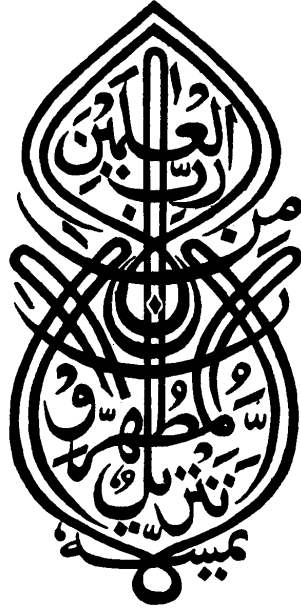


Light

From The

Holy Quran



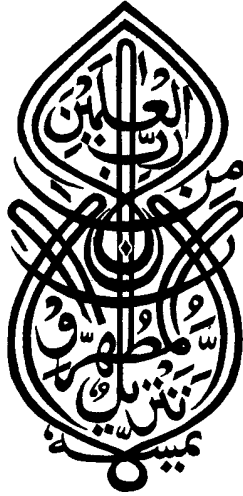
Naseer Ahmad Faruqi

Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam, Lahore, U.S.A.

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Holy Quran



Naseer Ahmad Faruqi

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER AL-FĀTIḤAH (The Opening)

Quranic Lesson No. 1

Attributes of Allah	11
The human soul	13
Knowledge of the Holy Quran	13

Quranic Lesson No. 2

The wisdom of <i>Al-Fātiḥah</i>	15
Man's quest after God	17
All praise is for Allah	17
Proof of existence of the Divine Being	18

Quranic Lesson No. 3

Undeniable proof of Divine existence	19
Modern age of Atheism	20
Recognition of Divine Being through His attributes	21
Purpose of man's creation	21
Divine guidance to all nations	22

Quranic Lesson No. 4

Attributes of Allah are infinite	23
Four basic attributes of Allah	24
Lord of the worlds	24
The Beneficent, the Merciful	26

Quranic Lesson No. 5

Master of the Day of Requital	27
Concept of Paradise and Hell	28
Only Allah is to be served with humility	29
Asking for Divine assistance	30

Quranic Lesson No. 6

Man created for a higher objective	32
The path of the righteous	33
Testimony of a righteous servant of Allah	34

Quranic Lesson No. 7

Closeness to God achieved through the Religion of Islam	36
The Perfect Model of righteousness	37
Those who did not benefit from Divine guidance	39
A comprehensive prayer	40

CHAPTER *AL-BAQARAH* (The Cow)**Quranic Lesson No. 8**

Answer to the prayer of <i>Al-Fātiḥah</i>	42
Lessons to be learned from previous nations	42
Significance of the name <i>Al-Baqarah</i> (The Cow)	43
Allah is the Author of this Book	44
The Book of Guidance	45

Quranic Lesson No. 9

Authenticity of the Holy Quran	47
Meaning of the word <i>Taqwa</i>	49
Guidance for the dutiful	50

Quranic Lesson No. 10

Belief in the Unseen	52
Limitations of human vision	54
Vision of the truthful	56

Quranic Lesson No. 11

Proof of Divine existence	57
Basis of all human development	59
The spiritual eye	60

Quranic Lesson No. 12

Prayer the means of Divine realization	62
God is Omnipresent	62
The true spirit of prayer	63
Rules of prayer	64

Quranic Lesson No. 13

Prayer as a means of guarding against evil	66
Spiritual sustenance	67
Spiritual Ascension	68

Quranic Lesson No. 14

Broad concept of charity	71
Universality of Divine Revelation	74
Belief in Life After Death	75

Quranic Lesson No. 15

Message of the Quran is for all nations	77
Service with humility	78
Freedom of will	79

Quranic Lesson No. 16

Guidance for all nations	82
Purpose of Divine guidance	82
Uniqueness of man's physical and spiritual faculties	84
Man's tendency to follow the religion of his forefathers	85
The consequences of following and ignoring Divine guidance	85

Quranic Lesson No. 17

Purpose of man's creation	87
The metaphor of spiritual sustenance	88
Seven realms of spiritual development	88
Revelation a source of life for the spirit	89
A challenge for the critics of Divine Revelation	90

Quranic Lesson No. 18

Quranic teachings are practical for all times	93
A challenge and a prophecy	95
Stones as fuel of fire	95
The concept of Hell and Heaven	96
Spirit - the real sensor of pain and pleasure	97
Addendum to Lesson No.18	98

Quranic Lesson No. 19

Weakness of false deities	102
Guidance of the Holy Quran	103
The transgressors	104
Quranic debate with the Atheists	105

Quranic Lesson No. 20

The incident of Adam and Eve	107
Incident of Adam and Eve applicable to all of humanity	111

Quranic Lesson No. 21

Summary of previous discussion	113
Divine knowledge given through Revelation	114
Purpose of creation of Angels	117
Divine purpose of giving man freedom of will	118

Quranic Lesson No. 22

How Divine knowledge is given to mankind	120
Adam being taught all the names	121
Submission of the angels to man	122
The Devil and his refusal to submit	122
Concept of Paradise and the forbidden tree	123
Salvation of mankind in following the Quran	124

Quranic Lesson No. 23

Divine blessings on the Israelites	127
The cause of Divine wrath	128
Muslims warned	128
Covenant of the Prophet	129
Objective of prayer	131
Keeping up prayer with humility	132

Quranic Lesson No. 24

Muslims warned not to follow the ways of the Jews	135
Divine warning not heeded by Muslims of the present age	136
Spread of Islam in the West prophesied	138

Quranic Lesson No. 25

Quranic Philosophy of trials and tribulations	140
Prayers in adversity strengthen bond between man and God . .	141
Patience, a Divine attribute	142
Adversity a means of spiritual development	143
The Greatest blessing achieved by those who are patient	144

Quranic Lesson No. 26

The true meaning of worship of One God	145
Signs of the existence and Unity of the Divine Being in the universe	146

Quranic Lesson No. 27

Nature's testimony towards Divine unity	150
Submission to Allah appealing to man's intellect	151
Association with God, the greatest inequity	152
False deities unable to assist in time of real need	153

Quranic Lesson No. 28

Dietary laws in Islam	155
Why certain foods are forbidden	156
Dietary laws relaxed in times of necessity	158
Hadith relating to dietary prohibitions	158

Quranic Lesson No. 29

The true meaning of East and West	160
Condition of the Muslim religious leaders during the 19 th century	162
Minor degrees of righteousness exist in all man made cultures .	162
True righteousness lies in higher moral values	163
Quranic code of higher moral values	163

Quranic Lesson No. 30

Belief in the Day of Judgment, a highly effective deterrent against evil	166
Belief in the angels involves listening to the inner voices of guidance	167
Divine Scripture, a guidance in black and white	167
A human role model essential for the teaching of righteousness	168

Quranic Lesson No. 31

Islam discourages asceticism	170
Quranic philosophy of wealth	171

Quranic Lesson No. 32

Quranic Philosophy of wealth (cont. from the previous Lesson) .	174
Prayer and obligatory charity	175
Keeping up promises	175
Patience the greatest virtue	176

Quranic Lesson No. 33

Unbridled passions the cause of spiritual decline of a nation . . .	178
Islamic teachings suited to human nature	179
Fasting the means to regulate human passions	179
Those exempted from fasting	181

Quranic Lesson No. 34.

Control of the animal within self leads to spiritual progress . . .	183
Guidance for all nations	185
A practical demonstration of the truth of the Holy Quran	186

Quranic Lesson No. 35

Summary of the previous lesson	188
Purpose of man's spiritual journey	189

Quranic Lesson No. 36

Quranic expression an example of true eloquence	192
Divine philosophy of the creation of wealth	193
False means of accumulating wealth	193
Injunctions regarding bribery	195

Quranic Lesson No. 37

Condition of women in Arabia and the world before Islam	197
Holy Quran predicts resurgence of women's rights in the modern age	197
Status of women in Islam	198

Quranic Lesson No. 38

Quranic charter of women liberation	201
Criticism of the charter answered	201
Why men are given a degree above women	203
Public discussions on the subject	204

Quranic Lesson No. 39

An example of the purity of speech and eloquence	206
Disruption of family order	207
Quranic remedy for women who desert their husbands	208
Testimony of a woman in Islam	210
The marriage of a Muslim woman to a follower of the Book . . .	211

Quranic Lesson No. 40

Purpose of warfare	214
Similarities between leaders of Israelite nation and modern politicians	214

Divine criteria for selection of leaders	215
Trial of the Israelite forces	217
Divine criteria for granting victory	218
Quranic Lesson No. 41	
Monetary sacrifice required for striving in the way of Allah . . .	219
Spiritual development is the purpose of spending in Allah's way	221
The true meaning of intercession	222
The meaning of 'Allah'—there is no God (Ilaha) but He	223
Wrongdoing of the disbelievers	224
Quranic Lesson No. 42	
Why Islam discourages monasticism as a way of life	227
Wealth as a means of spiritual development of mankind	228
The purpose of man's creation in the words of a righteous servant of Allah	229
Quranic Lesson No. 43	
Concept of the Divine Being in other religions	
Concept of the Divine Being in Islam	231
Quranic Lesson No. 44	
Fighting with the sword lawful only in defensive wars	237
Death is not the punishment of apostasy in Islam	238
Holy Prophet's life—a magnificent example of religious tolerance	239
Freedom of will essential for spiritual development	239
Divine guidance necessary to save mankind	240
Holy Quran—a guidance with clear proofs	241
Quranic Lesson No. 45	
Truth clearly distinguished from error	242
Disbelief in the devil	243
Service of Allah the right way	244
Low desires and the devil	245
Belief in Allah the firmest handle	246
Allah listens and responds to the cries of the believer	247
Quranic Lesson No. 46	
Questions about the creation of the universe	249
Mankind's reformation possible only through reformation of the heart	251
Quranic Lesson No. 47	
Philosophy of accountability of the self	253
The human soul and its stages of development	255
Quranic Lesson No. 48	
Human soul the trust of God	258

The heart of man capable of manifesting Divine presence259
 Why man is capable of bearing the trust of the Divine spirit . . .259
 Allah’s mercy takes precedence261
Quranic Lesson No. 49
 Progress of the human soul262
 Belief with practice essential for human spiritual development .263
 Belief through Divine revelation264
Quranic Lesson No. 50
 How to achieve the objective of belief267
 The example of the Holy Prophet and his companions268
 Burden laid down upon the soul in proportion to its capacity . . .269
Quranic Lesson No. 51
 Limitations in religious law not to exceed those of Allah
 and His Prophet272
 Burdens in accordance with the Law of Divine Measure272
 Burden laid down to increase the capacity of the soul273
 Burden of man’s own sins274
 The prayer of one lost in the love of God276

CHAPTER AL-IMRAN (The Family of Amran)

Quranic Lesson No. 52
 Significance of the name *Āl-‘Imrān*277
 The usage of abbreviations in the Holy Quran278
 Allah, (there is) no God (*Ilāha*) but He280
 The Ever-living281
 The Self-subsisting, by Whom all subsist281
 Verification of previous scriptures by the Holy Quran282
 The Holy Quran discriminates between truth and falsehood . . .283
Quranic Lesson No. 53
 Misinterpretations of allegorical verses by previous nations . . .284
 Definition of decisive and allegorical285
 Divine objective behind allegorical verses286
 Difference between the Divine and human perception of time . .288
 Relationship of the decisive verse to the allegorical289
 Those firmly rooted in knowledge290
 Perversity of the heart291
Quranic Lesson No. 54
 Summary of the previous lesson293
 Consequences of going astray293
 Similarities between Pharaoh and the Christian nations295
 Accountability in this life not on basis of belief296
 A sign in the Battle of Badr297

Quranic Lesson No. 55

Holy Quran prophesied the dominance of Christian nations . . .	300
Scheme to convert the colonies to Christianity	301
Christian onslaught against Islam	301
Defense of Islam by the Reformer (Mujaddid) of the 14 th century Hijra	302
Different elements employed in the conversion scheme	302
The fall of the empire	303
Higher goal of man's creation	303
The nature of Paradise	304
The path of spiritual development	306
Stages of the spiritual journey of those, "who guard against evil"	307
The doctrine of Divine Unity to prevail	308

Quranic Lesson No. 56

Allah, the real Source of All Power	311
Allah, the Source of Life and Sustenance	313

Quranic Lesson No. 57

Western domination prophesied by the Holy Quran	316
Scope and objective of western domination	316

Quranic Lesson No. 58

The tribulation of the <i>Dajjāl</i>	320
The crumbling of the cross and the prayer of the Promised Messiah	321

Quranic Lesson No. 59

Relations amongst sovereign Muslims and non-Muslim nations .	324
Muslims suffer as a consequence of not heeding the Quran . . .	325
Rules of conduct for Muslims	326

Quranic Lesson No. 60

Islam the religion of humanity	329
Muslims warned against disunity	330
Holding fast to the covenant of Allah	331
The lesson of history	332
Organization of the purpose of propagation	332

Quranic Lesson No. 61

The true meaning of trust in Allah	334
Example of the Holy Prophet and his companions in the Battle of Uhud	335
Action of the hypocrites and its consequences	336
Actions of the Holy Prophet and his companions	337
Action and patience, essential components of trust in Allah . . .	337

Quranic Lesson No. 62

Forgiveness of the Lord and the Garden of Paradise339

Quranic Lesson No. 63

Summary of the previous lesson343

The paradise of the heart and the Hereafter only for the dutiful .344

Time for reformation is limited345

The Garden of Paradise achieved through spending of wealth . .345

Islamic teachings regarding wealth, unique means
of spiritual development346

Quranic Lesson No. 64

Summary of the previous lesson348

Suppression of anger the key to serenity349

Consequences of uncontrolled anger349

Forgiveness and doing of good complement suppression
of anger351

Suppression of anger, a Divine attribute351

Al-Fātihah (The Opening) (Quranic Lesson 1)

I seek the protection of Allah from
the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Benefi-
cent, the Merciful.

