in sight, and the journey easy, they would all without doubt have followed you, but the distance was long, and weighed on them. They would indeed swear by Allah, "If we only could, we should certainly have come out with you:" They would destroy their own souls; for Allah knows that they are certainly lying.

(At-Tawba, 41-42)

One of the main attributes of believers is to maintain their obedience in every situation and under all circumstances. The Qur'an informs us about the different attitudes of believers and hypocrites.

They say, "We believe in Allah and in the messenger, and we obey." but even after that, some of them turn away: they are not (really) believers. When they are summoned to Allah and His messenger, in order that He may judge between them, behold, some of them decline (to come). But if the right is on their side, they come to him with all submission. Is there a disease in their hearts? or do they doubt, or are they in fear, that Allah and His Messenger will deal unjustly with them? No, indeed, it is they themselves who do wrong. The answer of the believers, when summoned to Allah and His Messenger, in order that He may judge between them, is no other than this: they say, "We hear and we obey." It is such as these who will attain felicity. It is such as obey Allah and His Messenger, and fear Allah and do right, who will win (in the end), They swear their strongest oaths by Allah that, if only you would command them, they would leave (their homes). Say: "Do not swear Obedience is (more) reasonable; truly, Allah is well acquainted with all that you do." Say: "Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger: but if you turn away, he is only responsible for the duty placed on him and you for that placed on you. If you obey him, you shall be rightly guided. The Messenger's duty is only to preach the clear Message.

(Al-Nur, 47-54)

Obedience to the messenger should come from deep within the heart and with full commitment. The believers should acknowledge that the decision of the messenger is righteous and, accordingly, never have any doubts about their obedience. This is an extremely important issue, since obeying reluctantly is described in the Qur'an as a sign of disbelief: "But no, by the Lord, they can have no (real) Faith, until they make you judge in all disputes between them, and find in their souls no resistance to Your decisions, but accept them with the fullest conviction. (An-Nisa, 65)

Obedience is a sure sign of one's faith in Allah and his total willingness to be a servant to Him. This is surely the only way to man's salvation. As Allah states in Surat' Al-Anfal, 24: "O you who believe! Give your response to Allah and His Messenger, when He calls you to that which will give you life." The messenger calls man to his eternal salvation. In another verse

Allah states that the Messenger summons the believers to salvation, freedom, contentment and avoidance of evil.

In verse 157 of Surah Al-Araf Allah says: "I will show mercy to those.....who follow the Messenger, the Ummi whom they find mentioned in their own (scriptures),- in the law and the Gospel;- for he commands them to do what is just and forbids them to do what is evil; he allows them as lawful what is good (and pure) and prohibits them from what is bad (and impure); he releases them from their heavy burdens and from the yokes that are upon them. So it is those who believe in him, honour him, help him, and follow the light which is sent down with him, who will prosper."

(Al-Araf,157)

The believers' victory over unbelievers is also dependent on their obedience to the Messenger and those charged with authority among them. In response to their obedience, Allah supports believers and grant them a glorious victory. The reverse is also true. In case of disobedience, they lose their power over unbelievers. Allah relates such an incident that took place in the prophet's time. in the following verse:

Allah did indeed fulfil His promise to you when, with His permission you were about to annihilate your enemy, until you flinched and fell to disputing about the order, and disobeyed it after He brought you in sight (of the booty) which you covet. Among you are some that hanker after this world and some that desire the Hereafter. Then He diverted you from your foes in order to test you, but He forgave you, for Allah is full of grace to those who believe.

(Al-Imran, 152)

Salvation can be achieved only through obedience. Those who do not obey the Messenger and follow a path other than the one leading to righteousness, will eventually go to Hell. Allah makes this fact plain in the Qur'an as follows:

If anyone contends with the Messenger even after guidance has been plainly conveyed to him, and follows a path other than that becoming to men of faith, We shall leave him on the path he has chosen, and consign him to Hell, what an evil refuge!

(An-Nisa, 115)

Determination

Determination is the most significant attribute of a believer. A believer never loses his enthusiasm and devotion. He engages in his struggle only to earn the pleasure of Allah. That is why, no difficulty proves to be a hindrance to his endeavours. A believer never attaches importance to what others think or say about him. His only goal is to deserve the favour of his Lord; and he shapes his life accordingly.

Allah certainly puts the determination of believers to the test in various ways; either by periodically giving them trouble, or making them undergo suffering. Details of the test are given in the verse below:

We shall test you with fear and hunger, with loss of life and property and crops but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere.

(Al-Baqara, 155)

However, a believer with total commitment displays his patience under all circumstances. Allah praises this attitude of believers in the following verse:

How many of the prophets fought (in Allah's way), and with them (fought) large bands of godly men? But they never lost heart if they met with disaster in Allah's way, nor did they weaken (in will) nor give in. And Allah loves those who are firm and steadfast. Their only words were: "Our Lord! Forgive us our sins and anything We may have done that transgressed our duty; make us firm of foot and help us against those that resist faith."

(Al-Imran, 146-147)

Lack of commitment, on the other hand, is not a trait attributable to believers. The following verse confirms this fact:

Only those ask you for exemption who do not believe in Allah and the last day, and whose hearts are filled with doubt, so that they waver.

(Al-Tawba, 45)

Besides hardships, trouble and distress, prosperity and affluence also shake people's determination. Comfort dampens most people's enthusiasm and excitement. Becoming insolent and turning one's face away from Allah after receiving His favour is characteristic of unbelievers. Allah explains this in the following verse:

When trouble touched a man, He cried to Us (in all postures)- lying down on his side, or sitting, or standing. But as soon as we relieved his affliction, he pursued his former ways, as if he had never cried out to Us for Our help! Thus do the deeds of transgressors seem fair in their eyes!

(Surah Yunus, 10:12)

However, this is not the case with believers. Prosperity, grandeur, money or power never change the attitude of a believer. He is well aware that all favours are bestowed on him by Allah and that they can be taken back at any time. Hence, he never falls into exultation over his own prowess.

Desiring the hereafter and striving for it with all their might, as well as avoidance of extravagance in daily affairs are indications of determination demonstrated by believers. Those who "strive with all their might" are thus described in the Qur'an:

Those who wish for the hereafter, and strive for it with all their might and have faith—they are the ones whose endeavours are acceptable (to Allah).

(Al-Isra, 19)

Never losing heart, demonstrating an unceasing enthusiasm is a command of Allah:

Neither lose heart, nor fall into despair: For you must gain mastery if you are true in faith.

(Al-Imran, 139)

Determination, consequently, is a significant attribute of believers. Those who seek an “immediate gain and an easy journey” (At-Tawba, 42) fail to show an unyielding determination. Believers, on the other hand, accomplish what is expected of them and display an unchanging determination until they meet their death.

“Among the Believers are men who have been true to their covenant with Allah: of them some have fulfilled their vow to the utmost, and others still wait: but they have never changed their determination in the least”.

(Surat’al-Ahzap, 23)

Hypocrites, on the other hand, display inconsistent behaviours and attitude, and change according to the type of people they socialize with. When believers win a victory, hypocrites want to share this success, while in times of trouble, they stay away from the community of believers. This is indeed a sure indication of their hypocritical nature.

The community of Kahf, into whose hearts Allah put courage, (Al-Kahf, 14) sets the best example for believers in the sense of determination. Continuity in worshipping is also important in the sense of consistency. Only death puts an end to the determination of a believer. A believer is responsible for showing patience and fulfilling his pledge to Allah until death comes.

Truly, those who plight their fealty to you do no less than plight their fealty to Allah: the hand of Allah is over their hands: then anyone who violates his oath, does so to the harm of his own soul, and anyone who fulfils his pledge to Allah, will soon be granted a great reward by Allah.

(Al-Fath, 10)

Perseverance

All throughout the life of the believer fundamental worship involves two things: being in constant pursuit of a life based entirely on the principles of the Qur'an and avoidance of behaviours contradicting its commandments. The term "patience" encompasses the virtues of being persistent, brooking no neglect of or delay in worship, and protecting oneself from the erosion of devoutness.

That is why patience and endurance are two separate concepts. Endurance implies a sense of objection and resistance. It is actually suffering difficulties or pain. The patience believers demonstrate, on the other hand, is totally different: A patient believer does not feel defeated or demoralized. On the contrary, he feels himself closer to Allah and consequently finds joy in any distresses befalling him. This is surely a source of ardour and excitement for believers.

Many of the verses in the Qur'an enjoin perseverance:

So patiently persevere: for the promise of Allah is, indeed true: nor let those shake your firmness, who have (themselves) no certainty of faith.

(Ar-Rum, 60)

O you who believe! Persevere in patience and constancy; vie in such perseverance; strengthen each other; and fear Allah, so that you may prosper.

(Al-Imran, 200)

And be patient, for your patience is but from Allah; nor grieve over them: (i.e. the unbelievers) and do not distress yourself because of their plots.

(An-Nahl, 127)

It is stated, moreover, in the Qur'an that the believers will be put to the test with patience:

And We shall try you until We test those among you who strive their utmost and persevere in patience; and We shall try your reported (mettle).

(Muhammad, 31)

You shall certainly be tried and tested in your possessions and in your personal selves; and you shall certainly hear much that will grieve you, from those who received the Book before you and from those who worship many gods. But if you persevere patiently, and guard against evil, that will be a determining factor in all affairs.

(Al-Imran, 186)

Perseverance is also the key to the victory of believers. Allah gives strength to the believers provided that they persevere:

If there are a hundred of you, patient and persevering, they will vanquish two hundred, and if a thousand, they will vanquish two thousand, with the leave of Allah: for Allah is with those who patiently persevere.

(Al-Anfal, 66)

And obey Allah and His Messenger; and fall into no disputes, lest you lose heart and your resolve weaken; and be patient and persevering: For Allah is with those who patiently persevere.

(Al-Anfal, 46)

Perseverance is an essential attribute of a believer and it is also the key to the will of Allah and to the attainment of heaven. In one verse, Allah states the attributes of believers "(They are) those who persevere in patience, and put their trust on their Lord." (An-Nahl, 42). The importance of the issue is emphasized in other verses:

What is with you must vanish: what is with Allah will endure. And We will certainly bestow, on those who patiently persevere, their reward according to the best of their actions.

(Al-Nahl, 96)

Those are the ones who will be rewarded with the highest place in heaven, because of their patient constancy: therein shall they be met with salutations and peace.

(Al-Furqan, 75)

Then will he be of those who believe, and enjoin patience, (constancy, and self-restraint), and enjoin deeds of kindness and compassion.

(Al-Balad, 17)

The believers ask for perseverance:

When they advanced to meet Goliath and his forces, they prayed: "Our Lord! Pour out constancy on us and make our steps firm: Help us against those that reject faith."

(Al-Baqara, 250)

Righteous Deeds

Righteous deeds" (amelun-salihan) are one of the key concepts of the Qur'an. In Arabic, the word "righteousness" comprises the meanings of good, beneficial and right. In Arabic, the verb "to amend" (islah) is also derived from the same root. Consequently, in English, every type of beneficial and good work or action done for the good of religion is expressed by the word "righteous deed." In terms of the Qur'an, on the other hand, each act and all behaviour designed to seek the favour of Allah is a "righteous deed."

The salvation of an individual is not attained only through faith; righteous deeds, the signs of sincere faith, also save the soul. Saying "I believe" yet failing to comply with the commandments of religion does not lead man to salvation. In the Qur'an Allah states the following about this issue:

Do men think that they will be left alone on saying, "We believe", and that they will not be tested? We tested those before them, and Allah will certainly know those who are true from those who are false.

(Al-Ankabut, 2-3)

The way a believer does righteous deeds proves his mettle. His deeds indicate his perseverance, stability, determination and loyalty-in other words the depth of his faith.

In the Qur'an Allah informs us about the various kinds of righteous deeds. Communicating the message of Islam to people, striving for the prosperity and the benefit of the Muslims, trying to attain a better understanding of the Qur'an, solving every kind of personal and social problem of the Muslims; all these are important righteous deeds. The fundamental Islamic forms of worship, such as saying prayers to Allah, fasting, spending for the cause of Allah, and the pilgrimage to Mecca are also among the important righteous deeds:

Righteousness does not consist in whether you turn your faces towards the east or the west; what is righteous is to believe in Allah and the last day, and the angels, and the Book, and the messengers; to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer, and practise regular charity; to fulfil the contracts which you have made; and to be firm and patient, in pain (or suffering) and adversity, and in times of war. Such as do so are people of truth. Such are the Allah-fearing.

(Al-Baqara, 177)

Yet there is another point that deserves mention: what makes an act a righteous deed is not its result but the "intention" behind it. That is why for an act to be a righteous one, it should be done purely to seek the approval of Allah. This is what really distinguishes a "righteous deed" from "charity", a concept prevalent in the ignorant society. A righteous deed is done to seek the approval of Allah; on the other hand, the concept of charity in an ignorant society, is based on a spirit of social solidarity and a personal desire to make a reputation as a "charity lover."

The verses below explain why the deeds of believers are by no means similar to alms-giving.

They perform (their) vows, and they fear a Day whose evil flies far and wide.