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord
of the worlds,

The Beneficent, the Merciful,
Master of the Day of Requital.

Thee do we serve and Thee do we
besech for help.

Guide us on the right path,

The path of those upon whom Thou
hast bestowed favors,

Not those upon whom wrath is
brought down, nor those who go
astray.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ
الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ
إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ
اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ
صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ
لَعْنَةُكَ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ

CH.1:1-7

I start this first lesson of the Holy Quran with its pure and sublime verses that mark the beginning of the Holy Quran. The selection of these verses is as much for their blessings and prayers, as it is upon my intention, God willing, to discuss those portions of the Holy Quran which are recited by Muslims in their daily lives and prayers. I also hope to comment on those verses that Allah has blessed me to understand. The motivation for developing this series of Quranic lessons has come from a request made by a foreign friend, who owns a radio station, and is desirous of broadcasting an easy to understand Quranic tutorial of about fifteen minutes duration, once every week.

Attributes of Allah

Let us start, “In the name of Allah, the Beneficent the Merciful” (*Bismi Allahi Al Raḥ-mān Al Raḥim*). This verse is at the beginning of each chapter of the Holy Quran, except one. It is not numerically included in the

total verses of each chapter, because it contains a complete text in itself. It has been placed at the commencement of each chapter just like a seal on an imperial proclamation which gives the emperor's name and title. It is essential for a book to have the name of its author on its title page. Similarly, it should be the first undertaking of any revealed scripture to give us the identity of the One Who has revealed it. Holy Quran is the only scripture, which declares right at its beginning that it has been revealed by Allah. It begins with, *Bismi Allahi Al Raḥ-mān Al Raḥīm*, which means, "In the name of Allah the Beneficent, the Merciful," and thus states that this Book is from the Being Whose name is Allah, and Who is *Al-Raḥmān* (the Beneficent) and *Al-Raḥīm* (the Merciful). Allah is the proper name of God, and means the Being Who is perfect in excellence and goodness. By excellence is meant that His attributes have reached perfection in His Being. This is further on stated in the first chapter *Sura Fātiḥah* as, "All praise is for Allah, the Lord of the worlds (*Rabb* - One Who brings everything to perfection)." By 'goodness,' is meant that the perfection of Allah is not confined to His own person, but all His creation benefits from it each and every moment. If, for example, someone possesses knowledge or wealth, but its benefit is limited to his own person, and it contributes nothing to the well-being of others, then that attribute is flawed. The goodness of Allah manifested in His attributes of *Rabb Al-ālamīn* (Lord of the worlds), *Al-Raḥmān* (the Beneficent), *Al-Raḥīm* (the Merciful), *Māliki yaum Aldīn* (Master of the Day of Requital), benefit the entire creation all the time, both in this world and the Hereafter.

Allah's attributes or qualities are unlimited, but only two of these attributes, *Al-Raḥmān* (the Beneficent), and *Al-Raḥīm* (the Merciful) are mentioned here. I will try to explain the significance of this. First let us understand the meaning of *Al-Raḥmān* and *Al-Raḥīm*. Both these words are derived from one root word, *raḥma*, which means tenderness requiring the exercise of beneficence, and thus comprise the idea of love and mercy. 'Al-Raḥmān,' and 'Al-Raḥīm,' are both active participle nouns of different measures. *Al-Raḥmān* being of the measure of *falān* in Arabic and indicating the greatest preponderance of the quality of mercy. In other words, the mercy of Allah is such that He has created, without any effort on part of the creation, the whole universe and its wonders. In fact, He has created the means of subsistence for all His creation, guided the creation towards the purpose of its existence, and given it the means of obtaining this objective. *Raḥīm* is the measure of *fa'il* in the Arabic being expressive of the constant repetition of the quality of *raḥma*. Thus Allah's mercy is continuous and repetitive. When proper use is made of the means which Allah has given us by His beneficence, His mercy flows in abundance and results repeatedly in excellent reward for our effort.

The human soul

I will further explain the meaning of *Al-Rahmān* and *Al-Raḥīm* in the commentary of the first chapter *Al-Fātiḥah*. First, I would like to point out the special reason why the attributes of *Al-Rahmān* and *Al-Raḥīm* are mentioned at the very beginning of the Holy Quran. It is because Allah has blessed man with something that none of His other creation received, which is the spirit (*Rūḥ*). The Holy Quran mentions this a little further on in the verse, “so when I have made him complete and breathed into him of My spirit” (15:29). This material world and everything that is in it, including the human body will one day cease to exist, and what will remain forever is the human spirit which Allah has given to man. This spirit, while in the human body is impacted by the good and evil actions of a person and shares all the circumstances experienced by the body. The *Rūḥ* thus develops a personality of its own, which has been called the *Nafs* (soul) by the Holy Quran. This *Nafs* (soul) is taken at the time of death and goes into the world Hereafter to exist forever. The *Rūḥ* is the real essence of mankind. What, one may ask, is the Divine program for nurturing, reforming and protecting this precious entity He has granted, and for making it realize its purpose? Man is unable to see his spirit although he is aware of its existence. Where does this spirit go after it departs from the body at the time of death? What is the nature of the spiritual cosmos, and the circumstances the spirit will encounter? Our physical existence ends over here, but the spirit has to remain forever; what should one do to maintain its health, and growth so as to realize the objective for which it was given? How has Allah’s attribute of beneficence fulfilled this urgent and most essential need? The Holy Quran states, “The Beneficent taught the Quran” (55:1-2), indicating that the beneficence of Allah has made full provision in the Holy Quran for the spirit by imparting this most excellent knowledge. When a person utilizing this knowledge acts upon it, then according to the Holy Quran, “And He is ever Merciful to the believers” (33:43). That is for those who believe and act upon it, Allah is oft returning to mercy and rewards man with those fine moral and spiritual blessings that are called the gifts of paradise. It thus becomes apparent how splendid and profoundly meaningful at the commencement of the Holy Quran is the verse, “*Bismi Allāhi Al Raḥmān Al Raḥīm,*” (In the name of Allah the Beneficent, the Merciful).

Knowledge of the Holy Quran

One of the meanings of the letter *Ba* in *Bismi Allāh* is, seeking the help of. The reader of the Holy Quran is thus taught to ask the help of Allah, Whose beneficence has granted us a blessing like the Holy Quran. We beg His Mercy that He may give us all the blessings- spiritual, moral, temporal, and

those pertaining to the Hereafter, and award us with His pleasure and contentment which can only be attained by following the Holy Quran. Included in this also is the prayer imploring the Beneficent, Who has given us the Holy Quran, to create all the conditions and circumstances conducive to our satisfactory completion of its study. These would include a healthy body, a mind free of worries and inclined towards the Holy Quran. Also required would be presence of mind and its inclination towards obedience, and absence of any circumstances that would influence the peace and comfort of the reader.

Appealing to Allah's attribute of mercy, involves supplication before the One Who possesses infinite goodness, so that His mercy opens up one's mind towards Divine guidance and complete submission. It also safeguards human effort from being wasted and protects him from the temptations and whisperings of the devil. Besides the recitation of the Holy Quran, the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has encouraged the Muslims to say *Bismi Allahi Al Raḥmān Al Raḥīm* (In the name of Allah the Beneficent, the Merciful) at the beginning of every task, in the following words. "Any task that is not started with the recitation of *Bismi Allahi Al Raḥmān Al Raḥīm* is devoid of blessing." Thus when a person recites it in this manner he pleads with Allah, for His Beneficence to provide the means for the accomplishment of the task, and to turn to him mercifully. Allah's quality of mercy thus invoked, rewards human endeavor with results that only He is capable of bestowing.

It may be noted that the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has used the word 'blessing' in his statement quoted above. The Arabic word for blessing is *barkat* - which means goodness that lasts forever. A person who recites *Bismi Allahi Al Raḥmān Al Raḥīm* at the start of any of his undertaking, dedicates it to Allah by invoking His name. Whether he meets with success or failure in its accomplishments, he is still rewarded by Allah for his effort. The rewards of this life are of course temporary, for one whose work is for Allah, the real bonus will be in the Hereafter which is everlasting.

By commanding the recitation of *Bismi Allahi Al Raḥmān Al Raḥīm* a great reformation of mankind is also desired. A person, who before beginning a task recites with understanding, "In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful," will abstain from any action that is evil or displeasing to Allah. This is *taqwa* (abstaining from evil, keeping one's duty), which is mentioned repeatedly in the Holy Quran and Hadith.

Al-Fātiḥah (The Opening) (Quranic Lesson 2)

I seek the protection of Allah from
the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Benefi-
cent, the Merciful.

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord
of the worlds,

The Beneficent, the Merciful,

Master of the Day of Requital.

Thee do we serve and Thee do we
beseech for help.

Guide us on the right path,

The path of those upon whom Thou
hast bestowed favors,

Not those upon whom wrath is
brought down, nor those who go
astray.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝
الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ۝
الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝
مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ ۝
إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ۝
اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ۝
صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ ۝
لَعْنَةُ الْمَعْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ۝

CH.1:1-7

The Wisdom of Al-Fātiḥah

This is a translation of the well-known chapter of the Holy Quran known as *Al-Fātiḥah*, which is memorized and recited by every Muslim in every *ruk'a* (unit) of his prayer. It is essentially read by anyone beginning the study of the Holy Quran, and also on other occasions. I, therefore, feel it is appropriate, in fact necessary to include it in my tutorials. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, “I have been given two blessings that no other prophet has received, one of these is the *Al-Fātiḥah* and the other is the last *ruk'u* (section) of *Al-Baqarah*, the second chapter of the Holy Quran.” How very true was his statement, because these two portions of the Holy Quran contain a sea of knowledge, wisdom and guidance. I am not going to go into the intricate depths of these verses so as to keep the present discourse simple and easily understandable. I am, however, obligated to go into some detail, otherwise I would not be doing justice to this most excellent chapter of the Holy Quran. It is important to

be aware of the spiritual knowledge, wisdom and essential principles of guidance in the *Al-Fātiḥah* because it is recited several times a day by every Muslim. Besides calling it the most excellent revelation, the like of which was not given to any other prophet, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) also named it the *Umm-Al-Kitāb* i.e., the Basis of the Book. Thus we can appreciate the critical need to understand it. Towards the end of my discourse on this chapter I will point out that not only is the *Al-Fātiḥah* unique in being the opening of the Holy Quran, but it is also the most excellent prayer for a person in difficult times of his life. It is therefore, imperative to understand the vast and comprehensive subject matter of these verses.

I have previously discussed the verse *Bismi Allāhi Al Raḥmān Al Raḥīm* (In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful). I will briefly summarize its meaning again for the benefit of those who are not familiar with it. Every chapter of the Holy Quran contains a complete subject in it. The words 'In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful,' being at the beginning of every chapter but one, indicate that it has been revealed by Allah, Who out of His grace, has given us all the means for our physical existence and progress. Not only that, but He has also granted us the extraordinary and splendid gift of the 'spirit' for a life everlasting and for the development and progress of our eternal spiritual life He revealed the Holy Quran. All this is inclusive in the word *Al-Raḥmān* (the Beneficent). The attribute of *Al-Raḥīm* (the Merciful) indicates that if a reader of the Holy Quran acts upon its teachings, he will develop spiritually and morally, and will attain peace in this world and the Hereafter as a special gift. The letter 'Ba' in *Bis- mil-lāhi* also means that one is beginning in the name of Allah and seeking His assistance. He is requesting the Beneficent Who has revealed the Holy Quran, that He, out of His mercy, should bless the suppliant with its knowledge and comprehension, and give him the ability to act upon it, so that he is able to achieve the lofty goals of Quranic revelation.

Now I would like to discuss the *Sura Fātiḥa*. This *sura* (chapter) has been named in the Holy Quran and the Hadith of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) by different names. The most well-known name is *Al-Fātiḥah* (the Opening) or *Fātiḥa-tul-Kitāb* (The Opening of the Book). By 'opening' is meant that it opens the door to the wisdom of the Holy Quran. Also opened up in this short chapter of seven verses is the path of guidance, Divine recognition and knowledge, which is unparalleled for all times. Although volumes have been written on this chapter, its treasures do not get depleted; I will only briefly mention a few important issues so that you can have some appreciation of this.

Man's quest after God

Man wonders Who is the Originator of this great universe in which even a single atom is such a marvel of creation? Man wants to know Who or What He is? He would like to know the names and attributes of this Divine Being? Next arises the question whether the Creator and Sustainer of this great universe are two separate entities, or is it the work of One Divine Being? Why did this Divine Being create the earth and all the life in it? What is the position of mankind in this creation? What is the relationship between man and the Divine Being? What is the purpose of man's creation? What kind of effort should one exert in order to attain the objective of his creation? Different people and nations are following their own direction, and everyone considers his way of thinking to be the correct one. Which then is the right path out of this maze? How can one find out, if the way he is following is the correct one? Has anyone achieved the purpose of his existence by treading on this path? What are the consequences of not following this path? Scriptures were revealed to all nations, before the Holy Quran, but today there are nations in which no trace of these revelations can be found, and they are following their own individual ways. What are the adverse consequences of doing so? This chapter has unveiled all these secrets in such a brief, but concise manner that no human being could have possibly accomplished this, as you will be able to soon appreciate yourself.