And they feed, for the love of Allah, the indigent, the orphan, and the captive,

(Saying) "We feed you for the sake of Allah alone: no reward do we desire from you,
n o r t h a n k s . "

"We only fear a day of distressful wrath from our Lord."

(Al- Insan 7-10)

If any acts ostensibly complying with the definition of “righteous deeds” are not intended to seek the good pleasure of Allah, they cease to be “righteous deeds.” This is simply because they are done to please other people. This is, in terms of the Qur’an, “associating partners with Allah”, which is a great sin. In the following verse, Allah explains how an act of worship done to attain not the approval of Allah, but other people loses its value and becomes an ordinary act.

Woe to the worshippers, who are neglectful of their prayers; who only want to make a show of piety.

(Al-Maun, 4-6)

Similarly, spending, which is a righteous deed in the presence of Allah, becomes an ordinary act if done to demonstrate one’s generosity in order to impress people. Allah describes the difference between spending to gain His approval and to satisfy one’s own desires:

O you who believe! Do not cancel out your charity by reminders of your generosity or by injury,- like those who spend their substance to be seen by others, believing neither in Allah nor in the last day. They are in parable like a hard, barren rock, on which there is little soil: on it falls heavy rain, which leaves it just a bare stone. They will be able to do nothing with anything they have earned. And Allah does not guide those who reject faith. Those who spend their substance, seeking to please Allah and to strengthen their souls, are like a garden, high and fertile: heavy rain falls on it, and makes it yield a double harvest, and if it does not receive heavy rain, light moisture suffices it. Allah sees well whatever you do.

(Al-Baqara, 264-265)

We have prepared a shameful punishment for those who spend their wealth for the sake of ostentation but who have no faith in Allah and the last day: If any take the evil one for their intimate, what a dreadful intimate he is! And what burden would it be on them if they had faith in Allah and in the last day, and they spent out of what Allah has given them for sustenance? For Allah has full knowledge of them.

(An-Nisa, 38-39)

In brief, what turns an act into a righteous deed is the intention behind it. If the intention is a righteous one, then the deed also becomes righteous, even if the desired result is not attained. For instance, with the intention of seeking the approval of Allah, a believer may work hard towards a desired end, yet his efforts may not fructify. However, this is not important; he shall still have his reward from Allah. Every believer should acknowledge that there is a reason why Allah does not always let the individual reach his goal: “It is possible that you dislike a thing which is good for you, and that you love a thing which is bad for you. But Allah knows, and you do not know.” (Al-Baqara, 216) Only Allah knows if the desired end will have beneficial consequences for man.

Hence, the result of each deed always rests with Allah. Each task should be done solely to please Him.

As stated above, intention is the essence of a righteous deed. This is due to the fact that Allah is free of all needs. Consequently, He actually does not need any of the acts that His servants perform. Allah states the following in one of His verses:

O you men! It is you that have need of Allah: but Allah is the One free of all wants, worthy of all praise. If He so pleased, He could destroy you and replace you with a new creation. Nor is that (at all) difficult for Allah.

(Fatir, 15-17)

He can do anything He wills when He wills it. He does not need the deeds and efforts of believers to make His religion prevail:

Do not the Believers know, that, had Allah (so) willed, He could have guided all mankind (to the right)?”

(Ar-Rad,31)

In brief, if a man does righteous deeds, it accrues to his personal benefit. Right action is surely the way to attain an eternal salvation. As the Qur’an, puts it:

If any strive (with might and main), they do so for their own souls: for Allah is free of all needs from all creation.

(Al-Ankabut, 6)

One who says prayers, fasts, spends in the cause of Allah, or supports Islam, becomes himself the beneficiary. It is he himself who needs to do good works; surely he shall have forgiveness and a great reward in return.

For the same reason, in the presence of Allah, a righteous deed is acceptable only when it is the expression of a good intention:

It is not their meat nor their blood, (i.e. of camels which have been sacrificed) that reaches Allah: it is your piety that reaches Him: He has thus made them subject to you, so that you may glorify Allah for His Guidance to you and proclaim the good news to all who do right.

(Al-Hajj, 37)

Therefore, while performing a righteous deed, it is of vital importance to keep oneself occupied with the remembrance of Allah. To this end, a believer should pray to Allah for the acceptance of his services. The prayer of the Prophet Abraham and Ismail sets a good example for all believers.

Remember Abraham and Isma’il raised the foundations of the House (with this prayer):”Our Lord! Accept (this service) from us: For You are the All-Hearing, the All-knowing. Our Lord! make of us Muslims, bowing to Your (Will), and of our progeny a people Muslim, bowing to Your (will); and show us our place for the celebration of (due) rites; and turn to us (in Mercy); for You are the Oft-Returning, Most Merciful.

(Al-Baqara, 127-128)

The address of Allah to David and his people also stresses the significance of prayer, and of giving thanks to Allah during the performance of a righteous deed:

They worked for him as he desired (making) arches, image, basins as large as reservoirs, and cooking cauldrons fixed (in their places) : “Work, sons of David, with thanks ! But few of my servants are truly grateful !” (Saba, 13)

This is surely the type of service that strengthens one’s faith in Allah: One’s statement of “I believe” is reinforced with this service and mount to Allah:

“To Him mount up (all) words of purity: It is He Who exalts each deed of righteousness.”

(Fatir, 10)

A devoted believer who performs righteous deeds all throughout his life will surely attain the gardens of heaven and will be rewarded most generously by Allah in the hereafter:

As for those who believe and do good works no burden do We place on any soul, but that which it can bear,— they will be companions of the Garden, therein to dwell (for ever). And We shall remove from their hearts any lurking sense of injury; Beneath

them will be rivers flowing; and they shall say: "Praise be to Allah, who has guided us to this (felicity): never could we have found the right path, had it not been for the guidance of Allah: indeed it was the truth, that the messengers of our Lord brought to us." And they shall hear the cry: "Behold! the garden before you! You have been made its inheritors, for your deeds of righteousness." (Al-Araf, 42-43)

Giving Thanks to Allah

Being grateful to a fellow human being who has shown favour, is to render one's thanks to express appreciative sentiments. The concept of being grateful to Allah (shukr), on the other hand, is to grasp and emphasize the fact that every kind of grace and favour is granted exclusively by Allah. In the Qur'an, the opposite of being grateful is defined by the term "disbelief"(Kufr), which is synonymous with ingratitude. Only this definition indicates the importance attached to being grateful as a form of worship and the detrimental consequences its neglect may have for a believer.

Gratefulness to Allah is one of the concepts principally emphasized in the Qur'an. In almost 70 verses, the importance of rendering thanks to Allah is stated, examples of those who are grateful and ungrateful are given and the end their requital in the hereafter is described. The reason why so much importance is given to this concept is simply that it is a sure indication of one's faith and affirmation of the Oneness of Allah. In one of the verses "being grateful" is described as "worshipping only Allah":

O you who believe! Eat of the good things that We have provided for you, and be grateful to Allah, if it is Him you worship.

(Al-Baqara, 172)

In another verse, giving thanks to Allah is described as the opposite of idolatry:

But it has already been revealed to you, — as it was to those before you, — "If you were to associate other gods with Allah, truly fruitless would be your work (in life), and you would surely be in the ranks of those who lose (all spiritual good)". Therefore, worship Allah, and be of those who give thanks.

(Az-Zumar, 65-66)

Satan's defiant statements to Allah (on the day of his refusal to bow to Adam) emphasize the importance of giving thanks to Allah:

"Because you have cast me out I will lie in wait for your servants as they walk on your straight path: Then will I assault them from in front of them and from behind them, from their right and from their left. Then you will find most of them, ungrateful for Your mercies."

(Al-Araf, 17)

As stated in the verse above, Satan out of sheer pique, devoted His life to misleading people. His ultimate aim is to make people be ungrateful to their Creator. When this ultimate purpose of the Satan is considered, it becomes more comprehensible how a man goes astray when he does not render thanks to Allah.

Gratefulness is a part of the test by Allah. Man is surely endowed with His favour, and is informed about how he should benefit from it. In return, he is expected to assume a submissive attitude towards his Creator. However, it is again only man himself who chooses to be grateful or ungrateful to Allah:

We created Man from a drop of mingled sperm, in order to try him. We gave him the gifts of hearing and sight. We showed him the way: whether he be grateful or ungrateful .

(Al-Insan, 2-3)

As the verses suggest, the choice of the human being whether to go grateful or ungrateful, is explicit sign of his faith or disbelief.

Gratefulness is also closely related to requital in the hereafter. No punishment shall befall those who have faith and are grateful:

What can Allah gain by your punishment, if you are grateful and you believe? Indeed, it is Allah who recognizes all good, and knows all things.

(An-Nisa, 147)

This verse, together with many others, gives the good tidings that Allah rewards those who remain grateful to their Creator:

And remember! Your Lord caused to be declared (publicly): "If you are grateful, I will increase My favours to you. But if you show ingratitude, truly, My punishment is terrible indeed."

(Abraham, 7)

That is the bounty of which Allah gives glad tidings to His servants who believe and do righteous deeds. Say: "No reward do I ask of you for this except the love of those near of kin." He who does a good deed shall be paid many times over: for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Ready to appreciate (service).

(Ash-Shura, 23)

The people of Lut rejected (his) warning. We sent against them a violent tornado with showers of stones, which destroyed all of them, except Lut's household, whom We delivered by early dawn,— through Our mercy. Thus do We reward those who give thanks.

(Al-Qamar, 33-35)

"If you counted up the favours of Allah, you would never be able to number them: for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." (Al-Nahl, 18) As this verse suggests, let alone counting up the favours of Allah, it is not conceivable even to categorize them. Since there is no limit to the favours of Allah, a believer should unceasingly keep himself occupied with the remembrance of Allah and express his gratefulness to Him.

In expectation of some very great favor, some people wait for special occasions to render their thanks to Allah. Settlement of a major problem, or recovering from a serious sickness are the proper times to express one's inner gratefulness to Allah, they assume. However, if one reflected only for a moment, one would instantly comprehend that he is always surrounded with infinite favours. At every moment, every minute, there is an uninterrupted flow of favours: life, good health, intelligence, consciousness, the five senses, the air that one breaths, in brief, everything that makes life possible is given to one by the grace of Allah. In return for all these, the individual is expected to serve Allah in gratitude. Those who are heedless of these favours and accordingly neglect to turn to Allah in order to express their gratefulness, acknowledge their importance only when they are deprived of them.

The Qur'an enjoins careful attention to the favours of Allah and repeatedly reminds us of those we tend to forget. Whole volumes would surely be insufficient to name all the blessings of Allah. Allah fashioned man into a man, He endowed him with five senses thus enabling him to perceive the world around him, guided him to the true path through His Book and Messenger, provided an explanation of the scriptures, desired no hardship for His servants, saved them from the oppression of unbelievers, made their habitations havens of rest and quiet for them, created fresh water, an abundant variety of food, sea-products, ships sailing night and day for the benefit of mankind.

No one can ever say “I say my prayers regularly and engage in righteous dealings, but do not give thanks to Allah”. The individual who is not grateful to Allah is one who does not occupy himself with the remembrance of Allah, and hence is heedless of Him. A person who, like the animals, consumes everything given to him without pondering over why it is granted and the One Who grants it, surely needs to change this attitude. Otherwise, expecting to receive a reward from Allah and hoping to attain Heaven would be meaningless. That is why a believer should never neglect to render thanks to Allah.

We also know from the revelations of Allah that only those who give thanks to Allah can acknowledge the signs of Allah in the outer world and draw lessons for themselves. The following verses elaborate upon this theme:

From the land that is clean and good, by the will of its Cherisher, springs up produce, rich after its kind: but from the land that is bad, springs up nothing but that which is niggardly: thus do we explain the signs by various symbols to those who are grateful.
(Al-Araf, 58)

We sent Moses with Our signs (and the command): “Bring out your people from the depths of darkness into light, and teach them to remember the days of Allah.” Truly, in this there are signs for such as are firmly patient and constant, grateful and appreciative.

(Ibrahim, 5)

Do you not see that the ships sail across the ocean by the Grace of Allah, So that He may show you His Signs? Truly, in this there are signs for all who constantly persevere and give thanks.

(Luqman, 31)

But they said: “Our Lord! Place longer distances between our journey-stages” But they wronged themselves in this. At length We made their fate a byword and We dispersed them throughout the land. In this there are truly signs for every soul that is patiently constant and grateful.

(Saba, 19)

The wisdom related in these verses and the evidences they furnish, can be comprehended only by those who are endowed with the insight and sensitivity of those who give thanks. This is no doubt a reward for being grateful to Allah. Ungrateful and insensitive people, on the other hand, do not even notice these verses.

In many verses, Allah advises His Messengers, one of whom is Moses, to be grateful:

(Allah) said: “O Moses! I have chosen you above (other) men, by the mission I (have given you) and the words I (have spoken to you): take then the (revelation) which I give you, and be of those who give thanks.”