All Praise is for Allah

In the Arabic word, *Al-ham-du-lil-lāh* (All praise is due to Allah), letters *Alif, Lam (A,L)* indicate comprehensiveness in the sense of entirety (i.e., true, genuine and exclusive praise). Thus all praise is for Allah Who is the *Rabb* (Lord - One Who is the Nourisher unto perfection) of the whole universe, all creation and every nation. 'Allah' is the proper name of the Divine Being as I have previously mentioned in my discussion of 'In the name of Allah the Beneficent, the Merciful.' It is the prime obligation of any revealed scripture that it should inform its reader about the identity of the One Who is responsible for its revelation, and the purpose behind it. The Holy Quran is the only revealed scripture which tells us in its very beginning, in the verse "In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful," that the name of its author is Allah. The preponderance of beneficence in His nature led to the creation of mankind, and the revelation of this book for its guidance. If man follows this guidance, it brings into action Allah's mercy and He rewards him in this life and the Hereafter with eternal bliss. The most notable of these blessings is the one for which man has been created and which will be mentioned later.

Proof of existence of the Divine Being

Those familiar with the current state of world affairs know that communism and materialism have promoted the spread of atheism. How can those who do not believe in the existence of God, accept that which was revealed by Him? I shall *inshā-Allah* (if Allah pleases) address this question in the discussion of the first verse of *Al-Fātiḥah* i.e., “All Praise is due to Allah, the Lord (*Rabb*) of the worlds.” Before this, I would like to submit that the existence of the Divine Being is the basis of all faiths. The testimony of hundred and twenty-four thousand prophets (this is on basis of a *Hadith* - tradition), in addition to that of millions of righteous servants of Allah (whose truthfulness was established), and the evidence provided by revealed scriptures is such a powerful argument in support of this truth that it cannot be denied by an intelligent person. Courts of law can decide even matters of great contention on the basis of one truthful witness. Here we have the testimony of thousands of truthful ones, that there is a Divine Being with whom they were able to establish communion. Further proof of their truthfulness is that those who follow them with complete submission also achieve this blessing.

If we use our common sense, it becomes quite apparent that every atom in the immense and intriguing universe evidences, and clearly manifests the presence of the Divine Being. For this very reason scientific inquiry which initially assumed an atheistic philosophy, has now been forced to admit that this universe has one Creator, because the whole creation is made of the same matter, and is obligated to follow the same universal laws. Every man’s nature provides the ultimate testimony of the existence of a Divine Being. All human beings in times of distress and difficulty spontaneously cry out for Divine assistance.

Why, then may one ask, has the denial of the existence of God become such a common practice in this day and age? I shall *inshā-Allah* (if Allah pleases), provide the answer to this from the preliminary verses of *Al-Fātiḥah* in the next lesson.

Al-Fātihah (The Opening)

(Quranic Lesson 3)

I seek the protection of Allah from
the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Benefi-
cent, the Merciful.

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord
of the worlds,

The Beneficent, the Merciful,

Master of the Day of Requital.

Thee do we serve and Thee do we
beseech for help.

Guide us on the right path,

The path of those upon whom Thou
hast bestowed favors,

Not those upon whom wrath is
brought down, nor those who go
astray.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ

اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ

صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ لَا عُدْوَانَ

لِلْمَعْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ

CH.1:1-7

Undeniable proof of Divine Existence

I have mentioned in my previous lesson that the existence of the Divine Being is the essential basis for a revealed religion or its scripture. If there is no God as publicized by contemporary Marxist and materialistic philosophies, then the claim of any religion or book that it is revealed by the Divine Being for the guidance of mankind, holds no validity. I also pointed out that a hundred and twenty four thousand prophets, and a far greater number of righteous servants of Allah bear testimony to this. The truthfulness and honesty of these individuals was generally accepted, and they sacrificed every thing they had in the way of Allah. They faced great difficulties and risked their lives for His cause. In return God brought their implausible missions to fruition successfully and thereby, provided undeniable proof of His existence. God foretold their success at a time of complete hopelessness, and allowed them to announce this publicly. Those who followed them with complete obedience also found God.

Progress in knowledge and modern scientific thought initially propagated atheistic beliefs amongst the educated masses. Today, however, the very same people admit to the unity and existence of the Divine Being. This is because scientific discovery has proven that the amazing universe, of which even a single atom holds within it a phenomenal creation, must have a Creator. He is One because all His creation works under one universal law.

Modern age of atheism

Human intelligence itself makes man aware that this wonderful creation has a maker who is also responsible for its upkeep. His own nature is also a witness to this; that is why even an atheist is forced to call upon God in times of distress. Despite this very strong evidence why then is atheism such a popular phenomenon today?

The answer to this is that in this modern age of scientific and intellectual development, blind faith is no longer accepted, and the younger generation does not necessarily follow the beliefs of the older without questioning. Today, unless an argument is backed by strong reasoning, people will not accept it. The concept of the Divine Being presented by religions other than Islam, does not appeal to the educated mind. Common conception of the Divine Being was either that of a stone idol, a cow, or fire. Those who progressed beyond this, started to worship human beings like themselves, be it Jesus, Mahatma Buddha, Krishna or Rama. According to the Christian belief Jesus died on the cross, stayed for three days in hell and was subsequently resurrected. In this case he fared no better than other mortals because all religions tell us that every human being is brought back to life after death. Mahatma Buddha, Krishna, and Rama like ordinary mortals have left this worldly abode. With the concept of the Divine Being bearing such close resemblance to mankind, it is not surprising to hear today that either 'there never was a God,' (*Na'ūdhu bi Allahi*, we seek the refuge of Allah from saying so) or, 'if there was One, He no longer exists.' In fact all polytheistic beliefs (*shirk*) are dependent on the existence of one or several defects or shortcomings in God; that is why other gods are needed to make up for these deficiencies. In this age of enlightenment, human intellect and nature is unwilling to accept a stone idol or another human being as a god. Such deities would have defects and weaknesses similar to other humans, and would require associate gods to compensate for them. Scientific discovery, on the other hand is providing evidence that this marvelous universe has only One Creator Who possesses such goodness, strength and power that it astounds the human intellect.

Recognition of Divine Being through His Attributes

The One and Only God Who can be accepted today is the one the Holy Quran begins to inform us about in the words, “All Praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds (*Al ḥamdu lillāhi Rabbi al‘ālamīn*).” All praise is for Allah, the Only Lord (*Rabb*) of the worlds, i.e., He creates, develops and nourishes to perfection the whole universe and everything within it. Human nature is such that it does not appreciate a defect or a fault in a fellow being; how could it accept any deficiency or weakness in the Divine Being? God should be free of defects, in fact all of His attributes should be to the degree of complete perfection. *Alḥamdu lillāhi* (All praise is for Allah), indicates that goodness has reached its perfection in Allah. It also tells us that since all good qualities and excellent praise is for Allah, the concept of righteousness and all admirable qualities that have arisen in the human mind are a result of awareness of the attributes of Allah. The human brain, otherwise like that of any other animal, is an anatomical organ in which the concept of righteousness cannot arise by itself. Thus we observe that animals do not have the concept of rectitude, or higher moral and spiritual values. If they do exhibit some qualities such as maternal love and tenderness for their offspring, these are instinctive and have been programmed into their nature by the Creator for the survival of the offspring. They do not have the realization of what is good or evil, in order to guide them towards its performance or abstention from it.

Purpose of man’s creation

Human beings like all other animals have the instincts of self and species preservation; however, they were exclusively bestowed the realization of higher moral and spiritual values through Divine revelation. The Holy Quran does mention revelation to animals like the honey bee, but the revelation in that context refers only to the instinctive guidance given to it in order to achieve the purpose of its creation. Man has been created for a purpose much higher than the lower animals, i.e., the realization of Divine attributes within himself. He was for this reason given knowledge of these attributes through Divine revelation from the very beginning. The Holy Quran tells us about this in the verse, “Then Adam received words (revelation) from his Lord” (2:37). Lord (*Rabb*), is the Nourisher unto perfection from the lowest to the highest stages of development. The condition of man at the time of birth is similar to an animal, but he has been created so that his spirit, which is from Allah, should reflect the Divine attributes within himself. It was for this reason the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, “Create the moral characteristics of Allah within yourself.” The Holy Quran has also referred to this in the verse, “(We take)

Allah's color and who is better than Allah at coloring and we are His worshippers" (2:138). Creating Allah's color in oneself obviously means reflecting His attributes.

Divine Guidance to all Nations

Allah did not reveal His attributes only to the first created man Adam, the Holy Quran clearly tells us "And there is not a people, but a warner has gone among them" (35:24); "and for every nation there is a messenger" (10:47). This message was in the form of a revealed scripture which made man aware of the attributes of Allah, and enjoined him to inculcate those attributes within himself in a reflective sense. This arrangement which has continued for thousands of years is responsible for creating the concept of spiritual and moral excellence in the human mind. These revealed books were either destroyed or corrupted, but the effect of their teachings continued to some degree. With passage of time there was a real danger that even this residual influence may also disappear, and so Allah revealed the Holy Quran. In it, Allah gathered together all those teachings that merited preservation as stated in the verses, "Wherein are (all) right books" (98:3); "A Guardian over it" (5:48). Allah has taken the responsibility upon Himself to protect the Holy Quran from destruction, or against interpolation as indicated in the verse (*ayat*), "Surely We have revealed the Reminder, and surely We are its Guardian" (15:9). Thus the forgotten lessons for human guidance have been revealed as a reminder in this book and Allah guarantees their preservation. This leads to the essential conclusion that only this book can now serve as a guide to all nations. This is such a great act of benevolence towards mankind, that spontaneously the words, "All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds" are articulated by the suppliant. It must be remembered that the words (*'ālamīn*) also stand for all nations and Lord (*Rabb*), means One Who causes to develop from the lowest to the highest stage of physical and spiritual perfection. Without the heavenly light and guidance of the Holy Quran mankind, which is unable to rise beyond the animal stage, would have been deprived of the spiritual progress it was created for. Since this progress is meant for this world and the world Hereafter, how very beautiful and appropriate are the words, "All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds." As man progresses along this path of moral and spiritual development, he becomes more aware of Allah's attributes of perfection in excellence and goodness. To quote Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed, the *Mujaddid* (Reformer) of the 14th century Hijra: "Since the excellence and goodness of Allah is unlimited, there is no limitation to the moral and spiritual progress of mankind in the life Hereafter." Again, "All praise is due to Allah the Lord of the worlds."

Al-Fātihah (The Opening)

(Quranic Lesson 4)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds,

The Beneficent, the Merciful,

Master of the Day of Requital.

Thee do we serve and Thee do we beseech for help.

Guide us on the right path,

The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed favors,

Not those upon whom wrath is brought down, nor those who go astray.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ۝

الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝

مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ ۝

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ۝

اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ۝

صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ ۝

لَعَنُوكَ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ۝

CH.1:1-7

Attributes of Allah are Infinite

In my previous lesson, I have briefly discussed the vast and comprehensive meaning of the verse, “All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds.” I would like to add that the attributes of Allah are infinite, and for this reason they have not been enumerated in this verse. As mankind takes advantage of His *Rabbubiyat* (attribute of nurturing unto perfection), and progresses down the spiritual pathway, it becomes more aware of His *Hasn* (excellence), and benefits from His *Ihsan* (goodness). His excellence being His attributes, and goodness being the benefits given to His creation as a result of these. Lord of the worlds (*Rabb al‘ālamīn*), indicates that His nurturing unto perfection (*Rabbubiyat*) is not limited to this world, but will go on in the Hereafter where man is to continue spiritual progress, and advance his knowledge of Allah’s attributes. Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed, the *Mujaddid* (Reformer) of the 14th century Hijra, highlights this in one of his writings: “Since Allah’s excellence and attributes are infinite, the

spiritual progress of man is also without limits.” “Glory be to Allah and all praise is His; glory be to Allah, the most High.”

Four basic Attributes of Allah

Out of the limitless excellence or attributes of Allah we have been given knowledge of only four in this chapter: *Rabb al'ālamīn* (Lord of the worlds, One Who nurtures unto perfection), *Al-Raḥmān* (the Beneficent), *Al-Raḥīm* (the Merciful) and, *Mālikī yaum al-dīn* (Master of the Day of Requital). These four basic attributes of Allah are the ones that benefit His creation in this world. *Rabbubiyat*, (Nurturing Unto Perfection) is the attribute, whereby after creating, He develops through stages, all His creation to the highest degree of perfection possible for it to attain. *Raḥmāniyat* (Beneficence), is the attribute which provides for all His creation the essential means to reach the stage of perfection, most of these provisions being made before bringing it into existence. *Raḥimiyat*, (Mercy) is the attribute which rewards exceedingly those who utilize these means. *Mālikī yaum al-dīn* (Master of the day of Requital) is the attribute as a result of which punitive measures are taken against those who do not utilize the means provided, or break and disobey the laws of Allah. This is to maintain law and order in the universe, so that suitable conditions remain for the creation to advance to its stage of perfection.