(Al-Araf, 144)

In Surat-al-Ahkaf, verse 15, a believer in his maturity (the age of 40 is referred to as the age of maturity in the Qur’an) prays that he may be a grateful person:

We have enjoined on man kindness to his parents. In pain his mother bore him, and in pain she gave birth to him. The carrying of the child to his weaning is a period of thirty months. At length, when he reaches manhood and attains forty years, he says, “O my Lord! Inspire me to be grateful for the favours which you have bestowed upon me, and upon both my parents, and to do good works of which you will approve; and grant me good descendants. Truly, I have turned to you and truly I bow to You in Islam.

(Al-Ahqaf, 15)

Not Pursuing Personal Benefits

Striving purely in obedience to the Will of Allah, and not seeking self-interests are clear manifestations of sincere faith. A believer who is well aware that all favours are given to him by Allah and who accordingly offers sincere devotion to Him and fears Him, would surely never pursue minor personal profit while striving in Allah's cause.

Seeking personal benefits from one's services in the way of Allah can never tally with one's faith. A person who is conscious of the existence of Allah and the Hereafter would definitely attach no importance to simple benefits and, at the behest of Allah, would never try to satisfy his own desires. Conversely, those who confine themselves to a world of minor interests, ideas and thoughts only degrade themselves.

The Qur'an repeatedly reminds believers not to seek any personal benefits in service rendered for the cause of Allah. All the prophets referred to in the Qur'an communicated the message of Allah without asking for any reward in return. Some of the verses extolling this virtue of the messengers are as follows:

To the 'Ad People We sent Hud, one of their own brethren. He said: "O my people! worship Allah! you have no other god but Him. Your other gods are mere inventions. "O my people! I ask of you no reward for this message. My reward can be from none but my Creator. Will you not then understand?"

(Hud, 50-51)

Say: "No reward do I ask of you for it but this: that each one who will may take a (straight) path to his Lord."

(Al-Furqan, 57)

Behold, their brother Noah said to them: "Will you not fear (Allah)? I am to you a messenger worthy of all trust: So fear Allah, and obey me. No reward do I ask of you for it: my reward is only from the Lord of the Worlds."

(Al-Shuara, 106-109)

As the verses suggest, no worldly gain is aimed at in the struggle made for the cause of Allah. A believer does not aim to have a lot of money or attain great status or appreciation of other people—also considered as worldly gain—in return for his services to Allah. The only end is approval of Allah. However, provided that Allah wills, He grants victory, relief and favours to believers in this world.

Consequently, the value of the services rendered for the cause of Allah depends not on the appreciation of people but on the intention, namely the will to earn the pleasure of Allah. All through their lives, messengers unceasingly communicated the message of Allah to their people. There have been many messengers who were neither appraised nor obeyed, but rather opposed. However, this is, by no means, a "failure" on their part. In the Qur'anic sense, success is actually not to impress people but to earn the pleasure of Allah. A believer is responsible for praying, building up his consciousness of Allah through reflection, and being a servant to Him. The decision on victory, on the other hand, rests with Allah. A believer should fulfill his own duty and not question what is destined for Him.

Those who follow the good pleasure of Allah ceaselessly worship Him. Believers are fully aware that this world has an alluring, yet deceptive nature. That is why, money, luxury cars, opulent houses, jewels, precious stones, prestige and status never impress them. This is in accordance with Allah's commands in the Qur'an:

And keep your soul content with those who call on their Lord morning and evening, seeking His pleasure. Do not let your eyes pass beyond them, seeking the pomp and glitter of this Life; nor obey any whose heart We have permitted to neglect the remembrance of Us, one who follows his own desires, whose case has gone beyond all bounds.

(Al-Kahf, 28)

One point is important here: in one's approach to religion, one should ask, "What other services can I perform to earn the pleasure of Allah?" rather than "How can I benefit from religion?" The latter approach would indicate sheer insincerity. In the Qur'an, those assuming such a cunning attitude are defined as hypocrites. These are the people who pretend to be faithful and simply make use of religion to satisfy their selfish ambitions. Actually, they are the type of people who deserve the Fire and severe punishment in the hereafter. In the Qur'an, Allah gives an account of their case:

They declare: "We believe in Allah and in the messenger, and we obey." But no sooner do they utter these words than some of them turn away: they are not (really) believers. When they are summoned to Allah and His messenger, in order that He may judge between them, behold some of them decline (to come). Had right been on their side, they would have come to him in all submission.

(Al-Noor, 47-49)

As is apparent from the verse, hypocrites do admit to belief if there is anything to their interest but later retract. These people may look like devoted believers for some time, but, as the Qur'an puts it, they are actually those who "lay their foundation on an undermined cliff ready to crumble to pieces."

Which then is better? - one who laid his foundation on piety to Allah and His good pleasure? - or one who laid his foundation on an undermined sand-cliff ready to crumble to pieces? And it did crumble to pieces with him, into the fire of Hell. And Allah does not guide people who do wrong.

(At-Tawba, 109)

There are numerous other verses in the Qur'an which stress the significance of gaining the pleasure of Allah:

Is the man who follows the good pleasure of Allah like the man who draws on himself the wrath of Allah, and whose abode is in Hell?- A woeful refuge!

(Al-Imran, 162)

And they returned with grace and bounty from Allah: no harm ever touched them; for they followed the good pleasure of Allah. And Allah is the Lord of bounties unbounded.

(Al-Imran, 174)

In most of their secret talks there is no good: But to one who exhorts others to deeds of charity or justice or conciliation between men, secrecy is permissible. To him who does this, seeking the good pleasure of Allah, We shall soon give a reward of the highest value.

(An-Nisa, 114)

A light has come to you from Allah and a glorious Book with which he will guide all who seek His good pleasure to ways of peace and safety, and lead them out of darkness, by His will, to the light; He will guide them to a path that is straight.

(Al-Maeda, 16)

Allah has promised to Believers, men and women, gardens under which rivers flow, in which they shall dwell forever. He has promised them beautiful mansions in

gardens of everlasting bliss. But the greatest bliss is the good pleasure of Allah: that is the supreme felicity.

(Al-Tawba, 72)

Those who patiently persevere, seeking the countenance of their Lord; regularly say their prayers, spend out of (the gifts) We have bestowed upon them for their sustenance, secretly and openly; and ward off evil with good: for such there is the final attainment of the (eternal) home. They shall enter the gardens of Eden.

(Al-Rad, 22)

A believer's ultimate purpose is to earn the good pleasure of Allah and to attain heaven.

Therefore while referring to the believers, Allah says: "Indeed, We chose them for a special purpose—proclaiming the Message of the Hereafter." (Sad, 46) Indeed, remembrance of the hereafter is the essential attribute of a believer.

The real grace and favours that a believer would like to attain exist in the hereafter. This world is a temporary residence for believers; more importantly, the blessings of this world are inherently limited and temporary. With these features, this world actually offers an incomplete example of the hereafter. It is indeed created as a reminder of the hereafter.

Fair in the eyes of men are the love of things they covet: women and sons; heaped-up hoards of gold and silver; horses branded (for blood and excellence); and wealth in cattle and well-tilled land. Such are the possessions of this world's life; but in nearness to Allah is the best of goals.

(Al-Imran, 14)

Know that the life of this world is but play and amusement, pomp and mutual boasting, a quest for greater riches and more children. It is like the plants that flourish after the rain. They delight the hearts of the tillers; but soon they wither; you will see them grow yellow; then they become dry and crumble away. In the hereafter there will be a severe Penalty (for the devotees of wrong). And forgiveness from Allah and (His) Good Pleasure (for the devotees of Allah). And what is the life of this world, but the goods and chattels of deception?

(Al-Hadid, 20)

A believer takes the benefit of the goods and favours of this life. But in the course of doing so, he keeps himself occupied with the remembrance of Allah and the hereafter, and never forgets his real purpose in life. Allah warns believers against the alluring nature of the things in this world:

Say: If it be that your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your mates, or your kindred; the wealth that you have gained; the commerce in which you fear a decline: or the dwellings in which you delight - are dearer to you than Allah, or His Messenger, or the striving in His cause; then wait until Allah shall fulfil His decree. Allah does not guide the rebellious.

(Al-Tawba, 24)

In the Surat al-Jumua, Allah informs us about an attitude believers should avoid:

No sooner do they see some bargain or some amusement, than they disperse headlong to it, and leave you (the prophet) standing. Say: "The (blessing) from the Presence of Allah is better than any amusement or bargain! And Allah is the Best to provide (for all needs)."

(Al-Jumua, 11)

Brotherhood and Solidarity

Loyalty and sincere devotion to Allah, brotherhood and solidarity are important attributes of believers. The Qur'an tells that all believers are brothers; they are people sharing the same feelings, who strive for the same end, adhere to the same book and struggle to reach the same goal. Consequently, solidarity becomes a natural feature of a community made up of believers. Allah commends this attachment of believers in the following verse:

Truly, Allah loves those who fight for His cause in battle array, as if they were a solid cemented structure.

(As-Saff, 4)

As related in the verse above, striving in unison for the cause of Allah is at this behest.

And hold fast, all together, by the rope which Allah (stretches out for you), and do not be divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude Allah's favour to you; for you were enemies and He joined your hearts in love, so that by His Grace, you became brethren; and you were on the brink of the pit of Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus Allah makes His Signs clear to you, so that you may be guided.

(Al-Imran, 103)

Believers are modest people who have fellow feeling and mercy for each other. Therefore, unity and solidarity among them is naturally maintained. But even in a community of this nature, there can be reasons to be cautious; certain erroneous behaviour may cause harm to this solidarity and create an unfriendly atmosphere among believers.

The basic reason for such undesirable behaviours is surely the soul (an-nafs): It is true that a believer is tolerant and warm. Yet, everybody has a wicked side to his soul and in a moment of moral weakness, a person may well be driven by the negative side of the soul; to put it another way, he may be influenced by jealousy, selfishness or ambition.

That is why the Qur'an stresses the impact of these negative aspects of soul as a serious threat to unity among believers. Considering that the soul, which can manifest signs of Satan in the human being, can mislead believers, they should avoid behaving in a manner that will provoke the wicked side of other believers. In the Quran, Allah commands as follows:

Tell My servants that they should be courteous in their speech. Satan would sow dissensions among them: Satan is the avowed enemy of man.

(Isra, 53)

The above verse surely gives an important message: Allah commands believers to address each other in the best manner possible (not in a good manner, but in the best manner). Here an important feature of Satan is revealed: Satan aims to create dissension among believers.

The essential method Satan employs to break the unity among believers is to inculcate the feeling of competition in the hearts of believers. In a state of heedlessness, a believer may well succumb to delusions of grandeur and develop an ambition to attain a particular status in society. In such a mood, it is quite possible that he may try to establish supremacy over other believers. Similarly, he may feel envy of his brother for one reason or another. Though the word "envy" may sound like a feeling that may be excused, it actually has a more serious significance: it amounts to an explicit rebellion against Allah. In the Qur'an it is mentioned thus: "Or do they envy mankind for what Allah has given them of His bounty?..." (An-Nisa, 54) As the verse suggests, all favours are bestowed by Allah and being envious of the favours given to others is simply opposing the will of Allah. That is why believers should make a point of

avoiding such an attitude. Otherwise, it would not promote conduct which would serve in attaining the will and pleasure of Allah. Besides, as the verse below indicates, it is detrimental to the unity of believers:

And obey Allah and His Messenger; and fall into no disputes, lest you lose heart and your power depart; and be patient and persevering: For Allah is with those who patiently persevere.

(Al-Anfal, 46)

It follows that a believer should never let competition or dissension prevail among his brothers. Considering the primitive nature of these feelings, his soul should never be driven by them. Furthermore, he should never arouse envy in others. Being unpretentious and modest eradicates the danger of competition among believers. Another key attribute of a believer stressed in the Qur'an is being self-sacrificing. A believer always gives priority to the needs and wishes of other believers and displays a virtuous spirit. What is more, he takes pleasure in assuming such an attitude. The Qur'an describes this attitude as follows:

But those who before them, had homes (in Medina) and had adopted the Faith, - showed their affection to such as came to them for refuge, and entertained no desire in their hearts for things given to the (latter), but gave them preference over themselves, even though poverty was their own lot. And those saved from the covetousness of their own souls are the ones that achieve prosperity.

(Al-Hashr, 9)

Essentially, envy, rivalry and contentiousness are the three basic factors posing a serious threat to the maintenance of brotherhood and solidarity among the believers. Competitiveness, likely to be aroused by ambition, does harm the bond of brotherhood. This is indeed detrimental to the soul and leads to moral regression.

It is, therefore, senseless to waste time in hindering the efforts of other believers through competition and envy, while endless opportunities lie ahead of man to earn the good pleasure of Allah. Indeed, competition never prevails in an environment where the common goal is earning the pleasure of Allah. A believer should never forget that a community of believers is like a body in which each organ functions in close cooperation with the others for its general well-being. In this context, believers should see the success of their brothers as if it were their own success. This is quite an important concept. There are numerous verses in the Qur'an stressing the importance of brotherhood. In one verse, a prayer made by believers is recounted:

And those who came after them say: "Our Lord! Forgive us, and our brethren who came before us into the faith, and do not leave in our hearts, any rancour (or sense of injury) against those who have believed. Our Lord! You are indeed full of Kindness, Most Merciful."