Lord of the Worlds

I would like to make one additional comment; the word '*ālamīn* (worlds) stands not only for the whole universe, but for all of the creation in it, and all of mankind. In this way the Holy Quran has presented a unique concept of the Divine Being, unlike previous religions where this concept is either of a stone idol, an animal such as a cow, inanimate objects like the fire, or heavenly bodies. Those making a little progress declared a weak human being as god, or came up with a national or tribal deity such as 'god of Israel' or 'god of the Aryan nation.' The Holy Quran declares the Divine Being as *Rabb al'ālamīn* (Lord of the worlds), i.e., One and Only God for all creation and all nations. There cannot be a better conception of the Divine Being than this. The idea of a national god led to divisions and dissension in the human race and promoted the idea of racial supremacy. The principle of One God for all humanity was advanced by the Holy Quran at a time when no other nation believed in it. They all considered themselves superior to others. Even within nations like the Hindus of India, there existed class differences between various castes of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras. These divisions eventually became part of organized religion. Prophets came to all nations for their guidance;

however, they erroneously accepted their own prophets as the only truthful ones and rejected all others, leading to further polarization of the human race and at times even to warfare. The Holy Quran declared prophets of all nations to be from Allah, and announced that Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was a guide to all nations. "Say, 'O mankind, surely I am the Messenger of Allah to you all'" (7:158). Thus the foundation to unite all humanity under one banner was laid down, by Allah sending Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) as a messenger for all mankind. He is also the *Khātam-an- Nabiyyin* (33:40), the seal and end of all prophets, so that other prophets could not come after him to erode the unity of the human race. "Glory be to Allah, all praise is His: Glory be to Allah, the most High."

It is essential to focus attention on another aspect of the words, "All praise is due to Allah." It directs mankind to recognize Allah by His attributes. Someone may think that visual observation is necessary to recognize things in this world. Science, however, has now confirmed that the true state of matter can only be known by becoming aware of its properties. If the matter which is creation, has to undergo such scrutiny for its nature to be understood, then Allah Who is the Creator can only be recognized through His attributes.

It is interesting to note that the word *Rabb* (Lord) and not *Khāliq* (Creator) was used in the verse under discussion. Further on in the Holy Quran it is clearly stated that Allah is "The Creator of all things" (6:102). The word *Rabb* (Lord) not only conveys the meaning of One Who creates, but also of the One Who gradually advances His creation to the stage of perfect development. Great wisdom underlies the use of this word in the present context. For example, an atheist, or argumentative person could say, that since no one has observed the first creation, how could one say with certainty that there is a Creator? Although this is an absurd objection, the word *Rabb* (One Who nourishes unto perfection) provides a very satisfactory answer to it. It is true that we have not observed our initial creation, however we witness everyday in our lives the manifestation of this Divine attribute. We witness every single creation evolving from a lower to a higher stage. If we think about our own creation, we notice how the nutrient substances derived from the earth are utilized by our bodies to form the germ cell. The astonishing complexities of this cell are still being discovered by science today. In all human beings, it develops in the womb of the mother to form the amazing human body. This highly developed creation and its organization astounds those scientists who have investigated its development. From the stage of infancy and complete helplessness, the human child progresses to the stage of youthful vigor and vitality. Who is responsible for this gradual development from the lower to the higher stage? Isn't the birth and development of the human species, in fact of all

of creation a very strong proof for the existence of a Creator (*Khaliq*) and One Who nourishes unto perfection (*Rabb*)? The evidence for the existence, and the Unity of the Divine Being presented in this attribute of Allah cannot, therefore be denied by a fair minded atheist. In the days when most scientists were leaning towards atheism, an incident regarding one of them is related thus: While observing the development of the embryo in an egg he exclaimed, "As if some God were making it!"

Today the oneness of all creation, its subordination and progression under one universal law has clearly been proven by scientific discovery. While studying this amazing and powerful universe, the words, "All praise is for Allah the Lord of the worlds," are uttered spontaneously by the contemplating soul.

The Beneficent, the Merciful

Physical creation and this worldly existence, are only the first stage of human development. "Lord of the worlds (*Rabb al'ālamīn*)," also implies that there are other worlds beyond this one, created by our *Rabb* (One who nurtures us unto perfection), and He will carry us there to complete our ongoing spiritual development. His beneficence (the attribute of being *Al-Rahmān*) has created the means for our physical development, without any effort on our part. He has likewise made the provision for our spiritual development from the lower to the higher stages by revealing the Holy Quran. To emphasize this fact the verse, "All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds," is followed by, "The Beneficent, the Merciful." This is further clarified by the verse: "The Beneficent (*Al-Rahmān*) taught the Quran" (55:1-2). Whoever acts upon this guidance Allah is Merciful (*Rahīm*) towards him and rewards him manifold. The Holy Quran refers to this, "And He is ever Merciful to the believers" (33:43). The real reward for the believer is in the world Hereafter where he resides forever; the reward of this life ending with his death.

The verse *Al-Rahmān, Al Rahīm* (the Beneficent, the Merciful), also tells us that the Mercy of Allah works for us before every event. Its blessing, however, continues with us if we utilize His benevolence, the greatest of which is the Holy Quran. In other words the mercy of Allah does not end with manifestation of Divine beneficence, but for the ones availing His guidance, it is further stimulated, and produces the 'paradise of the heart,' or the peace and serenity in the mind of the spiritual wayfarer. It assumes a more permanent, apparent and palpable form for him in the life Hereafter. With a tranquil mind, a person remains satisfied under all circumstances; however, with loss of mental satisfaction, even the greatest luxuries of this life cannot offer any comfort. Do not therefore consider the paradise of the heart in this life as insignificant.

Al-Fātihah (The Opening)

(Quranic Lesson 5)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds,

The Beneficent, the Merciful,

Master of the Day of Requitul.

Thee do we serve and Thee do we beseech for help.

Guide us on the right path,

The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed favors,

Not those upon whom wrath is brought down, nor those who go astray.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝
الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ۝
الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝
مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ ۝
إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ۝
اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ۝
صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ لَا عُدْوَانَ لِعُصُوبٍ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ۝

CH.1:1-7

Master of the Day of Requitul

In the previous four lessons we had a brief glimpse of the profound knowledge and wisdom contained in the verses, *Bismi Allahi Al Raḥmān Al Raḥīm* (In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful) and *Al hamdu lillāhi* (All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds). Today we shall, by the grace of Allah, contemplate on the meaning of the verses: *Māliki yaum aldīn* (Master of the Day of Requitul) and *iyā ka na'budu* (Thee do we serve). The word *yaum* is ordinarily translated as 'day,' i.e., the time between sunrise and sunset; however, in the Arabic language and also in the Holy Quran, it has been used to specify a time or period which may be very small or large. For example, the Holy Quran states: "*Kul-la yaumin Hu-wa fi shān* [Every moment He is in a state (of glory)] 55:29]. In this verse, the word *yaum* stands for a moment of time. Compare this with "*fi yaumin kāna miqdāru hu khamsīna alfa sanatin* (in the day the measure of which is fifty thousand years" 70:4). In this verse, *yaum* represents fifty

thousand years as stated. What then is the meaning of *Māliki yaum aldeen* (Master of the Day of Requital)? There is no doubt that a day will come when man is to be judged and recompensed for all his actions, good or evil, including the secrets hidden deep down within its bosom. That day can either be a single day, the whole time during which a person is rewarded for his good actions, or the extended period during which he faces the consequences of his evil deeds and internal detriment. The Day of Requital also stands for every passing moment of time in which the reward or punishment for every good or evil action is being recorded, though most people do not have true knowledge of it. Thus we observe that a good action immediately leads to a feeling of contentment and joy, while an evil one causes restlessness, worry and anxiety in one's mind. An honest person may go hungry, but he has the peace of mind and consequently a restful sleep at night. A dishonest person, on the other hand, is fearful of impending doom, and is uneasy and anxious. The reward and punishment for good and evil actions are therefore immediate, though man remains in denial during this life.

Concept of Paradise and Hell

The two types of paradise that are mentioned in the Holy Quran for those who guard against evil (*muttaqi*) are, by consensus, the paradise of this world and the Hereafter. The possessions of a righteous person in this world seldom include gardens with streams of running water (metaphorical language used in the Holy Quran for describing paradise); however, he is surely guaranteed peace and tranquillity of mind. On the contrary an evil person may own a garden with streams of flowing water, but he is devoid of inner peace and serenity, and his heart is always burning with the desire to acquire more material wealth. A person having thousands is worried about making millions, and a millionaire is likewise eager to reach the billion mark. After death, the burning desire and greed of a worldly person manifests itself as the external fire of hell. The Holy Quran tells us: "It is the fire kindled by Allah, which rises over the hearts. Surely it is closed in on them, in extended columns" (104:6-9). On the other hand the one whose heart is a recipient of internal peace and tranquillity, i.e., the paradise of this world, will after death enter the external blessings of heavenly paradise. The Holy Quran states, "O soul thou that art at rest, return to thy Lord, well-pleased well pleasing, so enter among My servants, and enter My Garden" (89:27-30).

The reward of heaven and the punishment of hell begin in this life, but are hidden from the physical eye. They assume a more apparent and palpable form in the life Hereafter. In both situations, that is in this life or the life Hereafter, this reward and punishment is not under man's control,

otherwise he could easily manipulate it to suit his advantage. The power to control this lies in the hands of One Who has been called, “Master of the Day of Requit,” in the chapter *Al-Fātiḥah*, and how very true it is! The verses: “All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds; the Beneficent, the Merciful,” draw man’s attention towards Allah, the Source of all goodness, the One Who guides and nurtures man from the lower to the higher stages of his development. Mercy is so preponderant in His nature that He provides for our physical needs before, and after our coming into existence. He has also provided for our spiritual sustenance, by revelation of a complete and excellent guidance, the Holy Quran. If we act upon this guidance, His mercy will reward us manifold not only in this life, but also in the Hereafter. In the verse, “Master of the Day of Requit,” man has been informed (which was very essential) that the way he spends his life in this world is his own responsibility, The compensation for whatever he thinks, speaks, or does starts in this very life; although, in the Hereafter it assumes a more perceptible form. Thus, mankind is in need of Allah’s guidance and help for his existence and well being, not only in this life, but also for the success and comfort of the life which occurs as a result of this.

Only Allah is to be Served with Humility

After becoming aware of these attributes of the Divine Being, the soul of the suppliant cries out spontaneously, “*Iyyā ka na ‘budu wa iyyā ka nasta ‘in* (Thee do we serve and Thee do we beseech for help). This is the verse of *Al-Fātiḥah* that follows. I have translated *na ‘budu* as ‘to serve,’ or ‘obey,’ although most people misunderstand its meaning to be recitation of prayers. In fact the Arabic word *ṣalāt* has been used for prayer in the Holy Quran. The dictionary meaning of the word *‘ibādat* (noun of *na ‘budu*) is obedience with humility. Allah has clearly differentiated between the meaning of *‘ibādat* and *ṣalāt* in the Holy Quran in the verse, “So serve Me, and keep up prayer for My remembrance (*fa ‘budni wa aqimi ṣalāta li dhikvī*)” (20:14); and in the verse, “Did I not charge you, O children of Adam, that you serve not the devil (*a lam a ‘hadu ilaikum yā banī ādama an lā ta‘budu alshaiṭān*)?” (36:60). In this verse *tabudu* (serve) from *ibadat* certainly does not mean prayer because no one performs the prayer service before the devil assuming the traditional postures of *qi-yām* (standing with folded hands), *ru-ku* (bending over), or *sajda* (prostration). The real meaning of *‘ibādat* in this context is exactly the dictionary meaning, that is ‘serving and obeying’; in this case the devil, which most human beings unfortunately do. It is a unique ability of the Arabic language that with a choice of a few words a very comprehensive and excellent meaning is conveyed. That is why it has been selected by Allah as the language of

His final revealed scripture, the Holy Quran, a book of complete guidance. We have seen an example of this in the use of the word *Rabb* (One Who nurtures unto perfection). Also we have just seen how the extensive subject of obedience with humility is addressed with the use of the word *i' bādat*. It is necessary to know all of this, because obedience can be of two kinds. One form is accomplished under duress and with infliction of chastisement. The other kind is purely voluntary and accomplished with humility. Compare the example of a child, who studies because he is afraid of being punished by his teacher with the one who considers the teacher as his benefactor and complies with his instructions, with enthusiasm and humility. Both of them cannot derive similar benefits from their teacher; certainly the one who is humble, and obedient benefits more. The same rule applies to parental guidance for children. Allah's mercy for man undoubtedly exceeds far beyond that of his parents. In fact He is responsible for inspiring mercy in the hearts of parents for their offspring. Who can be a greater benefactor of man than Allah? No one knows more than Him, what is beneficial or harmful for the human race. Parents, teachers and worldly leaders are liable to human error, however, Allah is *Subhān* (free of all faults). In fact according to the verse, "*Al hamdu lillāhi. . .* (All praise is for Allah)," He possesses all attributes and excellence to the degree of perfection. All Praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds, the Beneficent, the Merciful, Master of the Day of Requital. Whatever He commands for mankind to be carried out is beneficial for him and what He forbids is harmful. Therefore, one can only benefit from His *Rabbubiyat* (nurture unto perfection) by humbly submitting to His command.

Asking for Divine Assistance

In spite of good intentions man's effort may be lacking or faulty. This may be because of forgetfulness, lassitude, or lack of knowledge regarding Divine commandments. Man is also vulnerable to the continuous temptations of the devil, particularly during periods of trial and tribulation. This is why the subsequent verse is, "Thee do we beseech for help." In this verse one begs Allah for His protection, help, and the will required for complete submission so as to gain the full benefit of His blessings, and to protect oneself from loss and deprivation.