(Al-Hashr, 10)

A dispute or controversy among the believers will impair the entire struggle. Such a happening would lessen the unity and power of believers, while strengthening the unbelievers. Indeed, unless believers remain each other's protectors oppression will prevail. The Qur'an makes the following observation:

Unbelievers are each other's protectors. Unless you do this, (protect each other), there will be tumult and oppression on the earth, and great mischief.

(Al-Anfal, 73)

There are explicit commands on brotherhood and unity among believers:

Do not be like those who are divided amongst themselves and opposed to one another after receiving clear signs: for them there will be a dreadful penalty.

(Al-Imran, 105)

They ask you about the spoils of war. Say: "(Such) spoils are at the disposal of Allah and the Messenger: So fear Allah, and end your disputes. Obey Allah and His Messenger, if you are true believers."

(Al-Anfal, 1)

Have nothing to do with those who have divided their religion up into sects. Allah will call them to account: He will in the end tell them the truth of all that they did.

(Al-Anaam, 159)

Believers are obliged to be merciful and compassionate towards each other. Modesty is the distinctive attribute of a believer. Arrogance and envy are not characteristic of believers, but unbelievers. Thus believers should avoid being seized by this evil side of their souls and should constantly ask the protection of Allah, repent, and make amends. The end that awaits those who do not curb the evil of the soul is described in the following verse:

O you who believe! if any from among you turn back from the faith, Allah will soon replace them by other people whom He will love as they will love Him, who are humble with the believers, stern towards unbelievers, fighting for Allah's cause and never afraid of the reproaches of such as find fault. That is the grace of Allah, which He will bestow on whom He pleases. Allah encompasses all, and He knows all things.

(Al-Maeda, 54)

Modesty and Arrogance

Modesty is one of the most essential concepts of which we are repeatedly reminded in the Qur'an. Being modest and humble are signs of faith, while arrogance is a characteristic peculiar to disbelief.

If modesty is assumed to be akin to faith, and arrogance to disbelief, it is because faith leads man to understanding and wisdom, while disbelief hinders him from acquiring these virtues. Building a consciousness of Allah through wisdom, the individual who has faith in his heart never dares to conduct himself in an arrogant way. He readily concedes that Allah has control over everything and he, as a man, is only a servant being endowed with many favors. A man of understanding sees the power of Allah in everything and realizes his own weaknesses; Man is weak; he feels hungry, he is prone to diseases, suffers pain. He can never prevent himself from growing older. He did not create himself and likewise he cannot avoid death. With a body prone to weaknesses, he is destined to live for a certain period of time, then he is laid in his grave. Ultimately he will turn to his Creator. He has no reason whatsoever to display arrogance. Even if he thinks he has, the fact remains that everything he is, or has, is the gift of Allah. It is his duty to be grateful rather than display arrogance. Acknowledgement of the Creator manifests itself in the way a person conducts himself. He is completely aware of his weakness in the eyes of Allah; yet he does not display this to others. On the contrary, he is known to others for his dignity, honour, modesty, self-confidence and maturity.

Lacking the brains to conceive of Allah, unbelievers remain in the grip of their own vain arrogance and pride. They perceive themselves as having separate identities independent of Allah. Personal plus points like intelligence, wealth, good looks, and renown become matters on which they praise themselves. They never understand that these are endowments made by Allah and can be withdrawn at any time. Another aspect of the unbeliever's character is the inferiority complex. This is generally the consequence of not being able to attain a particular status, position or standard of living. Totally unaware of such key concepts as submission to Allah and putting one's trust in Him, unbelievers can suffer from different kinds of complexes, mostly those of inferiority or superiority. Their state is defined in the Qur'an as follows:

Those who dispute about the signs of Allah, without having been invested with any authority, nothing in their breasts but the quest of greatness—which they shall never attain: Seek refuge, then, in Allah. It is He Who hears and sees all things.

(Al-Ghafir, 56)

A man in this state finds everything insignificant except his own personal existence. In his eyes, everything is a means to satisfy his ego. He is constantly at pains to praise himself. He denies his failures and never admits that he is the kind of man who is likely to make mistakes. At some point, he develops an intense hatred for religion. That is basically due to the fact that religion teaches man the unique truth, that he is merely a servant of Allah whose existence is totally dependent on Him. Yet, wholly engulfed in self-esteem, he becomes totally blind to the truth shown by religion. In this negation of enlightenment, he holds strictly to his own stance on life. The Qur'an refers such people as follows:

And they rejected those Signs in iniquity and arrogance, though their souls were convinced thereof: so see what was the end of those who acted corruptly!

(Al-Naml, 14)

Immured in their vanity, such individuals live for their egos. They are undoubtedly the ones who are most prone to evil. The following verse warns us of their deceptive approach:

There is the type of man whose speech about this world's life may dazzle you, and he calls Allah to bear witness to what is in his heart; yet is he the most contentious of enemies. No sooner does he leave you than he hastens to spread mischief throughout the land and destroy crops and cattle. But Allah does not love mischief. When it is said to him, "Fear Allah", he is led by arrogance to further crime. Enough for him is Hell, an evil bed indeed to lie on.

(Al-Baqara, 204-206)

In another verse, the attitude of those who are arrogant is stated as follows:

He hears the signs of Allah rehearsed to him, yet is obstinate and lofty, as if he had not heard them: then announce to him a Grievous Penalty!

(Al-Jathiya, 8)

Denying what is conceived of by the soul as true is due to sheer arrogance. This is the key to understanding the significance of pride for one's eternal life. Displaying arrogance in this world, one chooses a life full of grief and sorrow, both in this world and the hereafter. That is why arrogance is the most bitter enemy of man.

The reason lying behind the straying and rebellion of Satan is also arrogance. It is fundamentally the main reason for all types of wicked deeds. This fact is explained in the Qur'an in the story about the deviation of Satan:

Behold, your Lord said to the angels: "I am about to create man from clay. When I have fashioned him (in due proportion) and breathed into him My spirit, fall down in obeisance to him." So the angels prostrated themselves, all of them together: Not so Iblis: he was haughty, and became one of those who reject Faith. (Allah) said: "O Iblis! What prevents you from prostrating yourself to one whom I have created with My hands? Are you haughty? Or do you think he is beneath you?" (Iblis) said: "I am better than he: you created me from fire, and him you created from clay." (Allah) said: "Then begone for you are rejected, accursed! "And My curse shall be remain on you till the Day of Judgement."

(Sad, 71-78)

The statements used by the Satan in the verse are startling indeed; they reflect his ill-will and nasty temper. Satan was possessed by the groundless feeling that he was important and hence superior to Adam. He little acknowledged that it is only Allah who exalts, dignifies or degrades all who are created. Commanding the angels to prostrate themselves to Adam, Allah surely rendered Adam superior to all others. No creature of understanding dares to resist the command of Allah. Yet, Satan dared and, as a result, was cursed for all eternity.

Satan sets an evil example for those who follow his path. Satan rebel against Allah, and also encourages others to rebel against Him. Hence, an evaluation of Satan based on the following verse will enlighten us about how man is led astray.

Allah said: "O Iblis! what is your reason for not being among those who prostrated themselves?" Iblis said: "I am not one to prostrate myself to man, whom You created from dry clay, from mud moulded into shape." Allah said: "Begone from here; for you are rejected, accursed. "And the curse shall be on you till the day of Judgment." Iblis said: "O my Lord! give me then respite till the Day the dead are raised." Allah said: "Respite is granted to you till the Day of the Time appointed." Iblis said: "O my Lord! because you have put me in the wrong, I will make wrong fair-seeming to them on the earth, and I will put them all in the wrong.

(Al-Hijr, 32-39)

Satan wants others too to go astray. This is a type of psychological satisfaction which is also prevalent among human beings. Just like Satan, one who commits a crime also wants others do the same and be arrested. This is actually an expectation that gives relief to Satan; the hope of sharing the crime and thus the penalty too. It is a consolation for those who reject faith and deny the existence of Allah to know that they are surrounded by people who have also gone astray. Sentiments like, "Everyone does it" and, "If all these people go to hell, so shall I" are commonly expressed. The rationale behind these statements is the logic as explained above. Satan knows Allah, he is totally aware of His existence and also His power. However, driven by his own superiority complex, he expects special treatment and wants to enjoy certain privileges. That is why he goes astray, when he is commanded to prostrate himself to Adam. No less than Satan, men too go astray: in the Qur'an it is described how unbelievers do acknowledge the existence of Allah, yet, believing themselves to possess some special features, they want to enjoy certain rights over others. What is more, many people who go astray, still consider themselves to be the "beloved servants of Allah." In the Qur'an, this mentality is frequently emphasized:

Christians and Jews who say: "We are sons of Allah, and his beloved," are responded to as follows: "Why then did He punish you for your sins? No, you are but men,- of the men He has created: He forgives whom He pleases, and He punishes whom He pleases : Allah has dominion over the heavens and the earth, and all that is between. All shall return to Him.

(Al-Maeda, 18)

The feeling of being privileged and superior may manifest itself in various ways. Islam teaches man that he owes his existence to Allah and that he has nothing except what Allah has endowed him with. Denial of this fact is the main reason why the majority of people go astray. In the manners of Satan saying: "I am created from flame," being a member of a noble family, possessing a lot of money or having good looks make people feel superior. This ultimately becomes the reason of their unmitigated arrogance. The case of Qarun, one of Moses people, is a remarkable example, as is narrated in the following verses from Al-Qasas.

Qarun was doubtless of the people of Moses; but he acted insolently towards them: such were the treasures We had bestowed on him that their very keys would have been a burden to a body of strong men, behold, his people said to him: "Do not exult, for Allah does not love those who exult (in riches). But seek, by means of the wealth which Allah has bestowed on you, the home of the hereafter. Do not forget your share in this world: but do good, as Allah has been good to you, and do not seek occasions for mischief in the land: for Allah does not love those who do mischief." He said: "This has been given to me because of a certain knowledge which I have." Did he not know that Allah had destroyed, before him, whole generations, which were superior to him in strength and greater in the amount of riches they had collected? But the wicked are not called immediately to account for their sins. So he went forth among his people in the pride of his worldly glitter. Those whose aim was the life of this said: "Oh! that we had the like of what Qarun has got! For he is truly a lord of mighty good fortune!" But those who had been granted true knowledge said: "Alas for you! The reward of Allah (in the hereafter) is best for those who believe and do good works: but this none shall attain, save those who steadfastly persevere in doing good." Then We caused the earth to swallow up him and his house; and he had no one at all to help him against Allah; nor could he defend himself. And those who had envied his position the day before began to say the next day: "Ah! it is indeed Allah Who gives abundantly to whom He will and sparingly to whom He pleases! Had it not been that Allah was gracious to us, He could have caused the earth to swallow us up! Ah! those who reject Allah will assuredly never prosper." As for the abode of the hereafter We

shall give it to those who intend neither high-handedness nor mischief on this earth:
and the righteous shall have a blessed end.

(Al-Qasas, 76-83)

Just as the verse above suggests, Qarun - and people of his ilk believe they are given favours simply because certain traits they possess make them the deserving of them. They either forget or wholly deny that those traits are in reality, the blessings of Allah.

The statement of Qarun: "This has been given to me because of a certain knowledge which I have" is a manifestation of this attitude. Such a person is apt to "exult," as mentioned in the above verses. This is basically why we witness self-important and overbearing attitudes in people when they attain success, prosperity and power. Such are essentially the individuals who presume themselves to be the "beloved servants of Allah":

Man does not weary of asking for good things, but when evil befalls him, he gives up all hope and is lost in despair. When we give him a taste of some Mercy from Ourselves, after some adversity has touched him, he is sure to say, "This is due to my merit: Do not think that the hour of judgment will ever become; but if I am brought back to my Lord, I have much good stored in His sight!" But We will show the unbelievers the truth of all that they did, and We shall give them the taste of a severe penalty.

(Fussilat, 49-50)

Those who conduct themselves with an air of superiority and constantly praise themselves, are referred to as follows in the Qur'an:

Have you not seen those who claim sanctity for themselves? Allah sanctities whom He pleases. But never will they fail to receive justice in the least little thing.

(An-Nisa, 49)

Believers, on the other hand, never feel sure being of exactly the type of person who, in the eyes of Allah, deserves to attain heaven. That is why, the believers pray to their Lord both "in fear and hope" (As-Sajda, 16). They turn to Allah and pray, "Defend us from the torment of the Fire!" (Al-Baqara, 201); "Let not our hearts deviate now after You have guided us" (Al-Imran, 8); "Take our souls to You as Muslims who bow to Your will!" (Al-Araf, 126). Out of sheer arrogance a man assumes himself to be one who is deserving of paradise. Yet, arrogance is the greatest hindrance to one's eternal salvation, "for Allah does not love the vainglorious boaster."

(Al-Hadid, 23)

The theme of "arrogance" is frequently taken up in the Qur'an. The following verses call upon man repeatedly to avoid arrogance:

Nor walk on the earth with insolence: for you cannot rend the earth asunder, nor reach the mountains in height.

(Al-Isra, 37)

Do not turn your cheek in scorn toward people, nor walk in insolence on the earth; for Allah does not love any arrogant boaster.