It is worth noting that the verses, "All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds, the Beneficent, the Merciful, Master of the Day of Requital," Allah is addressed in the absent form. This is because when one starts reciting the *Al-Fātiḥah*, Allah is absent from the mind's eye. These verses with their profound meaning and wisdom when recited with full concentration bring before the mind's eye the full excellence and goodness of the

Divine Being. This is the reason for addressing Allah in the dialogue format in the subsequent verse, “Thee do we serve and Thee do we beseech for help.” In order to create a concept of the Divine Being during prayer, people have made idols, images or pictures of their prophets. These icons present a very poor and degrading concept of the Divine Being. Does this concept compare at all with the one presented in *Al-Fātiḥah*? —the concept which defines the grandeur, power, excellence and goodness of the Divine Being and how mankind benefits from it. When this powerful concept is presented to the mind of the suppliant, his heart cries out spontaneously, “Thee do we serve and Thee do we beseech for help.” In this way the true feelings, which are essential for prayer, are generated in the heart.

Another point worth noting in the verse, “Thee do we serve,” is that the plural (we) is used, although one is praying individually. This is because this prayer is recited several times in the obligatory prayers, which are required to be offered in congregation, whenever possible. Also when reciting the non-congregational portion (sunnah) of the prayer, one is frequently surrounded by other Muslim devotees in the mosque. Even if this is not the case, one should include his friends, relatives, and members of the congregation in his prayer, for no other prayer excels the *Al-Fātiḥah* in terms of blessings in this life and the Hereafter. Another reason for using the plural in the above mentioned verse is that man is a collective body composed of different faculties. All of these, including his eyes, ears, tongue, hands and feet, mind etc., should submit before Allah with complete humility. It is only then that one can truly say, “Thee do we serve.” Similarly Allah’s help is asked for in, “Thee do we beseech for help,” because, without His grace these faculties can stray away from the right path. Sometimes the eyes, ears, tongue, hands and feet are involved in sinful behavior, and the mind is frequently involved in deviant thoughts. May Allah protect us from these dangers. *Āmīn* (be it so).

Al-Fātihah (The Opening)

(Quranic Lesson 6)

I seek the protection of Allah from
the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Benefi-
cent, the Merciful.

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord
of the worlds,

The Beneficent, the Merciful,

Master of the Day of Requital.

Thee do we serve and Thee do we
beseech for help.

Guide us on the right path,

The path of those upon whom Thou
hast bestowed favors,

Not those upon whom wrath is
brought down, nor those who go
astray.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ۝

الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝

مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ ۝

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ۝

اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ۝

صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ لَا عُرْ

لْمَعْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ۝

CH.1:1-7

Man created for a higher objective

Today we will discuss the meaning of the verse, “Guide us on the right path (*Ṣivāt-alladhīna an ‘amta ‘alaihim*).” The prayer in this verse is a vital part of *Al-Fātihah* because it provides, as explained in the verse that follows, the answer to the very important question; what is the purpose of man’s creation? No other revealed scripture in its present form, or a sage, a scientist or philosopher has been able to give an answer to this. Scientists have discovered today, what the Holy Quran made known 1400 hundred years ago in the verse, “And He has made subservient to you whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth, all from Himself ” (45:13). The purpose of creation of the whole universe is, therefore to be beneficial and subservient to mankind. Further on the Holy Quran tells us that this was brought about by Allah appointing His vicegerent on earth, and by giving him knowledge of all things so he could dominate all creation (2:30,31). If the purpose of all creation is to serve mankind, then what is the

purpose of man's creation? As mentioned earlier, the answer to this is found nowhere else today except in the Holy Quran. If man does not know the reason for his creation, then his whole life, in fact the creation of the universe which was meant for him, would fail to achieve its purpose. Let us consider what man himself considers as the goal of his creation. With all the knowledge and scientific discoveries of the modern age, man still considers the goal of his creation to be, to eat, drink, get married, have children and make some worldly progress. In this, he is no different from his ancestors of thousands of years ago, who held the same view with their far lesser level of knowledge. Was this the purpose of creation behind the whole universe, a single atom of which contains a world of wonderment? Was it meant to serve mankind only for his limited life span? The whole universe, according to scientific research took billions of years to prepare for the arrival of mankind. Was he created only to perform a few bodily functions and fade into the dust? This could be the purpose of creating animal life, but for this to be the destiny of mankind for whom the whole universe was created, would appear to be an exercise in futility.

The path of the righteous

Human intellect and nature cannot be satisfied by such a desultory objective. Man had so far accepted this because no one had provided the correct answer. The light of truth was first shed on this by the Book of Divine wisdom revealed to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). The answer to this secret lies in the spiritually vital prayer of *Al-Fātiḥah*, "Guide us on the right path." What is that path, and where does it lead to? The explanation for this is provided in the verse, "The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed favors." Who are these people and what favors were bestowed upon them? The Holy Quran informs us about them in the verse, "And whoever obeys Allah and the Messenger, they are those upon whom Allah has bestowed favors from among the prophets (*nab-iy-yīn*), and the truthful (*ṣiddiqīn*), and the faithful (*shuḥadā*), and the righteous (*ṣāliḥīn*), and a goodly company are they!" (4:69). The verse just before this states, "And We would certainly have guided them in the right path" (4:68).

The question which now comes to mind is what kind of favors were they given? Most people with a worldly outlook consider wealth and power as the greatest blessing. With the exception of a few, no prophet or righteous person received this, and even those who did, considered it as something very insignificant. If material wealth and worldly power are the favors asked for in the *Al-Fātiḥah*, one must admit that the faithless and worldly people get the most of it. The greatest blessing bestowed upon the

prophets, the truthful, and the righteous servants of Allah is, in fact, the recognition of the Divine Being. The Holy Quran explains this in the verse, “Then as for those who believe and hold fast by Him, He will admit them to His mercy (spiritual blessings) and grace (worldly blessings) and guide them to Himself on a right path” (4:175). The prayer for the ‘right path,’ which is the life giving element of *Al-Fātiḥah* leads to the source of all righteousness, the Divine Being Himself. Other verses in the Holy Quran further clarify this, for example the verse, “Surely my Lord is on the right path,” (11:56) and the verse, “He said: this is the right way with Me”(15:41). The Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was sent as a messenger to invite people towards Allah. This is clearly stated in several places in the Holy Quran as in the verse; “Say: this is my way, I call to Allah, with certain knowledge (*baṣīrat*) — I and those who follow me” (12:108). *Baṣīrat* or certain knowledge of Allah means having such a close relationship with Allah as to be able to visualize Him with the mind’s eye; such being the case of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and those who follow him. Therefore, all the truthful (*ṣiddiqīn*) and faithful ones (*shuhadā* - the real meaning of the word being those who after acquiring knowledge of internal or spiritual matters convey it to others), and the righteous (*ṣāliḥīn* - those who completely follow the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), are the ones who attain nearness to God, the proof of this being that Allah communicates with them.

Several other verses of the Holy Quran give further confirmation to the statement that the real purpose of man’s creation is recognition of the Divine Being. For example, the Holy Quran states, “Surely this is a Reminder; so let him who will take a way to his Lord” (73:19). In another verse it is stated, “And those who strive hard for Us, We shall certainly guide (*hadai-na*) them in Our ways” (29:69). In Arabic language the word *hidāyat* means not only pointing towards the right path, but also guiding one along on it till one reaches one’s destination.

Testimony of a Righteous Servant of Allah

What a great blessing it is to attain closeness to Allah Who is the Possessor and Source of all excellence and goodness. Let us hear about it from the mouth of one who in this age of atheism and materialism, by following the Holy Quran and the example of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), was able to find God and establish communion with Him. This person being none other than Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed, the *Mujaddid* (Reformer) of the 14th Century Hijra, who writes in one of his books:

How unfortunate is that person who still does not know that he has a God Who is One and Who has power over all things. Our Lord is our heaven. Our greatest pleasures lie within Him, because we saw Him and found every excellence within Him. This treasure is worth gaining even if one has to lay down his life for it. This precious jewel is worth buying, even if one has to relinquish his self for it. O! Deprived ones quicken your pace towards this fountain, for it will quench your thirst. It is the fountain of life which shall save you. What should I do to focus your attention towards this good news? With what kind of drum beat should I proclaim in the streets that 'This is our God,' so that people would listen? What medicine should I prescribe for their ears so that they hear this message? If you become of God, then be certain that He is yours. While you are in slumber He lies awake for you. You will be unaware of your enemy, and God will be watching him, and destroy his plans. You do not yet know the Omnipotence of your God. If you knew about it, you would never grieve for this world. One who owns a treasure does he ever scream, or cry, or become despondent with the loss of a penny? If you knew about this treasure that God will help you in time of need, why should you be besides yourself in pursuit of worldly gain? God is a Beloved and Precious Treasure. Be cognizant of His blessings, He is your Helper in every step you take.

In another place Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed writes:

The overwhelming concern that motivates me is that I have discovered a gold mine, and I have been given information of a quarry of precious stones. I have been fortunate to find a shining and extremely valuable diamond from this mine. The value of which is such that if I distribute it amongst all my fellow beings, they would all become wealthier than that person who in the world today has, the largest quantity of gold and silver. What is that diamond? 'The Truthful God.'

Searching for and finding Allah, therefore is the greatest purpose for which man was created. The prayer to achieve this is the essence of *Al-Fātiḥah*. There is a Hadith of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) in which he says that God informed him as follows: "I was a hidden treasure, so I determined that others should have knowledge of Me, therefore I created man." This manifests the excellence and goodness of the meaning of the word Allah. Allah, Who is the Treasure House of all attributes and excellences, created man to give away these treasures. There could be no greater honor or benevolence for man.

Al-Fātihah (The Opening)

(Quranic Lesson 7)

I seek the protection of Allah from
the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Benefi-
cent, the Merciful.

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord
of the worlds,

The Beneficent, the Merciful,
Master of the Day of Requital.

Thee do we serve and Thee do we
beseech for help.

Guide us on the right path,

The path of those upon whom Thou
hast bestowed favors,

Not those upon whom wrath is
brought down, nor those who go
astray.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ
الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ
إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ
اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ
صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ
لَا غُرُورَ لِمَعْصُوبٍ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ

CH.1:1-7

Closeness to God achieved through the religion of Islam

Today we will discuss the last two verses of this magnificent and comprehensive prayer, *Al-Fātihah*. In the previous lesson, I have discussed in detail the verse, “The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed favors,” and it was pointed out that these were the people who attained the purpose of their creation, i.e., Allah Almighty. Whosoever achieves this goal is successful in this world and the Hereafter. He does not have any sadness, worry or desire left, because he has found the perpetual peace and happiness which exists only in a relationship with God. All religions have made this claim that they have come to inform people about God, and to help them establish a relationship with Him. There is no doubt that when these religions first came into existence, they were actually revealed by God to fulfill this purpose. Today, however, there does not exist within them a path which leads directly to God, nor can He be reached by following them. For example, pure monotheism has been adulterated. Belief in

One God, lays down before mankind only the objective of reaching Him. Polytheism, on the other hand presents the concept of many gods before man. Which one of these various deities should he be searching for? None of these religions, today can, therefore truly claim to have found God. In the beginning when the straight path (*ṣirāṭ-Almustaqīm*) did exist within them; those who followed their teachings, were able to establish a relationship with God. An affirmative sign of this was that He would communicate with them. Today, none of the followers of these religions can make such a claim, nor can they submit evidence that they are recipients of Divine communion in the form of *ilhām* (voice messages) or *wahy* (non-prophetic revelation). According to an Urdu couplet of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed (Reformer of the 14th Century Hijra):

“We have tasted this fruit only from the garden of Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).”

The Perfect Model of Righteousness

Now, only by following Islam, the guidance of the Holy Quran, and the living example of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), people of different time periods can become closer to God to the extent that He communicates with them. In this age of materialism and atheism we have witnessed a shining example of this in the life of the reformer of the 14th century, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed. A living proof of this are the thousands of Divine revelations, words heard by a person spoken to as from behind a veil (*ilhām*), and true visions (*kashūf*) bestowed upon him, which are available in print. A great number of these were fulfilled during his lifetime, and there are many that continue to do so even today, after his death. It is essential to mention over here ‘those upon whom favors are bestowed,’ and their leader, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) who once again pointed out the straight path to the world. He was the one to whom the *Al-Fāṭihah* was revealed, and he reached his exalted spiritual status by acting upon its guidance. By following, ‘Thee do we serve and Thee do we beseech for help,’ he not only became the perfect exemplar of one who serves with humility, but also the best of mankind, and foremost of all prophets. Who else is there who not only became beloved of God himself, but also led others in this direction? Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed has described this beautifully in one of his Persian couplets, “In the person of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), all excellences of prophet hood have reached their full manifestation.” Therefore, he is inevitably the last of, and the seal of the prophets (*khatam-al-nabiyyin*). No deficiency remains behind to be fulfilled by another prophet. Think about the difficult

task that was accomplished by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). He became the best exemplar for the whole of the human race, for all nations, and all ages till the Day of Resurrection. ‘O! Allah exalt Muhammad and those who follow him, and grant them peace and blessings.’ Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was able to follow the straight path in this life, and reach his destination with unparalleled success. The ultimate manifestation of this was the *mi‘rāj* (grand vision of Spiritual Ascension) of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) in which he was able to meet Allah face to face. A poet has put this so well in an Urdu couplet, ‘During the night of the *mi‘rāj* you ascended above all the spiritual heavens, and the status you achieved was not attained by any other prophet.’ Also observe (by reading his life history) how well he imbued himself in the color of Allah’s attributes described in the *Al-Fātiḥah*. ‘All praise be to Allah,’ was not only a part of his physical recitation, but he became a living manifestation of it.

The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), according to Hazrat Ayesha (his wife), emulated the Divine attributes described in the Holy Quran to such an extent that, ‘His character was the Holy Quran.’ If prophets before him described it as ‘coming of the Lord,’ this was the reason for it. He manifested the coloring of the Lord of the Worlds (*Rabb Al‘ālamīn*) to such an extent that he became the mercy for all nations. (*Raḥmat Al‘ālamīn*) The spiritual and moral nurturing of the whole world for all times is now dependent on his example. This is because he had the unique distinction of being the only prophet who out of his great concern for all of humanity, cried and supplicated day and night for their spiritual and moral welfare, and for their well-being in this world and the Hereafter. It is for this reason that Allah Almighty has said more than once in the Holy Quran, “Will you kill thyself with this grief (that they do not come towards righteousness).” This was mentioned in the Holy Quran also with the intent that if we want to follow the footsteps of this Holy person, we should also borrow a spark from the fire of his yearning, to ignite this flame in our hearts.

Along with his great concern for the human race, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) also left behind a legacy of priceless treasures in the form of his *sunnat* (example) and *hadīth* (sayings), for the benefit of mankind. This knowledge was acquired by him through his extraordinary spiritual and moral progress. He thus became colored in the spiritual beneficence of *Al-Raḥmān*. His conduct was, therefore purely selfless as the Holy Quran remarks, “I do not ask of you any return on this?” Despite being completely imbued in the coloring of Allah, he did not give himself, or allow anybody else to give him a status beyond that of

a humble servant. Other prophets, though lagging behind him in spiritual status, were elevated by their followers to the status of a God or an associate with Him. Despite being a virtual ruler of his community, the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) still kept himself and his household in a state of poverty and hunger. He did not ask anything in return for his service and benevolence to humanity. This is the meaning of being a servant of *Al-Rahmān*, who provides everything for His creation without asking anything in return. If He asks for obedience with humility in return, it is for the benefit of mankind. Unless man serves Allah with humility, He is unable to nurture him spiritually, just like the parents of a child are unable to contribute towards his development unless he follows their guidance. Now consider the manifestation of the attribute of *Al-Raheem* in the Prophet's character. It is provided in its most excellent form for the believer, and the Holy Quran bears testimony to it in the words, "To the believers (he is) compassionate, merciful" (9:128). Those who joined the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and followed his footsteps, definitely benefited from his bounteous nature and mercy. We also witnessed the manifestation of the Divine attribute *Mālik-i-yaum Al-dīn* (Master of the Day of Requital) in his conduct. Thus on the day when Mecca was conquered, the day on which the victor and the vanquished were to receive their due, he magnanimously forgave all his enemies.

Those who did not benefit from Divine Guidance

Now let us consider the last verses of this chapter *Al-Fātiḥah*, "Not those upon whom wrath is brought down, nor those who went astray." This is the prayer seeking protection from falling into the ways of those upon whom the wrath of Allah was brought down, or those who went astray. When truth comes into this world, those who are presented with it, tend to fall into three categories. Those who accept it and act upon it, are included in the description of those, "upon whom Thou has bestowed favors." Some unfortunate ones, however, not only reject the truth, but also attempt to destroy it along with its followers. These people, after being given ample opportunity for reform and repentance, are destroyed by Allah. The word used for destruction in Arabic, besides conveying the meaning of 'to annihilate,' also indicates the breaking of the power, or hold of a people, or nation. If Allah does not destroy those planning the destruction of truth, then truth itself and those that follow it would be eliminated. How could this be acceptable to Allah Who has, 'power over all things'? Thus those who are destroyed, or whose power is eliminated are the ones, "upon whom wrath is brought down." There is also the third category of people i.e., 'those who went astray.' These are the ones who either ignore the truth and remain

persistent in their insubordination, or after having initially accepted the right path, they later on reject it. Because of their action in pursuing falsehood over truth, they are left by Allah to wander in their deviant ways.

The Prophet of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) gave the example of the Jews as, “Those upon whom wrath is brought down.” They did not accept Prophet Jesus (*Isa*), in fact tried to destroy him. He cited the Christians as an example of, “those who went astray,” because after accepting Jesus they elevated him to the status of Son of God, or in fact God. This is the way of excess or exaggeration (*ifrāt*), the way of the Jews being that of diminution or (*tafrīt*). Both of these being human weaknesses. Thus for example mankind either becomes totally engrossed in pursuit of worldly gain and gives up religion, or follows the other extreme of becoming a monk, nun, or a *sadhu* (Hindu ascetic). The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, “The best way of all is the middle course, which is the straight path.” This is why the Muslims are enjoined in their daily prayers to ask for the straight path, so they can guard against the two extremes.

A Comprehensive Prayer

Al-Fātiḥah is such a broad and comprehensive prayer that it is useful for mankind in all conditions and times of need. For example for a student, ‘The Day of Requit,’ is the day when he sits for an examination. “Those upon whom Thou hast bestowed favors,” are the ones who qualified with flying colors. Those who do not succeed are the ones “upon whom wrath is brought down,” and “the ones who go astray,” are the ones who qualify with marginal grades and stray around in life with the hope of achieving success. I would like to give one other example of the general benefit of the *Al-Fātiḥah*, and then close this discussion. In the case of a surgeon who decides to operate on a patient, the day of surgery for both of them is, the day of requital. Those upon whom favors are bestowed would include the surgeon who is successful, and the patient who regains his health. The condition of those upon whom wrath is brought down would occur when the patient dies, and thus, is a source of disappointment for the surgeon and ruins his reputation. For the relatives of the deceased it becomes a day of irreplaceable loss and profound sadness. The state of those who went astray would occur when the patient did not die, but also did not fully recover.

Every individual has to face situations in life on a daily basis where he is at a loss in deciding the appropriate course of action. For example, in the case of a merchant making a crucial business decision, or a parent giving the hand of his daughter away in marriage, or a person trying to decide to travel to a certain destination. If one considers these situations under *yaumi*

aldīn and asks for guidance towards the right path to avoid wrong decisions and pitfalls, it becomes quite apparent how helpful *Al-Fātiḥah* is in everyday life. In applying this to one's mundane affairs one should not, however, forget that the most excellent meaning of *Al-Fātiḥah* is prayer for the moral and spiritual guidance of mankind. The answer to the prayer, 'Guide us on the right path,' comes subsequently in the opening verse of *Al-Baqarah*, "I, Allah am the best Knower. This Book, there is no doubt in it, is a guide to those who keep their duty." The guidance asked for is thus provided by the revelation of the Holy Quran. One can, therefore appreciate the immense spiritual grandeur of *Al-Fātiḥah* in answer to which the whole Quran was revealed.

Thus from whatever perspective we look at the saying of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) that, "I have been given two blessings, no other prophet has received i.e., the *Al-Fātiḥah* and the last section (*ruk'u*) of the *Al-Baqarah*," is so true. I have endeavored to comment only briefly on the *Al-Fātiḥah*, otherwise it is a sea of spiritual knowledge and wisdom, the treasures of which are limitless. Glory be to Allah, all praise is His. Glory be to Allah, the Great.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 8)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah , the Beneficent, the Merciful.

I, Allah, am the best Knower

This Book, there is no doubt in it, is a guide to those who keep their duty.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الْم
ذَلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ

CH.2:1,2

Answer to the prayer of Al-Fātiḥah

These are the first two verses of *Surat Al-Baqarah* (Ch: The Cow). In a way this is the beginning of the Holy Quran. In another place, the Holy Quran, and the *Al-Fātiḥah* have been described thus, “And certainly We have given thee seven oft-repeated (verses) and the grand Quran” (*Al-Hijr*, verse 87). There is a saying of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) that these frequently repeated verses are those of *Al-Fātiḥah*. Besides other occasions every Muslim recites the *Al-Fātiḥah* at least thirty times in his five daily prayers. It is an essential component of every *rakat* (unit) of these prayers. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) himself called *Al-Fātiḥah* as the *Umm-ul-Kitāb* i.e., the Basis of the Book, because it contains the whole of the Quran in a nutshell. This essence of the Holy Quran was thus extracted and placed at the very beginning of the Holy Quran, just like a diamond is placed on top of a gold ring. Although a part of the ring, the diamond still appears distinct from it. This also manifests the grandeur of the *Al-Fātiḥah*, as the Holy Quran was revealed in reply to the prayer for guidance towards the right path in it. Thus in the verses under discussion today, we are told that the guidance you had asked for, has been provided by Allah in this Book.

Lessons to be learned from previous nations

Also in the *Al-Fātiḥah* Divine guidance is requested on the ‘path of those upon whom favors are bestowed, and not of those upon whom wrath is

brought down, nor those who go astray.’ The lesson implied by obligating the repetition of these verses in the daily prayers is that some nations upon whom favors were bestowed, became subject to the wrath of Allah on account of their misdeeds, and went astray after being guided. The Muslims are therefore, given a constant reminder not to follow the path of these nations. Thus, in *Al-Baqarah*, after referring to the benevolence of a great blessing like the Holy Quran, and its many superb lessons of guidance, mention is made of the nation of Israel. This was the nation upon whom were bestowed both spiritual and worldly blessings in great abundance and in an unprecedented scale. A nation which had been in bondage for centuries, and persecuted by the Egyptians, was led to freedom by Allah sending prophets Moses and Aaron for this purpose. Towards the end, this persecution had increased to such an extent that by the command of the Pharaoh, the female progeny of the Israelites were allowed to survive, while the male offspring were killed. The intent of the plan was to destroy this nation, even as the Egyptians dishonored and degraded their young women. When Pharaoh pursued the Israelites with his forces, Allah manifested His supreme power by safely delivering the Israelites through the falling ocean tide, and destroying the mighty army of Pharaoh with the rising ocean currents. The Israelites witnessed this great manifestation with their own eyes. Before this also, during their period of slavery, this nation had seen great signs of Divine power. These are mentioned further on in the *Al-Baqarah*.

Significance of the name Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

Despite these powerful signs and blessings, the Israelite nation did not recognize the Divine Being, and were ungrateful. They secretly continued to worship the cow which they had observed the Egyptians doing. At first they worshipped clandestinely a live cow which was a fine looking and healthy animal, but when this was sacrificed by Allah’s command, they made a calf out of gold and silver and started worshipping it. The Holy Quran says, “And they were made to imbibe (the love of) the calf into their hearts on account of their disbelief ”(2:93). The point to note in this connection is that the cow they worshipped first, was an animal, and the subsequent one was an object of gold and silver. Today in Europe and America, in fact in most areas of the world which follow their lead, the worship of God has been discarded in favor of the animal within oneself i.e., one’s emotions and animal desires.

Worship (*‘ibādat*), as I have previously explained in my commentary of *Al-Fātiḥah* means service with humility and obedience of Allah. The place of the love of the Divine Being in our hearts, has been taken over by

the love of gold and silver, the search and acquirement of which has become the purpose of life today. The purpose of man's creation on earth, as I have already discussed in my commentary on the *Al-Fātiḥah*, is to search for and establish a relationship with God. Therefore, even today, the cow representing our animal desires, and the golden calf our lust for material wealth, is the god that many worship. In this respect, this topic and subject is as relevant today as it was in the description of the disbelief of the Children of Israel (*Banī-Isra'īl*). I have made these comments because most people consider this relevant only to the polytheistic beliefs of the Israelites, and do not understand its implications for the modern age. Moses liberated his nation from centuries of Egyptian political dominance, however, their slave mentality persisted, resulting in their worship of an animal, and gold and silver representing the gods of their former masters. Similarly today, although the political bondage of the European powers has diminished, their psychological dominance persists. The whole world thus follows their lead in worshipping either their own animal desires, or making the pursuit of material wealth, rather than love of the Divine Being, as the sole objective of their lives. This is true also in case of the Muslims, amongst whom individuals influenced by Western thinking, follow their low desires and make the love of gold and silver rather than love of God, as the purpose of their existence. No other subject matter can therefore be of greater importance today. I have elaborated this point for you so that you can perceive the excellence of the Holy Quran. It made us aware of these truths fourteen hundred years ago which can be applied towards every age.

Allah is the Author of this Book

Let us now consider the verses which mark the beginning of the *Surat Al-Baqarah*. *Alif-Lām-mīm* and letters like these precede twenty nine chapters of the Holy Quran. These are called the *huruf-e-muqatta'at* or letters that are read separately i.e., abbreviations. For example, in this context these letters are not joined together and read as *ALM*, but are read separately as *Alif-Lām-mīm*. Most people do not interpret these letters, although their meaning has been reported by the honorable companions, and it is most likely that they came to know of this from the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Such letters, however, had been used previously in the Arabic language and their meaning in the appropriate context was understood. In other languages such as English, similar usage of letters exists, most frequently used of which is perhaps the abbreviation O.K. meaning it is quite all right or correct. Some commentators have misinterpreted these as being the names of the scribes who wrote copies of the Holy Quran. They do not give thought to the fact that these letters being part of

verses of the Holy Quran have always been enumerated with these verses, and are therefore, a part of the Holy Quran. These words have always been read in the prayers or recited otherwise as part of the Holy Quran. If the names of the scribes, after being written down, have become part of the Holy Quran, then what guarantee is there that the rest of the Holy Quran is safe from interpolation? (I seek the refuge of Allah from saying so). This would be quite contrary to the Quranic verse, “Surely We have revealed the Reminder, and surely We are its Guardian” (15:9). Hadith (traditions of the Holy Prophet) tells us that the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and his companions used to read these letters from the very beginning while reciting the Holy Quran. Were they then reciting the abbreviated names of the scribes as part of the word of God? (I seek the protection of Allah).