(Luqman, 18)

No misfortune can happen on earth or in your own souls but is in a book before we bring it into existence; surely that is easy to Allah: so that you may not despair over goods things you miss nor exult over favours bestowed upon you. For Allah does not love any vainglorious boaster.

(Al-Hadid, 22-23)

Serve Allah, and do not associate any partners with Him; and do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbours who are near, neighbours who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer you meet, and what your right hands possess: for Allah does not love the arrogant, or the vainglorious.

(An-Nisa, 36)

In the Qur'an, the believers are frequently reminded to be modest and moderate. Believers rigorously avoid arrogance since they can comprehend the verse "Allah does not love any vainglorious boaster." Accordingly, the Qur'an declares that modesty is the basic virtue of a believer:

...But your Allah is One Allah: then submit your wills to Him (in Islam): and give the good news to those who humble themselves.

(Al-Hajj, 34)

And the servants of Allah Most Gracious are those who walk on the earth in humility, and when the ignorant address them, they say, "Peace!"

(Al-Furqan, 63)

That abode of the hereafter We shall give to those who intend no high-handedness or mischief on earth: and the end is best for the righteous.

(Al-Qasas, 83)

Only those believe in Our signs, who, when they are recited to them, fall down in prostration, and celebrate the praises of their Lord; nor are they ever puffed up with pride.

(As-Sajda, 15)

This is rather an important point to consider. Whether a person believes or goes astray entirely depends on his arrogance or modesty. The consequences of being arrogant are explained in the following verse:

Those who behave arrogantly on the earth in defiance of right will be turned away from My signs. Even if they see all the signs, they will not believe in them; and if they see the way of right conduct, they will not adopt it as the way; but if they see the way of error, that is the way they will adopt. For they have rejected Our signs, and failed to take warning from them.

(Al-Araf, 146)

The common shortcoming in all the unbelievers of the past was their arrogance.

My Signs come to you and you rejected them: you were haughty, and became one of those who reject faith!

(Az-Zumar, 59)

When it is said to him, "Fear Allah", he is led by arrogance into further crime. Hell shall be enough for him --an evil bed indeed!

(Al-Baqara, 206)

We gave Moses the Book and followed him up with a succession of messengers; We gave Jesus, the son of Mary, clear signs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit. Will you then scorn each messenger whose message does not suit your fancies, charging some with imposture and slaying others?

(Al-Baqara, 87)

The arrogant are the people of Hell who are destined to dwell there for eternity:

To those who reject Our signs and treat them with arrogance, no opening will there be of the gates of heaven, nor will they enter the garden, until a camel can pass through the eye of a needle. Such is Our reward for those in sin. For them there is Hell, as a couch (below) and sheets of fire will cover them: such is Our requital of those who do wrong.

(Al-Araf, 40-41)

But those who reject Our signs and treat them with arrogance,- they are companions of the Fire, to dwell therein for ever.

(Al-Araf, 36)

Those who opposed and rebelled against the Messengers were arrogant, as were those who fought against them. The people, defined as “leaders of the unbelievers”, or “those who behaved proudly ” in the Qur’an, declined to obey the messenger due to their pride and arrogance. They simply rejected the guidance of another human being to the righteous way. Their perverseness knew no bounds. The pride of the leaders of communities is frequently mentioned in the Qur’an.

The leaders of those who behaved proudly among his people said to those who were reckoned powerless - those among them who believed: “Do you really believe that Salih is a messenger from his Lord?” They replied: “We do indeed believe in the revelation which has been sent through him. Those who were haughty said: “For our part, we reject what you believe in.”

(Al-Araf, 75-76)

The leaders those who were proud from among his people said: “O Shu’aib! we shall certainly drive you out of our city - you and those who believe with you; or else you and they shall have to return to our ways and religion.” He replied: “What! even though we detest them?”

(Al-Araf, 88)

Arrogant people set the highest value upon social status, prosperity and fame. Any messenger who cannot lay claim to any of these material props will therefore be rejected outright by them as a person they presume to be incapable of leading humanity to the right path. The commonest shared trait of unbelievers is their propensity to revolt against Allah’s chosen messengers.

In the Qur’an, the rebellion of the children of Israel against Talut, a leader sent to them, is thus narrated:

Their Prophet said to them: “Allah had appointed Talut as your king.” They said: “How can he exercise authority over us when we are better fitted than He to exercise authority, and he is not even gifted with wealth in abundance?” He said: “Allah has chosen him above you, and has gifted him abundantly with knowledge and bodily prowess: Allah grants His authority to whom He pleases. Allah cares for all, and He knows all things.”

(Al-Baqara, 247)

During the period of Prophet Mohammed also, the prominent people of the community vehemently opposed him saying, “Why has this Qur’an not been sent down to some leading man in either of the two (chief) cities?” (Az-Zukhruf, 31). Their antagonism resulted quite simply from their habit of assessing people according to their wealth, properties or reputation. If the messenger had been a “leading man in either of the two (chief) cities” then they would have obeyed him. However, obeying someone only because he had been chosen by Allah seemed

difficult for them on account of their arrogance. The same thing happened to Salih who was sent to the people of Thamud:

For they said: "What! a man! a solitary one from among ourselves! Shall we follow such a one? Truly should we then be straying in our minds, and mad! Has the Message been sent to him, of all people amongst us? He is indeed a liar, and an insolent one!"

(Al-Qamar, 24-25)

In understanding how arrogance misleads men, Surat' Al-Muddaththir enlightens us greatly. It gives the example of a man who is given many favours by Allah, who listens to and understands the words of Allah, but who disobeys Allah out of sheer arrogance. For this he deserves to be punished by being consigned to Hell:

Leave to Me the creature whom I created bare and alone!—to whom I granted resources in abundance, and sons to be by his side!—to whom I made (life) smooth and comfortable! Yet is he greedy for Me to add yet more; By no means! For to Our Signs he has been refractory! Soon I will afflict him with a mountain of calamities! For he thought and he plotted. And woe to him! How he plotted! Yes, woe to him, how he plotted! He looked around him, then he frowned and he scowled; then he turned back and was haughty. Then he said "This is nothing but magic, derived from of old; this is nothing but the word of a mortal!" Soon I will cast him into Hell-Fire! And what will explain to you what Hell-Fire is? It permits nothing to endure, and spares no one! It burns the skins of men!

(Al-Muddaththir, 11-29)

In another verse, the situation of an arrogant person in Hell is described as follows:

A voice will cry: "Seize him and drag him into the midst of the blazing fire! Then pour over his head the penalty of boiling water, saying, `Taste this! Truly, you were mighty and an honourable man. Surely this is what you used to doubt.'"

(Ad-Dukhan, 47-50)

Man is merely a servant of Allah. Keeping in mind his actual state before Allah will make him appreciate deep in his heart the favours bestowed by Him. In this way, he realizes that he does not possess anything, for they are Allah's endowments. He finds real relief in being grateful to Allah. If he starts to display arrogance on account of what has been granted to him, before long he loses the pleasure he derives from that favour. Soon he witnesses the total loss of the favour in question. The whole system is simply based on understanding one's position before Allah; Allah guides the one who realizes that he is His servant. Otherwise, he will incur the wrath of his Lord, as the following verse relates:

"...those who disdain His service through arrogance - shall all be brought before Him."

(An-Nisa, 172)

But those who reject Our signs and treat them with arrogance, shall be companions of the Fire, to dwell therein forever.

(Al-Araf, 36)

On the contrary, those who are not arrogant, but moderate are true servants of Allah, and will be rewarded with heaven:

True abode of the hereafter We shall give to those who intend neither high-handedness nor mischief on earth: and the end is best for the righteous.

(Al-Qasas, 83)

Trust in Allah and Submission

Two important indicators of faith are trust in Allah and submission to Him. Between a believer and a non-believer, these draw the ultimate distinguishing line.

An unbeliever perceives the whole world as being in a state of chaos. He assumes that he owes his existence to pure “coincidence.” According to him, the happenings around him also take place by pure coincidence. Such a point of view is, however, detrimental to the mental well-being of a person; he feels insecure and never trusts anyone. Nothing eases his fears for the future. He spends long hours planning ahead. Hundreds, even thousands of independent factors work to turn his life into one of sheer disappointment. He feels feeble; he may at any time develop an incurable disease. Something unexpected may happen one day and he may lose his job or someone he loves. Believing these incidents to occur at random, he feels consternation at every such event. This means worshipping hundreds of independent factors as gods. In Qur’anic terms, the fearing or trusting of anything implies taking it as a god besides Allah. A believer, on the contrary, conceives the essence of this world; that Allah holds control over every living thing and nothing occurs without His permission and knowledge. This fact, enunciated in such verses as “...There is not a moving creature, but He has a grasp of its forelock...”(Hud, 56) and “To Him belongs every being that is in the heavens and on earth: all are devoutly obedient to Him.”(Ar-Rum, 26) is only conceivable by “those who by tokens understand.”
(Al-Hijr, 75)

A believer is fundamentally assured of the fact that “Allah regulates all affairs.” (Ar- Rad, 2). He is well aware that all the incidents which punctuate his life are predestined. That is why he never reckons an incident to be an “unfortunate” one. Though it may seem to be “unfortunate” it essentially implies goodness. First of all, nothing is futile in Allah’s creation. Whatever the events affecting the life of a believer, they are definitely designed to bring goodness to him. Even if an event seems outwardly to be an unfortunate one, a believer should persevere and put his trust in Allah. Ultimately, Allah will turn it to the good.

In his arduous struggle, a believer finds relief and peace in this cast of mind. When we consult the Qur’an, we see that all messengers and their followers met with extremely adverse and seemingly “unfortunate” incidents. Almost all unbelievers were oppressed, threatened, assaulted, tortured, insulted, and some even were killed. Yet, nothing daunted them; not even the strongest tempest of adversity and the mightiest of armies. They stood firm and strong, never giving up in their resolution. The essence of such an attitude lies solely in the consciousness a believer builds; that everything is created by Allah and, accordingly, is destined to bring goodness. Believers are well aware of the fact that Allah always provides guidance to believers and surely places no burden on any soul that it cannot bear. In the Qur’an hundreds of verses call for trust and submission in Allah:

Say: “Nothing will happen to us except what Allah has decreed for us: He is our Protector. In Allah let the believers put their trust.”

(Al-Tawba, 51)

The word in Arabic used for “trust in Allah” is “tewekkul”, which means “taking as guardian and helper”. However, unlike its common usage, the word has a totally different connotation in the Qur’an. Ordinarily, its meaning is perceived as “doing one’s best about a

situation and then putting the rest in the care of Allah". But the concept of "taking as guardian and helper" conveys rather more than this. It means leaving the entire course of events and their consequences in Allah's change.

At this point, we must avoid an essential misconception: putting the course of events in the care of Allah in no way means avoidance of becoming involved in daily affairs. On the contrary, a believer deals with every stage of a problem or event, shouldering all responsibilities. Indeed, the true meaning of "trust in Allah" lies in being totally aware that everything we experience and everything we do takes place under Allah's control; that is why believers take the initiative in anything they undertake by "taking Him as a guardian and helper."

The prayers of the prophets recounted in the Qur'an instruct us about the significance of this subject. In the Surat'Al-Naml, the Prophet Solomon says: "O my Lord! Order me, so that I may be grateful for Your favours, which you have bestowed on me and on my parents, and so that I may do the good works that will please You. And admit me, by Your Grace, to the ranks of Your righteous servants." (Al-Naml, 19). This prayer explicitly reveals that Solomon is aware that he can perform his tasks only if Allah so wills and asks Him to give His approval when he becomes committed to action.

This is actually the rationale lying behind "trust in Allah." A believer is well aware that both the external world and his soul are entities completely under the control of Allah. Accordingly, he submits himself—his soul—to His Almighty Creator. Consequently, a believer becomes exceedingly brave; so brave as to challenge the whole world all alone yet calm and confident as if there were no besetting dangers. The kind of attitude a believer shows in times of trouble and difficulty is described in many stories of the Qur'an. That of the Prophet Noah is one of them:

Relate to them the story of Noah. He said to his people: "O my people, if it offends you that I should stay with you and commemorate the signs of Allah, in Allah have I put my trust. So, muster all your idols and decide upon your course of action. Do not intrigue in secret. Then pass your sentence on me, and give me no respite. If you turn back, I asked of you no recompense; my reward is only with Allah, and I have been commanded to be of those who submit to Allah's will (in Islam). (Jonah, 71-72)

Shu'aib, too, assumed the same attitude towards his people:

He said: "O my people! If I have a clear sign from my Lord, and He has given me sustenance pure and good as from Himself should I not guide you? I do not wish, in opposition to you, to do that which I forbid you to do. I only desire (your) betterment to the best of my ability and my success (in my task) can come only from Allah. In Him I trust, and Him I turn in repentance.

(Hud, 88)

In many other verses in the Qur'an, trust in Allah and the perseverance the believers display is likewise stressed:

But if they turn away, say: "Allah suffices to me: there is no god but He: in Him I put my trust. He the Supreme Lord of the throne of glory!"

(Al-Tawba, 129)

For true believers are those who, when Allah is mentioned, feel a tremor in their hearts, and as they listen to His revelations, they find their faith strengthened, and put all their trust in their Lord.

(Al-Anfal, 2)

To Allah belong the unseen secrets of the heavens and the earth, and to Him goes back every affair for decision: then worship Him, and put your trust in Him: your Lord is not unmindful of what you do.

(Hud, 123)

Thus have We sent you forth to a people before whom long since other peoples have passed away so that you may recite them what We send down to you by inspiration; yet they reject Him, the Most Gracious! Say: "He is my Lord! There is no god but He! In Him I put my trust, and to Him I shall return."

(Al-Rad, 30)

Their messengers said to them: "True, we are human like yourselves, but Allah bestows His grace on such of his servants as He pleases. It is not for us to bring you proof, except as Allah permits. And in Allah let all men of faith put their trust.

(Abraham, 11-12)

Say: "He is (Allah) Most Gracious: We have believed in Him, and in Him we have put our trust. So, soon you will know which of us it is that is in manifest error."

(Al-Mulk, 29)

The person who trusts in Allah and takes Him as guardian and protector should be well aware of the fact that there is nobody else to trust in and take as a guardian. Nothing troubles a believer as long as he prays to Allah, and trusts in Him. By the will of Allah, events will proceed and end in the best possible way for a believer. As it says in the Qur'an:

Put your trust in Allah, and Allah is All-sufficient as a Disposer of affairs."

(Al-Ahzap, 3)

In another verse it is related as follows:

...And for those who fear Allah, He will always find a means of salvation, and will provide for them from sources they could never imagine. And if anyone puts his trust in Allah, He is all sufficient for him. For Allah will surely accomplish his purpose: indeed, for all things Allah has appointed a due proportion.

(At-Talaq, 2-3)

Unless Allah permits, nobody can do harm to the believers. Nobody can kill a man unless Allah wills. It is only Allah who can take away life. Hence, it is pointless to feel fear for any being except Allah. The Qur'an repeatedly reminds believers of this fact:

Secret counsels are only inspired by the Evil One, in order that he may cause grief to the believers; but he cannot harm them in the least, except as Allah permits; in Allah let the believers put their trust.

(Al-Mujadila, 10)

Do not obey the unbelievers and the hypocrites, and pay no heed not to their insolence, but put your trust in Allah. For Allah is All-Sufficient as a Disposer of affairs.

(Al-Ahzap, 48)

If indeed you ask them who created the heavens and the earth, they will be sure to say, "Allah". Say: "Do then that the things you invoke besides Allah, can if Allah wills some Penalty for me, remove His Penalty? Or if He wills some Grace for me, can they keep back his Grace?" Say: "Allah is All -sufficient for me! " In Him let the faithful put their trust."

(Az-Zumar, 38)

One who trusts in and submits to Allah, and who takes Allah as the true guardian and helper is saved from the temptations of Satan. In the Qur'an this is expressed in the verse: "No authority has Satan over those who believe and put their trust in their Lord." (An-Nahl, 99). Those attaining the benevolence of Allah in the hereafter will be the ones who put their trust in Allah and submit to Him.

Whatever you are given here is (but) a convenience of this life: but that which is with Allah is better and more lasting: it is for those who believe and put their trust in their Lord.

(Ash-Shura, 36)

There is nobody but Allah to whom one can always turn for help, guidance and mercy. Jacob says "...None can command except Allah: in Him I put my trust: and let all who are faithful put their trust in Him." (Joseph, 67) There is no god except Allah, so He is the only protector and guardian. Allah! There is no god but He: and in Allah, therefore, let the believers put their trust.

(At-Taghabun, 13)

And put your trust in the Ever-living, Who never dies. Celebrate His praise; is well acquainted with the faults of all His servants.

(Al-Furqan, 58)

Praying for Forgiveness and Repentance

All through their lives, certain people pursue a flawless image for themselves. Their efforts center around one goal: to be perfect and to look perfect. This is a natural consequence of finding it degrading to make a mistake. The ideal person, they consider, is one who can project an aura of impeccability.

However, this “flawlessness” is an illusionary goal. Neither is it one of the attributes of a believer we find extolled in the Qur’an. We would go so far as to say that such a “believer model” does not exist. For man is inherently weak, humble and helpless before Allah; and can consequently make mistakes all throughout his life. No doubt, he will always do his best to avoid mistakes and sins, yet, being a frail servant of Allah, he will not be successful in being free of all mistakes.

In the Qur’an we are informed that man has faults and sins before Allah:

If Allah were to punish men according to what they deserve, He would not leave on the surface of the earth one single living creature: but He gives them respite for a stated term: when their term expires, truly, (they will know that) Allah has in His sight all His Servants.

(Fatir, 45)

In accordance with this divine command stated in the Qur’an, the attitude expected of a believer is not that of being faultless or sinless. He is only expected to constantly seek forgiveness from Allah.

This is actually an attribute which makes the distinction between a believer and non-believer: Unbelievers struggle to cover up their faults and sins. Yet, a believer never tries to do this.

What is important for him is to feel an inner regret and consequently turn to Allah and seek His forgiveness.

While reading the Qur’an, we see that the willingness to ask for forgiveness is a natural and unfailing attribute of the believers. On that account, we understand that believers never see themselves as beings purified of all sins and faults. On the contrary, they continually seek refuge in Allah’s mercy. In the following verse, turning to Allah in repentance is regarded as one of the important attributes of a believer:

Those that turn to Allah in repentance; that serve Him, and praise Him; that fast in devotion to the cause of Allah; that bow down and prostrate themselves in prayer; that enjoin good and forbid evil; and observe the limit set by Allah, shall be richly rewarded. Proclaim the glad tidings to the believers.

(Al-Tawba, 112)

The distinction between and inter-relatedness of the concepts of repentance and forgiveness should be carefully considered.

Asking for forgiveness of Allah is a regular aspect of worship for believers. Man can ask forgiveness of Allah all day long for all his sins, whether deliberately or unintentionally committed. Moreover, as well as asking for forgiveness for oneself, one can also do it for other believers, as stated in the Qur’an.

In Arabic, the word for “asking for forgiveness” is “istigfar” which is “asking for Allah's attribute of Gafur.

(Gafur (G-F-R), in Arabic, means to “cover, protect, hide totally, recover.”)

Thus, asking for forgiveness of Allah is like pledging to purify oneself and hence seeking refuge in the mercy and grace of Allah. In the Qur'an the believers pray saying, "Our Lord! Forgive us our sins, remove from us our iniquities, and take to Yourself our souls in the company of the righteous." (Al-Imran, 193). The judgement of Allah regarding this is as below:

I am with you: if you (but) say your prayers regularly, practice regular charity, believe in My messengers, honour and assist them, and loan to Allah a beautiful loan, indeed I will rid you of your evils, and admit you to gardens with rivers flowing beneath; but if any of you, after this, denies Me, he will truly have wandered from the path of rectitude.

(Al-Maeda, 12)

As mentioned above, praying for forgiveness of Allah may be both for sins, committed intentionally or unintentionally, as well as for the sins of other believers. This is the most important distinction between asking for forgiveness and repentance. Although praying for forgiveness is a regular prayer of the believers, repentance is the steadfast attitude taken towards a particular sin or fault, or the giving of a firm decision not to turn to that sin again.

Repentance is seeking refuge in Allah for one's sin, promising not to commit that sin again and, to this end asking the guidance and help of Allah. The exact meaning of repentance is "to turn back". Thus, repentance expresses an absolute commitment not to commit any particular sin again.

The intention behind repentance is not to repeat the same sin. Allah enjoins the faithful thus: "O you who believe! Turn to Allah with sincere repentance, in the hope that your Lord will remove from you your ills and admit you to Gardens beneath which Rivers flow..." (At-Tahrim, 8)

However, this is not to say that a believer repents for a sin or fault only once. He may repent on one occasion, and then, in a moment of weakness, repeat the same sin. However, the mercy of Allah never ceases to encompass him. This is why he can still repent to Allah and seek refuge in Him. Allah is always ready to show grace and mercy to the believers. This is stated in the Qur'an as below:

"O my Servants who have transgressed against their souls! Do not despair of the Mercy of Allah: for Allah forgives all sins: for He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. Turn to your Lord (in repentance) and bow to His Will, before the Penalty comes upon you: after that you shall not be helped.

(Az-Zumar, 53-54)

Still, there is one kind of repentance Allah will not accept: the insincere repentance offered when death comes to a man. This is actually the moment a man meets the angels of death. Of this the Qur'an says:

Allah accepts the repentance of those who do evil in ignorance and repent soon afterwards; to them Allah will turn in mercy: for Allah is full of knowledge and wisdom. Of no avail is the repentance of those who continue to do evil, until death faces one of them, and he says, "Now I have indeed; repented indeed" nor of those who die rejecting Faith: for them We have prepared a most grievous punishment.

(An-Nisa, 17-18)

In the Qur'an Allah gives the striking example of such an act of repentance made at the last moment. Pharaoh, who chased Moses and the believers in order to kill them, ended by expressing his repentance while he drowned in the sea, a miracle wrought by Allah.

"...At length, when overwhelmed with the flood, he said: I believe that there is no god except Him Whom the Children of Israel believe in: I am of those who submit (to Allah in Islam).

(Jonah, 90)

However Allah's response to him was as follows:

"...Ah now! But a little while before, you were in rebellion! And you perpetrated mischief and violence!

(Jonah, 91)

Since repentance is essential to the eternal salvation of man, one should well be aware of its importance and observe this form of worship to the best of one's ability. One may have sinned extensively or have rebelled against one's Creator. Yet, Allah encompasses His servants with so much mercy that He grants eternal salvation in response to a sincere repentance:

When those who believe in Our signs, come to you say: "Peace be upon you: Your Lord has decreed for Himself (the rule of) mercy: truly, if any of you committed evil in ignorance, and thereafter repented, and mended his ways, he would find Allah Oft-forgiving and Most Merciful.

(Al-Anaam, 54)

Keep in mind that Allah even forgives unbelievers and hypocrites who fought against Him and His Messenger, if they turn back to Allah with sincere and true repentance:

The Hypocrites shall be cast into the lowest depths of the Fire: no helper will you find for them; But those who repent, mend their ways, hold fast to Allah, and are sincere in their devotion to Him—they shall be numbered with the believers. And soon Allah will grant to the believers a reward of immense value.

(An-Nisa, 145-146)

Those who conceal the clear signs We have sent down, and the guidance, after We have made it clear for the people in the Book—on them shall be Allah's curse, and the curse of those entitled to curse, except those who repent and make amends and openly declare the Truth. Toward them I shall relent; for I am the Relenting one and Most Merciful.

(Al-Baqara, 159-160)

This is a great opportunity Allah grants to His servants. He commands man never to be overwhelmed by despair due to any sin he has committed and always to turn to Him in hope. However, misinterpretation of this concept and an insincere attitude do not earn a man divine approval. Knowing the commandments of Allah, yet deliberately committing sins, saying "no matter what happens I will be forgiven" shows completely flawed reasoning. Such are the people who "reject faith after they accepted it, and then go on adding to their defiance of faith." Only the repentance of those who out of ignorance commit sins accepted. The repentance of an insincere person who simply take repentance as the freedom to commit sins is, however rejected. Stress is laid on this in the Qur'an: "But those who reject faith after they have accepted it, and then go on adding to their defiance of faith, will never have their repentance accepted; for they are those who have of set purpose gone astray." (Al-Imran, 90)

One point needs clarification here: it is quite possible that, due to ignorance, being in a state of heedlessness or indulging oneself in one's own desires, one may very well commit sins. However, if one realizes one's faults and sincerely repents, Allah may well be forgiving. However, people who commit sins, although knowing the judgements of Allah, saying, "I will

be forgiven no matter what happens," are merely deceivers. That is why their repentance is not acceptable to Allah.(Allah knows the best).

It is hardly necessary to say that heartfelt regret and sincerity are the keys to divine forgiveness. The Quranic injunction: "Call on your Lord with humility and in private..." (Al-Araf, 55) also applies when showing contrition asking for forgiveness. While repenting for serious errors especially, deep regret and a sincere attitude are essential. As an example of repentance and forgiveness, the Qur'an cites the case of the three Muslims who were left behind, when all others had gone to fight in the cause of Allah, thereby committing a great sin;

Allah turned with favour to the Prophet, the Muhajirs, and the Ansar, who followed him in a time of distress, when the hearts of some of them had nearly swerved from duty; but He turned to them (also): for He is Most Kind, and Most Merciful to them. He turned in mercy also to the three who were left behind; they felt guilty to such a degree that the earth seemed constrained to them, for all its spaciousness, and their very souls seemed straitened to them, and they perceived that there was no fleeing from Allah and no refuge but in Him. Then He turned to them, so that they might repent: for Allah is the Forgiving One and Most Merciful.

(Al-Tawba, 117-118)

Asking forgiveness of Allah and repenting one's sins serve as pure expressions of being a sincere servant to Allah. The believer should be well aware that he may commit sins, but that he should take refuge in the mercy and grace of Allah. Simply worrying, or feeling grief for one's former sins is quite pointless. Man should consider the story of the messengers who made some errors, yet continued their struggle after sincerely repenting. Man should trust in the forgiveness of Allah.