Those who have seen Imperial decrees know that in the beginning of every such document is the name and title of the emperor. These *muqatta’āt* or abbreviations used in the Holy Quran indicate to us the titles or attributes of Allah, the greatest Emperor of all. The attributes they refer to have a deep and meaningful connection with the subject matter of the verse or chapter in which they occur. For example, Ibn Abbas, a companion of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has narrated *Anā Allahu ‘alamu* (I, Allah am the best Knower), as the interpretation of *Alif-Lām-mīm*. The first letter *Alif* was taken from the word *Anā* (I), letter *Lām* was taken as the second letter from *Allah* and the last letter *mīm* was taken from the Arabic word *‘alamu* (Knower). Thus the abbreviation *Alif-Lam-mīm* stands for, “I, Allah, am the best Knower,” which is a most elegant and appropriate explanation for the context.

The Book of Guidance

The reason for the verse, “I, Allah, am the best Knower,” is further elucidated by the words that follow. Allah replies, “This (here is) Book,” in response to the guidance asked for by mankind in *Al-Fātiḥah* in the form of the prayer, “Guide us on the right path.” The One most capable of giving guidance, is the One Who possesses the greatest amount of knowledge. Thus when somebody falls ill, we seek the advice and direction from a physician regarding what kind of medication to dispense, and what form of dietary precautions to take. This is because the doctor has more knowledge than us in this matter. If the doctor needs further consultation in this matter he would refer us to a specialist, who would have even greater expertise in that field.

Who possesses greater knowledge than Allah, the Creator of the universe? All knowledge scientific, or otherwise is based upon discovering the

laws of the Creator, and the study of His creation. Thus, Allah is the Source of all such knowledge. Allah created man and within him His spirit, He also created angels and the devil (*shaiṭān*). We shall, if Allah pleases (*Inshā-Allah*), study the great purpose behind this creation in the study of the fourth section (*ruk'ū*) of this Chapter *Al-Baqarah*. Who possesses greater knowledge than Allah regarding the purpose of man's creation? What is the path man needs to follow in order to fulfill the objective of this life and the life Hereafter (of which only Allah has knowledge)? What are the apparent and hidden dangers which one needs to avoid? In the matter of guiding mankind what could be a better and more appropriate statement than this, that Allah Who possesses the greatest degree of knowledge including, knowledge of the unseen known only to Him, is the One most Capable of giving such direction.

The verse *Dhalika alkitābu* (This, Book) means, this Holy Quran is that book of direction. The Holy Quran from the very beginning has been called, 'The Book,' indicating it will be written down and preserved in this form in this world. The Holy Quran is the only scripture which was written down as it was being revealed. I shall, if Allah pleases, discuss this in the next lesson.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 9)

In my previous lesson, I had discussed the significance of the name *Al-Baqarah* (The Cow), and its relationship with the ills of the modern age. The verses, “I, Allah am the best Knower (*Alif-Lām-Mim*),” and “This Book (*Dha-li-kal Kitābu*),” were also discussed.

Authenticity of the Holy Quran

Today we will learn about the remaining part of this verse:

This Book, there is no doubt in it.

CH.2:2

ذٰلِكَ الْكِتٰبُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيْهِ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِيْنَ

This statement is a parenthetical clause as it relates to, “This Book,” and also to the subsequent verse, “It is a guide for those who keep their duty.” Let us first consider what having ‘no doubt’ about the Book means. It is mandatory for a revealed book to tell us who it was revealed from, the mode of revelation, who the recipient of the revealed word was, the language of revelation, the time of revelation etc. We observe that no other scripture fulfills these criteria. For example, the Bible does not tell us who it was revealed from. The current four gospels do not give us a clue to this. In fact they are named after the names of their scribes, and are clearly the record of events in the life of the Messiah. They were translated from books existing in the Greek and Roman languages which were not the mother tongues of Jesus or his people. If they were revealed in his language, they would have been either in Aramaic or Hebrew. Even amongst the four gospels there is so much contradictory information that one cannot decide which of the four is authentic. In fact, none of them can be authentic. In addition to being translations, they cannot be the revealed word of God in their present form, because they were authored by human beings, and present different versions of the life history of the Messiah.

On the contrary, the Holy Quran leaves no doubt about these matters with regards to itself. It meets all the requirements that I had outlined earlier in this discussion. For example, in the verse I recited in the beginning of our lesson today, we are informed that Allah is the One revealing this book. These questions have been answered with further clarification in the

following verses of the Holy Quran. “And surely this is a revelation from the Lord of the worlds. The faithful spirit has brought it, on thy heart that thou mayest be a warner. In plain Arabic language”(26:192-195). Before commenting on these verses, I would like to cite a few more references from the Holy Quran. “Whoever is an enemy to Gabriel — for surely he revealed it to thy heart by Allah’s command” (2:97). This verse is addressed to the Israelites who now professed enmity to the Angel Gabriel, for bringing revelation to the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), where as previously for two thousand years Gabriel had brought revelation to the prophets of Israel. It is stated that he was now descending upon the heart of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) only by the command of Allah. Likewise, in the following verses it is stated, “And believe in that which has been revealed to Muhammad” (47:2). “The month of Ramadan is that in which the Quran was revealed”(2:185). “Surely We revealed it on the Night of Majesty” (97:1). All these verses prove that Allah Who is the Lord of the worlds (*Rabb-Al’amin*) is the One revealing the Holy Quran. The Quranic message is, therefore for all nations, and is meant to advance them spiritually from a lower to a higher state of development in this life, and the life Hereafter. The Angel Gabriel is the one bringing this message from Allah to the heart of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). It is revealed in Arabic which has been chosen because it can express the wisdom and knowledge of Allah in a most comprehensive and easily understandable manner. The Holy Quran was revealed in the month of Ramadan on the Night of Majesty (*Laila-tul-Qadr*). Thus there is not a single detail about its revelation which is left out. Where mention is made of the Holy Quran being revealed to the blessed heart of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), it is stated, “So that you can become the warner.” Why is this so? This is because the heart upon which such a powerful revelation descended, itself trembled with humility due to the awe-inspired by the Divine word. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) on his return from the cave of Hira, a distance of four or five miles from Mecca, was still trembling after having received the first revelation. According to Bukhari (book of the traditions of the Holy Prophet), the muscles in the neck and shoulders of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) were still trembling with awe, and he asked his wife Hazrat Khadija to cover him up. In spite of being covered up he remained tremulous for quite a while. The same condition re-occurred at the time of the second revelation. According to his wife, Hazrat Ayesha, even afterwards when he became more accustomed to it, he would still break out into a sweat on a cold day. Only the heart of a person who is greatly impressed by the power and dignity of the Divine

word is thus capable of warning the rest of humanity.

Another matter in which there can be no doubt concerning the Holy Quran is whether this is the same book from the first to the last letter which was revealed to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). The first point that I would like to mention in this regard is that the Holy Quran is the only scripture in which it has been written down that Allah Himself will protect this Book, “Surely We have revealed the Reminder, and surely We are its Guardian”(15:9). No other revealed scripture has made such a claim. The followers of other books now admit that their originals have been lost and what remains behind is only the translation. Interpolations have occurred in them, and even today changes are being made in them intermittently. Recently the editorial board of the well known Readers Digest eliminated forty percent of the Bible in their edition. In comparison, even critics of Islam admit that no other book in the world is as well preserved today as the Holy Quran. This is because, besides the Divine promise of its preservation, the following measures were taken.

- 1) The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) as soon as he received Quranic revelation, would call in one of the scribes, and instruct them to have it written down in its proper location under his own direction. Other revealed scriptures were not written down right away, but in most cases hundreds of years later.
- 2) The Holy Quran is the only revealed scripture that can be committed to memory, and since the time of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) hundreds and thousands of people have memorized it.
- 3) The Holy Quran is the only scripture whose copies were circulated worldwide, but no discrepancy can be found amongst the various copies in circulation.

This could not have happened without Divine intervention and protection. Thus neither friend nor foe can doubt the authenticity and complete preservation of the Holy Quran.

Meaning of the word Taqwa

The Holy Quran, “Is a guide to those who keep their duty (*hud-al-lil-muttaqin*).” The word *taqwa* (verb form of *muttaqin*) is mentioned frequently in the Holy Quran. It is therefore important to understand its meaning. In simple language the word *taqwa* means protecting the self from elements which are injurious, painful or detrimental to it. Such injury in case of the human soul is caused by evil and sinful behavior, therefore by definition of Quranic Law (*Shariat*), *taqwa* is defined as guarding against evil; *muttaqi* being one who is careful of, or has regard for, or keeps his duty. Sometimes

it is understood as meaning fear, because sin is something one should be most fearful of committing. Harmful and injurious behavior, and bad habits are things that human intellect and nature dislikes. Why does man, then get involved in these? One reason for this is lack of knowledge that such a path ultimately leads to suffering and fire (that envelops the heart in this life in the form of discontent, and assumes the more palpable form of hell fire in the life Hereafter).

Guidance for the dutiful

It is, therefore essential that mankind should be given such knowledge. This is one meaning of 'guidance for those who keep their duty.' Guidance, however is of no use unless it is followed. For example a doctor instructs us to take a certain medication and follow certain dietary guidelines. If the patient does not act upon this advice, he cannot benefit from it. Matters relating to the inner-self, or soul of man are beyond his comprehension, unless knowledge in this regard is given by Allah, Who created the human spirit. This is the reason why the Holy Quran, in another verse has been called, "Light, guiding thereby" (42:52). *Nur* means the light which illuminates matters relating to the inner self. Thus the Holy Quran not only gives guidance, but provides the inner light with the help of which man can follow the right path and reach his destination. It can protect him from going in the wrong direction, and warn him of pitfalls and dangers that lurk in the way. In fact all human faculties of action are two fold i.e., we can utilize them to do good or evil. Let us, for example, take the faculty of speech which distinguishes mankind from the rest of creation. We can use the power of speech to tell the truth or lie, to abuse verbally, or to speak to someone with love. We can indulge in backbiting people, or remember them for their good qualities. We can use it to disturb law and order, or to create peace and harmony among fellow beings. Thus all human actions are a mixture of good and evil. Therefore, for a person who is *muttaqi* i.e., wants to guard against evil, what greater beneficence is there that he is made aware of the difference between right and wrong in all of his actions. This is the meaning of guidance towards the right path. This Book provides guidance to, and distinguishes between the right and wrong of every action. Some people raise the objection that for someone who is already guarding against evil, what is the purpose of telling him about good and evil. As I have already stated, man despite his intention to guard against evil, falls prey to evil and wrongdoing because of incomplete and incorrect knowledge in this matter. For matters relating to the inner self of man, there is need for that inner light which can only be provided by the One Who has created the Human spirit. Those who raise such objections are not familiar

with the real meaning of the Arabic word *hidāyat* or guidance. It means guiding one on the right path with pleasure and kindness till one reaches the desired destination. *Muttaqi* is the one who intends to, and wants to guard against evil, but he has yet to walk on the right path and reach his destination. The spiritual wayfarer, who guards against evil, does not ever reach a point, where he is not in need of guidance from the Holy Quran. After the broad and general directions, the Holy Quran also gives guidance in finer matters of spiritual purification. As I have mentioned, every human faculty is capable of good or evil. Thus when man benefits from the light of Quranic guidance and guards against evil in all his actions, what remains behind is called righteous action (*'amal Al ṣāliḥ*), the reward for which is paradise (peace and contentment of the heart in this life and the more palpable heavenly blessings of the Hereafter).

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic lesson 10)

I seek the protection of Allah from
the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah , the Benefi-
cent, the Merciful.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Who believe in the Unseen, And
keep up prayer and spend out of
what We have given them.

الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ
وَمِمَّا سَرَرْنَا لَهُمْ يَنْفِقُونَ ﴿٣﴾

CH.2:3

Belief in the Unseen

In the last verse discussed, we are informed by Allah that this Book (Holy Quran) is a guide for those who keep their duty (*muttaqin*). In the verse under discussion today, those who keep their duty, are further defined. They are the ones who believe in the Unseen (*Al-Ghaib*). Unseen is what cannot be perceived visually or by means of our other physical senses. The Unseen in this verse means Allah. By use of the word Unseen, attention has been drawn to this specific attribute of Allah and its effect on our spiritual development. *Taqwā* (root word of *muttaqin*) has previously been defined as abstaining from evil and anything injurious to one's spiritual well being. This quality would fail to evolve in man, if the presence of Allah (Who is Omnipresent), could be visualized by our physical senses. For example, if the chief law enforcement official of a country is physically present in an area, then those who are aware of his presence are disposed towards following the laws and avoidance of criminal behavior. This does not mean that each one of those individuals is a truly righteous and law abiding citizen. The real measure of their character can only be established during the physical absence of the legal authority. If one abstains from evil while not being able to see the Divine Being, then only can it be said unequivocally that the quality of *taqwā* (abstinence from evil) has truly developed in that person. Such a person rejected the evil of a wrongful action after recognizing it and accepted the goodness of righteous action on the basis of a similar assessment. Only such a person can really be called a *muttaqi* (one who

keeps his duty and abstains from evil). Allah has kept Himself in the unseen only from human visual perception, otherwise Divine presence is with mankind all the time. The Holy Quran refers to this in the verses, “And He is with you wherever you are”(57:4); “And Allah is ever Hearing, Seeing”(4:134). Man may need His help, at any time and in any place, and if Allah was just confined to the heavens, or the mosque, then how could He have helped him? From the Holy Quran it is quite apparent that Allah helps His servants all the time as stated in these verses, “And thy Lord suffices as having charge of affairs”(17:65). “Surely my Lord is Preserver of all things (including human beings)” (11:57). If this was not the case the world would cease to exist. He is also the *Rabb-Al‘ālamīn*, One Who evolves and nourishes all His creation to perfection, from a lower to a higher state so that it can achieve the purpose of its creation. I have discussed this in my commentary on the chapter *Al-Fātiḥah*. Thus in every moment of its existence there is a relationship between the Creator and His creation.