In the Qur'an it is mentioned that praying for forgiveness and expressing repentance are ways to eternal salvation:

If it were not for Allah's grace and mercy to you, and that Allah is Forgiving and full of Wisdom, (you would indeed be ruined).

(Al-Noor, 10)

Prayer

Prayer shows a deep sense of appreciating one's weak and helpless state before one's Creator. It is a clear indication of the fact that the human being is a frail creature who can never satisfy his needs or attain his goals alone, unless they have Allah's blessing. Prayer is the purest, most explicit and most honest way of expressing one's status as a servant before one's Creator. In the Qur'an it is stated that a basic attribute of the believer is his "calling on Allah morning and evening":

And keep your soul content with those who call on their Lord morning and evening, seeking His pleasure; and let not your eyes pass beyond them, seeking the pomp and glitter of this Life; nor obey any whose heart We have permitted to neglect the remembrance of Us, one who follows his own desires, whose case has gone beyond all bounds.

(Al-Kahf, 28)

The true meaning and content of prayer should be well grasped, since what most people understand by prayer considerably differs from what the Qur'an actually tells us about it. This is solely because information about prayer is mostly gathered from sources outside the Qur'an, such as tradition, parents, ancestors, etc. That is why the Qur'anic standpoint and the morale it inculcates should be well comprehended.

The Qur'an explains the kind of prayer which is made "with humility" While praying, man should deeply recognize his weaknesses and frailty in the presence of His Creator and feel that he is desperately in need of His guidance. His prayer will thus surely meet the criteria set by Allah, as stated in the following verse:

Call on your Lord with humility and in private: for Allah does not love those who trespass beyond bounds.

(Al-Araf, 55)

The prayers of the believers in the Qur'an set an example for all believers. That of Zakariya is one of them:

Behold! he cried to his Lord in secret, praying: "O my Lord! infirm indeed are my bones, and the hair of my head glistens with grey: but never am I unblest, O my Lord, in my prayer to you! Now I fear what my relatives and colleagues will do after me: but my wife is barren: so give me an heir as from yourself."

(Maryam, 3-5)

Another attribute of a believer's prayer is being in a mood of mingled "fear and hope".

They forsake their beds, while they call on their Lord, in fear and hope: and they spend in charity out of the sustenance which We have bestowed on them.

(As-Sajda, 16)

The believers fear Allah with sincere and true respect, while hoping for His grace and mercy.

Allah accepts the sincere prayer intended to seek His good pleasure.

When My servants ask you about Me, I am indeed close to them: I answer to the prayer of every suppliant when he calls on Me: let them also, listen with a will, to My call, and believe in Me so that they may walk in the right way.

(Al-Baqara, 186)

And your Lord says: "Call on Me; I will answer your prayer: but those who are too arrogant to serve Me will surely find themselves in Hell - in humiliation!"

While praying, man should certainly know that Allah will respond to his call. He should be aware that Allah is the Master of all, Omnipotent and Omniscient; that He is All-Knowing and All-Seeing. In an ardent expectation, a believer never becomes despondent and patiently awaits for the response of Allah. Having a firm belief in His justice, he avoids taking an anxious and desperate attitude. The mind of a believer adhering to the guidance of the Qur'an never harbours doubts about the answer Allah would give to his call. Anyone who is beset by doubts would from the very beginning display a contradictory attitude to the reasoning of the Qur'an. Beneath the very essence of prayer, there lies a sincere approach and deep faith in Allah, as the prophet Salih said, "...my Lord is always near, and ready to answer." (Hud, 61) The believer fully trusts in Allah.

However the fact that Allah answers his servants' calls does not necessarily mean that the suppliant will get whatever he wishes. This is because sometimes an individual may ask for something which is harmful for him. Such a call will certainly not be answered, and Allah will grant something better to his servant.

An example given by a famous Islamic scholar Said-i Nursi, illustrates this subject very well. A physician is called to see a sick child. The child asks the physician for a particular medicine he likes. However, the physician knows from experience that that particular medicine is no cure. So, he provides a totally different treatment and heals his young patient.

Allah totally encompasses man and knows exactly he his needs. He always responds to a sincere call, yet His answer might not be in accord with the desires of the devotee. As the Qur'an puts it: "You may dislike a thing which is good for you, and love a thing which is bad for you. But Allah knows, and you do not know." (Al-Baqara, 216)

Like the child in the aforementioned example, a man may not distinguish good from evil. Hence it is quite possible that he may be asking his Creator for something detrimental: "The prayer that man should make for good, he makes for evil; for man is given to hasty (deeds)." (Al-Isra, 11)

Accordingly, man should primarily seek the Will and Mercy of Allah. He should ask Him for an honourable and mature soul. Allah knows what is best for man. The prayer of Solomon sets a good example for all believers: "...O my Lord! so order me that I may be grateful for Your favours, which You have bestowed on me and on my parents, and that I may do good works that will please You..." (Al-Naml, 19)

Furthermore, believers are welcome to ask for anything praised in the Qur'an. In a sincere and honest spirit, man should not restrain himself from asking for anything he would like to have. Allah knows exactly what His servants wants. As a matter of fact, He is the One placing all the desires and wishes in his soul.

Allah answers the sincere prayers of the believers. The past communities destroyed by the prophet's prayer's are examples to this;

They (prophets) sought victory and decision (there and then), and frustration was the lot of every powerful obstinate transgressor.

(Abraham, 15)

In the Qur'an many examples are cited. Allah has rewarded the messengers and the believers with many graces :

And remember Job, when He cried to his Lord, "Truly distress has seized me, but You are the Most Merciful of those that are merciful." So We listened to him: We removed the distress afflicting him, and We restored his people to him, and doubled their number, as a grace from Ourselves, and an admonition to all who serve Us. And remember Isma'il, Idris, and Zul-kifl, all men of constancy and patience; We admitted them to Our mercy, for they were of the righteous ones. And remember Yunus, when he departed in wrath. He imagined that We had no power over him! But he cried in the darkness, "There is no god but you: glory be to you: I was indeed wrong!" So We listened to him: and delivered him from distress: and thus do We deliver those who have faith. And remember Zakariya, when he cried to his Lord: "O my Lord! do not leave me without offspring, though you are the best of inheritors." So We listened to him: and We granted him Yahya: We cured his wife's barrenness for him. These three vied with each other in good works and called on Us with love and reverence, and humbled themselves before Us.

(Al-Anbiya, 83-90)

The worshipper who prays realizes that Allah is All-Knowing and All-Seeing and expresses his respect for and fear of Him. He never hesitates to admit his status as a servant before Him.

Since prayer is an important worship, it is not only done to make a wish. Every need or wish signals the time of this worship. Since man constantly needs and demands things, he should also pray consistently. There of course, are particular times for prayer: regular night and morning prayer times are mentioned in the Qur'an as the proper moments for prayer in the Qur'an.

Nevertheless, man should consistently pray all day long since every course of action proceeds under the control of Allah. Man should turn to Him for guidance and help in all his deeds. Moreover, he should pray for Allah's acceptance of his services. The prayer of Abraham is an example:

And remember Abraham and Isma'il raised the foundations of the House with this prayer:

Our Lord! Accept this service from us: For you are the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing.

(Al-Baqara, 127)

The believers who pray to Allah, and turn to Him under all circumstances are described in Surat'Al-Imran, as "men who celebrate the praises of Allah, standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides..." (Al-Imran, 191). The believers are naturally praised in the Qur'an for this attitude.

For Abraham was, without doubt, forbearing of faults, compassionate, and devout.

(Hud, 75)

Abraham was indeed a paragon, a devoutly obedient to Allah, and true in Faith, and he associated no other gods with Allah.

(Al-Nahl, 120)

Have patience at what they say, and remember our servant David, the man of strength: for he always turned to Allah.

(Sad, 17)

" Truly We found him (Ayyub) full of patience and constancy. How excellent he was in Our service! He always turned to Us!

(Sad, 44)

The verses below are a key to understanding the significance of prayer:

Say (to the Rejecters): "My Lord would not care for you were not for your prayer. But you have indeed rejected Him, and soon will come the inevitable (punishment)!"

(Al-Furqan, 77)

In the Qur'an, one point is repeatedly stressed: now and then pagans also pray to Allah. However a great difference exists between the prayer of pagans and that of the believers.

The believers turn to Allah under all circumstances. Whether in times of ease or difficulty, their attitude never changes; they keep praying being conscious of their frailty before Allah.

Pagans, on the other hand, keep themselves constantly distant from Allah. Only hardship makes them feel their weakness before Allah and leads them to turn to Him. Their prayer said in times of trouble, is indeed a sincere one. Yet, sooner do things take a turn for the better than they forget that they prayed for the mercy of Allah and remain ungrateful:

We find several references in the Qur'an to this pagan attitude . Here are some examples:

When misfortune befell man, He cried to Us in all postures- lying down on his side, or sitting, or standing. But when We relieved his affliction, he went on his way, as if he had never cried to Us for our help. Thus the deeds of transgressors seem fair in their eyes!

(Jonah, 12)

When We bestow favours on man, he turns away, and holds himself aloof; but when evil seizes him, he comes to us and is loud in prayer!

(Fussilat, 51)

When evil befalls man, he prays to his Lord, turning to Him in repentance: but when He bestows His favour upon him, he forgets what he has cried and prayed for, and he sets up rivals to Allah, thus leading others away from Allah's Path. Say, "Enjoy your blasphemy for a little while: truly, you are one of the Companions of the Fire!"

(Az-Zumar, 8)

Now, when evil befalls man, he cries out to Us: but when We bestow a favour upon him from Ourselves he says, "This has been given to me because of a certain knowledge I have!" By no means! This is but a trial, but most of them do not understand!

(Az-Zumar, 49)

When evil befalls men, they cry out to their Lord, turning back to Him in repentance: but when He gives them a taste of His Mercy, behold, some of them pay part-worship to other gods besides their Lord.

(Al-Room, 33)

In some of the verses, the example of a ship is given. In a sinking ship, man understands the emergency of his situation and sincerely prays, expressing his repentance and asking for salvation. This is surely a time of desperation when a person comprehends that no other soul can save him. It is then that he turns to Allah. However, when Allah rescues him, he again assumes his former attitude. This is certainly a great distortion of true piety:

It is He Who enables them to travel over land and sea. They board their ships; they set sail, rejoicing in a favourable wind. Then comes a raging tempest and the waves surge upon them from all sides, and they think they are being overwhelmed. They cry out to Allah, sincerely offering their allegiance to Him saying, "If you deliver us from this, peril, we shall truly show our gratitude!"

But when He delivers them, behold! they transgress insolently in the land in defiance of right! O mankind! your insolence is against your own souls. Take your enjoyment in this life: in the end, to Us you shall return, and We shall show you the truth of all that you have done.

(Jonah, 22-23)

When a wave covers them like the canopy of clouds, they call to Allah, offering Him sincere devotion. But when He has delivered them safely to land, some of them falter between right and wrong. But none reject Our Signs except the perfidious and ungrateful!

(Luqman, 32)

Say: "Who delivers you from the perils of land and sea, when you call out to Him in humility and in silent terror saying: 'If only He delivers us from these dangers, we vow we shall truly show our gratitude?'" Say: "It is Allah who delivers you from these and all other afflictions, and yet you worship false gods!"

(Al-Anaam, 63-64)

Believers should constantly pray to Allah and put their trust in Him, knowing that there is no one else to help or guard them.

Call then upon Allah with sincere devotion to Him, even though the Unbelievers may detest it.

(Al-Ghafir, 14)

Say: "I do no more than invoke my Lord, and I do not associate any false god with Him."

(Al-Jinn, 20)

The believer attains true gratification only when he asks for the help of Allah. He feels the security of being cared for and guarded by his Creator. This is the highest degree of happiness that one can ever attain both in this world and the hereafter. Thus, prayer is a source of great satisfaction which will also continue in the hereafter. The Qur'an states that believers will keep praying also in the hereafter:

Those who believe, and do good works will be guided by their Lord because of their faith: beneath them will flow rivers in gardens of bliss. (This will be) their cry therein: "Glory be to You, O Allah!" And "Peace" will be their greeting therein! and the close of their invocation will be: "Praise be to Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds!"

(Jonah, 9-10)

The Prayers From the Qur'an

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Praise be to Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds; Most Gracious, Most Merciful; Master of the Day of Judgment. We worship, you and we seek your aid. Show us the straight way, the way of those on whom You have bestowed your Grace, not of those who have incurred your wrath and who have gone astray.

(Al-Fatiha, 1-7)

And remember Abraham said: "My Lord, make this a land of peace, and feed its people with fruits, such of them as believe in Allah and the last day." He said: "Yes, and such as reject faith, for a while I will grant them their pleasure, but will soon drive them to the torment of the Fire—an evil destination indeed!"

(Al-Baqara, 126)

And remember Abraham and Isma'il raised the foundations of the House with this prayer: "Our Lord! Accept (this service) from us: for You are the All-Hearing, the All-knowing. Our Lord! make of us Muslims, bowing to Your Will, and of our progeny a Muslim people, bowing to your will; and show us our place for the celebration of our rites; and turn to us in Mercy; for you are forgiving and Most Merciful. Our Lord! send amongst them a messenger of their own, who shall declare your signs to them and

instruct them in the scriptures and in wisdom, and purify them of sin: for you are the Exalted in Might and Wise."

(Al-Baqara, 127-129)

There are some who say: "Our Lord! Give us good in this world and good in the hereafter, and defend us from the torment of the Fire!" To these will be allotted what they have earned; Allah is swift in His reckoning.

(Al-Baqara, 201-202)

When they advanced to meet Goliath and his forces, they prayed: "Our Lord! Fill our hearts with constancy and make our steps firm: help us against those that reject faith."

(Al-Baqara, 250)

On no soul does Allah place a burden greater than it can bear. It shall be requited for whatever good and whatever evil it has done. (Pray:) "Our Lord! Do not condemn us if we forget or fall into error; our Lord! Do not lay on us a burden like that which you laid on those before us; Our Lord! Do not lay on us a burden greater than we have strength to bear. Forgive us our sins, and grant us forgiveness. Have mercy on us. You alone are our Protector. Help us against those who stand out against faith."

(Al-Baqara, 286)

"Our Lord!" (they say), "Let not our hearts deviate now after you have guided us, but grant us your own mercy for you are the Giver of bounties without measure. Our Lord! You will surely gather mankind together upon a day about which there is no doubt; for Allah never fails in His promise."

(Al-Imran, 8-9)

Those who say "Our Lord! we have indeed believed: forgive us, then, our sins, and save us from the agony of the Fire."

(Al-Imran, 16)

Behold! a woman of 'Imran said: "O my Lord! I dedicate to you what is in my womb for your special service. So accept this from me. You alone hear and know all things."

(Al-Imran, 35)

There Zakariya prayed to his Lord, saying: "O my Lord! Grant me progeny that is pure: you hear all prayers!

(Al-Imran, 38)

"Our Lord! we believe in what you have revealed, and we follow the Messenger; then write us down among those who bear witness."

(Al-Imran, 53)

All that they said was: "Our Lord! Forgive us our sins and anything We may have done that transgressed our duty: make us firm of foot and help us against those that resist faith."

(Al-Imran, 147)

In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alteration of night and day, there are signs for men of sense; those who celebrate the praises of Allah, standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides, and contemplate the wonders of creation in the heavens and the earth, saying: "Our Lord! not for nothing have you created all this! Glory be to You! Give us salvation from the penalty of the Fire. Our Lord! any whom you cast into the Fire, you will cover with shame, and never will wrong-doers find any helpers! Our Lord! We have heard the call of one calling Us to the true faith saying: 'Believe you in your Lord,' and we have believed. Our Lord! Forgive us our sins, remove from us our iniquities, and take to yourself our souls in the company of the

righteous. Our Lord! Grant us what you promised us through your messengers, and save us from shame on the day of judgment: For you never break your promise.”
(Al-Imran, 191-194)

And when they listen to the revelation received by the Messenger, you will see their eyes overflowing with tears, for they recognise the truth. They pray: “Our Lord! we believe; write us down among the witnesses.

(Al-Maeda, 83)

They said: “Our Lord! We have wronged our own souls. If you do not forgive us and do not bestow upon us Your Mercy, we shall certainly be lost.”

(Al-Araf, 23)

“...Our Lord! decide between us and our people in truth, for you are the best of judges.”

(Al-Araf, 89)

Moses prayed: “O my Lord! forgive me and my brother! Admit us to your mercy! for You are the Most Merciful of those who show mercy!”

(Al-Araf, 151)

“...Our Lord! give us patience and constancy, and take our souls to You as Muslims who bow to your will! ”

(Al-Araf, 126)

(Moses said): “You are our Protector: so forgive us and give us Your mercy; for You are the best of those who forgive. And ordain for us that which is good, in this life and in the hereafter: for we have turned to you.” He said: “With My punishment I visit whom I will; but My mercy extends to all things. That mercy I shall ordain for those who do right, and practise regular charity, and those who believe in Our signs.

(Al-Araf, 155-156)

They said: “In Allah we have put our trust. Our Lord! Do not make us a trial for those who practise oppression; deliver us by Your Mercy from those who reject You.”

(Jonah, 85-86)

Moses prayed: “Our Lord! you have indeed bestowed on Pharaoh and his chiefs splendour and wealth in this life, and so, Our Lord, they mislead men from Your Path. destroy their wealth, and harden their hearts, so that they will not believe until they face the grievous penalty.”

(Jonah, 88)

“O my Lord! you have indeed bestowed on me some power, and taught me something of the interpretation of dreams and events. Creator of the heavens and the earth! you are my Protector in this world and in the hereafter. Take my soul at death as one submitting to your will as a Muslim, and unite me with the righteous.”

(Joseph, 101)

Abraham said “O our Lord! I have settled some of my offspring in a valley without cultivation, near your Sacred House, so that our Lord, they may observe regular worship. So fill the hearts of men with love towards them, and feed them with the earth’s fruits, so that they may give thanks. O our Lord! truly, you know what we conceal and what we reveal: for nothing whatever is hidden from Allah, whether on earth or in heaven.

(Ibrahim, 37-38)

And, out of kindness, treat them (your parents) with humility and tenderness, and say:
"My Lord! bestow on them Your Mercy. They cherished me in childhood."
(Al-Isra, 24)

Say: "O my Lord! Let my entry be by the gate of truth and honour, and likewise my
exit by the gate of truth and honour; and grant me your authority to aid me."
(Al-Isra, 80)

When the youths sought refuge in the cave, they said: "Our Lord! bestow on us Your
Mercy and dispose of our affair for us in the right way!"
(Al-Kahf, 10)

This is a recital of the Mercy of your Lord to His servant Zakariya. Behold! he cried to
his Lord in secret, praying: "O my Lord! infirm indeed are my bones, and the hair of
my head glistens with grey: but never am I unblest, O my Lord, in my prayer to You!
Now I fear what my relatives and colleagues will do after me: but my wife is barren:
so give me an heir as from yourself,- one that will truly represent me, and represent
the posterity of Jacob; and make him, O my Lord! one with whom you are well-
pleased!" (His prayer was answered):

"O Zakariya! We give you good news of a son: his name shall be Yahya: on none by
that name have we conferred distinction before."

He said:

"O my Lord! How shall I have a son, when my wife is barren and I have grown quite
decrepit in my old age?"

He replied:

"Such is the will of your Lord. It shall be no difficult task for Me, for I brought you into
being when you were nothing before."

(Mary, 2-8)

O my Lord! make me and my offspring steadfast in prayers. O our Lord! accept my
prayer. O our Lord! grant us your Forgiveness - me, my parents, and all believers, on
the Day of Reckoning!

(Ibrahim, 40-41)

(Moses) said:

"O my Lord! Put courage into my heart; ease my task for me; and remove the
impediment from my speech, so they may understand what I say: and give me a
counsellor from my family, Aaron, my brother; add to my strength through him, and
make him share my task, so that we may celebrate your praise without stint, and
remember You always. For you are surely watching over us."

(Ta-Ha, 25-35)

And remember Yunus, when he departed in wrath: he imagined that We had no
power over him! But he cried in the darkness, "There is no god but You. Glory be to
You: I was indeed wrong!" So We listened to him, and delivered him from distress
Thus do We deliver those who have faith.

(Al-Anbiya, 87-88)

And (remember) Zakariya, when he cried to his Lord:

"O my Lord! do not leave me without offspring, though you are the best of inheritors."
(Al-Anbiya, 89)

Say:

“O my Lord! if you will show me in my lifetime that which they are warned against, then, O my Lord! Do not put me amongst the people who do wrong!”
(Al-Mumenoon, 93-94)

(Noah) said: “O my Lord! help me, for they accuse me of falsehood!”
(Al-Mumenoon, 26)

And when you have embarked on the Ark - you and those with you, say:

“Praise be to Allah, Who has saved us from the people who do wrong.” And say: “O my Lord! enable me to disembark with your blessing: for you are the Best to enable us to disembark.”
(Al-Mumenoon, 28-29)

(The Prophet) said: “O my Lord! help me: for they accuse me of falsehood.”
(Al-Mumenoon, 39)

And say: “O my Lord! I seek refuge in you from the promptings of the Evil Ones. And I seek refuge in you, O my Lord! lest they should come near me.”
(Al-Mumenoon, 97-98)

So say: “O my Lord! grant us forgiveness and mercy, for you are the Best of those who show mercy!”
(Al-Mumenoon, 118)

And those who pray, “Our Lord! Give us joy in our wives and offspring and give us the grace to lead the righteous. (Al-Furqan, 74)

Abraham said : “O my Lord! bestow wisdom on me, and join me with the righteous; grant me honourable mention on the tongue of truth among the latest generations; make me one of the inheritors of the Garden of Bliss; forgive my father, for that he is among those who have gone astray; and let me not be in disgrace on the Day of Resurrection.”
(Al-Shuara, 83-87)

He (Noah) said: “O my Lord! truly, my people have rejected me. Judge rightly between us, and deliver me and those of the believers who are with me.”
(Al-Shuara, 117-118)

So he (Solomon) smiled,amused at her speech and said: “O my Lord! so order me that I may be grateful for your favours, which you have bestowed on me and on my parents, and so that I may do the good works that will please you: and admit me, by your Grace, to the ranks of your righteous servants.”
(Al-Naml, 19)

He (Moses) prayed: “O my Lord! I have indeed wronged my soul! Forgive me!” So Allah forgave him: for He is the Oft-Forgiving, and Most Merciful. He said: “O my Lord! Because you have bestowed your Grace on me, never shall I be a help to those who sin!”
(Al-Qasas, 16-17)

He (Moses) went away, looking about, in a state of fear. He prayed
“O my Lord! save me from people given to wrong-doing.”
(Al-Qasas, 21)

So he (Moses) watered their flocks for them; then he turned back to the shade, and said:
“O my Lord! truly I am in desperate need of any good that you send me!”

(Al-Qasas, 24)

He (Lot) said: "O my Lord! help me against people who do mischief!"
(Al-Ankaboot, 30)

Abraham said: "O my Lord! Grant me a righteous (son)!"
(As-Saaffat, 100)

He (Solomon) said:"O my Lord! Forgive me, and grant me a kingdom such as will belong to no other after me: for you are the Bountiful Giver."
(Sad, 35)

Those who sustain the Throne of Allah and those around it sing Glory and Praise to their Lord; and believe in Him.They implore forgiveness for those who believe saying :

"Our Lord! Your Reach is over all things, in Mercy and Knowledge. Forgive, then, those who turn in repentance, and follow your Path; and preserve them from the penalty of the Blazing Fire! And grant, our Lord! that they enter the Gardens of Eternity, which you have promised to them, and to the righteous among their fathers, their wives, and their descendants! For you are Exalted in Might, and Full of Wisdom. And preserve them from all ills; and any whom you preserve from ills that day, on them you will have bestowed Mercy indeed: and that for them will truly be the highest achievement."

(Al-Ghafir, 7-9)

We have enjoined on man kindness to his parents. In pain his mother bore him, and in pain she give birth to him. The carrying of the child to his weaning is a period of thirty months. At length, when he reaches the age of full strength and attains forty years, he says:

"O my Lord! Grant that I may be grateful for your favour which you have bestowed upon me, and upon both my parents, so that I may do good works of which you will approve; and be gracious to me in my descendants. Truly, I have turned to you and truly I bow to you in surrender." Such are they from whom We shall accept the best of their deeds and truly overlook their ill deeds: (They shall be) among the Companions of the Garden: a promise truly made to them in this life.

(Al-Ahqaf, 15-16)

And those who came after them say: "Our Lord! Forgive us, and our brethren who came before us into the Faith, and do not leave in our hearts, rancour or a sense of injury against those who have believed. Our Lord! you are indeed Full of Kindness and Most Merciful."

(Al-Hashr, 10)

..."Our Lord! in you we trust, and to you we turn in repentance: you are our Final Goal. Our Lord! Do not expose us to the designs of the Unbelievers. Forgive us, our Lord! for you are the Exalted in Might and Wise."

(Al-Mumtahina, 4-5)

To those who believe Allah sets forth as an example to the wife of Pharaoh. Behold, she said:

"O my Lord! Build for me, in nearness to You, a mansion in the Garden, and save me from Pharaoh and his doings, and save me from those that do wrong."

(At-Tahrim, 11)

And Noah, said: "O my Lord! Do not leave a single one of the Unbelievers, on earth! For if you leave any of them, they will only mislead your devotees, and they will breed none but wicked, ungrateful ones."

(Nooh, 26-27)

Noah Said: "O my Lord! Forgive me, my parents, all who enter my house in faith, and all believing men and believing women: and hasten the destruction of the wrong-doer."

(Nooh, 28)

You shall admonish such a one as follows the Message and fears the (Lord) Most Gracious, though he cannot see Him. Give such a one, therefore, good tidings, of forgiveness and a reward most generous.

(Ya-Seen, 11)