The Holy Quran repeatedly tells us that, “Allah is Ever-Hearing, Seeing.” He listens to man and observes all his actions. He has knowledge of why man acts in a certain way as in the frequently stated verse, “And Allah is Aware of what you do” (2:234). He also knows the hidden secrets of our inner self and the condition of our souls as in the Quranic verse, “He is Knower of what is in the hearts” (57:6). This is not difficult to understand. God has created man from a state of non-existence to that of a fully developed human being. Not only has He fashioned his outer form, but also created his spirit within. How is it possible for such a Creator to be unaware of and be unresponsive to His creation, and to allow it to act according to its own design? Similarly it is inconceivable that the Creator of the human soul is unaware of its inner secrets and its moral condition. If one reads the histories of the prophets, and the appointed ones, it becomes quite evident that Allah listens to their supplications and responds to their actions and to those of their opponents in this very life. He brings to light the evil intentions of the evil doers, and informs His prophets and appointed ones of this beforehand. This proves that Allah is truly, ‘Ever- Hearing Seeing,’ and is, Knower of what is in the hearts, and He is with His servants at all times. In addition hundreds of events in the lives of these people testify to the truth that He responds to His servants who call upon Him during times of distress and difficulty, by bringing about a change in their condition. Unfortunately, the fact that Allah is not visualized by the human eye, has led many worshippers of form to go astray. Particularly in the last hundred years people influenced by the scientific materialism and western culture started making such statements that until they see God, they cannot be expected to believe in Him. How truly magnificent is the excellence of the Creator. The very same scientists who influenced their thinking are now

saying that although we can see and touch matter, we can never understand its real nature, because it extends far beyond atoms and electrons to a point beyond our comprehension. Thus we can only realize the real nature of matter through its properties (*The Mysterious Universe*, by Sir James Jean). If something as insignificant as matter can only be recognized through its properties, then why are objections raised when the Holy Quran (at least in this material world) teaches us to recognize the Divine Being through His attributes? From the beginning to the end, the Holy Quran on numerous occasions identifies the Divine attributes relevant to any of His commands or actions. A Persian couplet describes this very appropriately:

How very evident is the Source of all resplendence

The whole universe is His reflection for those who can truly see.

Limitations of human vision

These western oriented gentlemen do not realize that the eyes only fulfill our limited physical needs. In reality, they do not even give us reliable knowledge of God's creation, what to mention of God. Whatever information they do give us is flawed. Without light the human eye does not function, and even after its reception it can only visualize a limited spectrum of it. Even within this limited spectrum, it is unable to visualize the rays with longer wave length, such as ultraviolet, and those with shorter wave length such as infra-red and x-rays etc. Again the differences that are visualized by the human eye are merely in the outward form. In reality all things are internally composed of similar components of matter. The different colors seen in various objects by the human eye are not their actual colors. For example, something which appears red, is not really red in color. It absorbs all other colors except red which is the only color reflected back to the eye, thereby giving the false impression that the color of that object is red. Our eyes cannot even stand a slight increase in intensity of light. This is the reason scientists advise us not to look at the sun directly. Although the sun is ninety three million miles away even this type of minor exposure can result in permanent damage to the eye. Our sun is a small star, where as there are billions of other stars which are thousands of times larger in mass and the quantity of light they generate. These heavenly bodies are only a reflection of the light (*Nur*) and power of the Creator. As the Holy Quran states, "Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth" (24:35). How can we then expect to see the Divine Being with our eyes?

The Holy Quran has explained this in the incident relating to Prophet Moses. The Israelites like modern materialists had asked a similar question from him, "And when you said : O Moses we will not believe in thee till we see Allah manifestly" (2:55). The Holy Quran further describes this

incident, “And when Moses came at Our appointed time and his Lord spoke to him, he said : Thou canst not see Me; but look at the mountain; if it remains firm in its place, then wilt thou see Me. So when his Lord manifested His glory to the mountain, He made it crumble and Moses fell down in a swoon” (7:143). Thus when Allah cast the reflection of His power on the mountain, it was made to crumble, and Moses fell down in a swoon. If something as strong as the mountain could not bear the manifestation of Divine Power, how can the human eye (which is the most frail part of the human body) stand up to it? This type of difficulty arises because association with God, which is a universal phenomenon, has corrupted the concept of Unity of the Divine Being. This has led people to the worship of stone idols, the cow, or at the most that of a mortal being like themselves. I would advise my young western oriented friends to cast away this type of concept from their hearts. The strength, majesty, and dignity of the One Who is Creator of such a magnificent, powerful and limitless universe, cannot be measured. He is not a finite being that the human eye, which is the most delicate part of his body, could visualize Him with its extremely limited capacity.

The Holy Quran explains this in another verse, “Vision comprehends Him not, and He comprehends (all) vision ; and He is the Subtile, the Aware”(6:103). Thus mankind or any other creation cannot visualize, or comprehend the greatness, and grandeur of the Divine Being. He, however, comprehends the full extent and degree of what they or any of His other creation can visually observe.

It is impossible to estimate the extent of Allah’s creation, or the limits of His universe. As progress is made in the development of telescopic instruments, and they become more powerful, the existence of previously unknown heavenly bodies is confirmed. The immensity of this universe is such that distances in it cannot be measured, except by the speed of light. The knowledge of the existence of this universe is also obtained by noting the increase and decrease in the colors of the light spectrum. The speed of light is 186,000 miles per second. If we multiply this twice by sixty, we get the distance that light travels in one hour. Multiply this by twenty four, and then by three hundred and sixty-five to calculate the distance which light travels in one year. This is called a light year and is used to measure the distances in this universe. Human mind cannot comprehend the extent of this universe. Several years ago there was a news item that American scientists had discovered a galaxy 8 billion light years away which was estimated to be five to ten times our galaxy, the milky way . The sky we see full of stars, is only a limited portion of our galaxy. There are hundreds of thousands of galaxies much larger than ours and these amazing pieces of the universe with their vast distances surround us on all sides. They are formed from the

same elements and follow the same universal laws. This gives us only a small estimate of the power, unity and omnipotence of Allah. Human mind cannot fathom the depth of this limitless universe in which new discoveries are made every day. How can it be possible for the tiny human eye to envision the Creator and the Master of the Universe.

Vision of the truthful

Right after the verse, “Vision comprehends Him not,” the Holy Quran states, “Clear proofs (*baṣā’iru*) have indeed come to you from your Lord ; so whoever sees (*ab-ṣa-ra*), it is for his own good ; and whoever is blind, it is to his own harm” (6:104).

The Arabic word used here is *baṣā’iru* which is the plural of *baṣīrat*. This word stands for the discerning faculty of the human mind. The verses that I have just quoted, therefore mean that the human visual faculty cannot comprehend the Divine Being. However, the discerning faculties of the human mind can recognize and find Him, through the luminescent proofs and arguments presented in the Holy Quran, which appeals to human wisdom.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow) (Quranic Lesson 11)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah , the Benefi-
cent, the Merciful.

Who believe in the Unseen, And
keep up prayer and spend out of
what We have given them.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ
وَمِمَّا سَرَرْنَا لَهُمْ يَنْفِقُونَ ﴿٣﴾

CH.2:3

In the previous lesson the subject of belief in the Unseen was discussed. Some of the wisdom behind Allah's attribute of being Unseen visually, and being Omnipresent at the same time was elaborated. This is, however, such an important matter that additional comments are needed. I will cover some of these important points before discussing the rest of the verse.

Proof of Divine Existence

God's creation has always been a proof of His existence. In this age when science made further analysis of matter and split the atom, a whole new and remarkable universe was discovered. This and the ongoing new discoveries leave no doubt that the universe has a wonderful Creator Whose power, grandeur and goodness is a source of great amazement for the human intellect. In addition to the evidence provided by scientific discovery and human intelligence, there is another type of evidence which is ingrained into the human soul and cannot be separated from it.

The mind is the center of man's natural disposition. Imprinted upon human nature is a bond between man and his Creator which cannot be eliminated. The Holy Quran refers to this in these words, "And when thy Lord brought forth from the children of Adam, from their loins, their descendants, and made them bear witness about themselves : Am I not your Lord? They said : Yes, we bear witness. Lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection : We were unaware of this, Or (lest) you should say : Only our fathers ascribed partners (to Allah) before (us), and we were (their) descendants after them. Wilt Thou destroy us for what liars did?"(7:172, 173). In

these verses the Holy Quran reminds us of the natural bond which exists between every human soul and the Divine Being.

As a result of this natural inclination even the most diehard atheist, or the one who associates with God, sometimes calls out spontaneously to the One God. This crying out occurs particularly during times of distress. Even otherwise, however, the bond seems unbreakable. I would like to illustrate this with a few anecdotes. During the SALT-2 talks in Vienna, Leonid Brezhnev (the leader of the communist world), said to the American President Jimmy Carter, "Mr. President, if we do not sign such a treaty, God will never forgive us." Hearing the name of God from the lips of the leader of the communist world was so surprising for Mr. Carter that he immediately pulled out his note book and asked Mr. Brezhnev to repeat his words so that he could note them down correctly. Realizing what he had said, Mr. Brezhnev just smiled and remained silent. After the Soviet Union the greatest communist power was China. Chairman Mao was responsible for introducing communism to his country. Henry Kissinger, the American Secretary of State at the time has written that in his last days Mr. Mao Tse Tung remarked several times that, "I will be meeting my Creator soon" or, "God is calling me." When the daughter of the Russian dictator Stalin escaped to the U.S., responding to a reporters' question as to her reasons for leaving the Soviet Union, she said, "Without a place for God in one's heart, it is difficult for mankind to survive." This bond between man and his Creator cannot be kept a secret for long. This lady was born and raised in the lap of atheism, in the heart of Kremlin, where it was against national policy to even mention the name of God. Faith in God being so deeply ingrained in her nature, could certainly not have been due to the effect of her social upbringing. In fact all this is evidence of that inherently inculcated belief in God and His Unity which has been mentioned in the Holy Quran.

In addition to the evidence provided by the intellect, scientific development, and human nature, the most overwhelming proof of Divine existence, is His speaking to man when He responds to the quest of the seeker. He listens to his supplications and removes his distress. We see the most clear manifestation of this in the lives of prophets (*anbiyā*), reformers (*mujaddids*) and the saints (*auliyā*). The judicial systems in this world can give a decision in a legal matter on the basis of the testimony of one truthful witness, and on these very grounds send even their most prominent citizens to the gallows. There were in total, one hundred and twenty four thousand prophets, and if we consider the number of righteous servants, this figure becomes even far greater. All these individuals were well known for their truthfulness. Their testimony provides overwhelming evidence for the existence of the Divine Being. A living proof of this communion are the

scriptures revealed to these prophets, other forms of Divine revelation (*wahy*), and words heard by a person spoken to as from behind a veil (*ilhaam*), which they received. These contained true knowledge of the unseen, which is further proof of their authenticity from God. The greatest proof of the existence of the Divine Being is provided by the very lives of these righteous servants and the sacrifices they made. In spite of overwhelming odds they succeeded over the opponents of truth, and through Divine revelation prophesied such events at a time and under conditions when success seemed very unlikely. All this is undeniable proof of the existence of the Divine Being. It is also through Divine revelation that we have obtained knowledge of the attributes of Allah, and the Holy Quran is the perfect example of excellence in this respect. From its first to the last letter, the Holy Quran gives us powerfully effective and exceptional knowledge of the attributes of Allah. I have explained this in my previous lesson that even in case of matter, which we can see and touch, truth can only be learned by becoming aware of its properties. The frail human eye cannot bear the sight of Divine manifestation, nor can vision comprehend Him. True knowledge of His Being by man in this life, can thus only be obtained through recognition of His attributes. If one could have visualized God, His Being is so attractive, that it would have been impossible for human beings to focus their attention in another direction, and they would not have been able to perform any other activity. It is, however, essential for God to be Omnipresent so that He can nurture us unto perfection, protect us, keep an eye on our actions and thoughts, and help us in extraordinary ways after hearing our cry for help. It is not in the human interest that God should be in front of human eyes; in this lies the secret of human freedom and concealment of their shortcomings.

Basis of all human development

It must also be remembered that that human spiritual faculties would have failed to develop if God was visible to the human eye. Take into consideration human development in the physical world. Both intellectually, and otherwise such development was only possible because everything was hidden from mankind since the very beginning. He struggled to make discoveries, and gradually progressed during this process. For example when Newton saw the apple falling down, he started wondering why it did not go in the opposite direction due to the resistance of air and the rotation of the earth. Then, with belief in the unseen, he postulated that there was a force which he could not visualize, but which affected every form of matter. After this belief in the unseen, Newton investigated further and discovered the force of gravitation, which forms the basis of modern

scientific development. In addition, he discovered many unknown facts which are relied upon by scientists even today. Similarly, the atom which is the basis of a new science cannot be visualized by the naked eye, or the microscope. It conveys to us the knowledge of its existence through its properties. Scientists after following the principle of belief in the unseen in this case, were able to achieve an amazing degree of progress. Consequently what we observe in the physical world is also applicable to our spiritual development. Only by belief in Allah, Who is the Unseen, by searching for Him, and striving in His way can we achieve development of our spiritual faculties.

Although the western oriented atheists do not profess belief in the Unseen, they undertake and carry out all their daily tasks on the basis of the same. For example, if they consume food, or drink water, they do so on basis of belief in the unseen that it is beneficial for their health. If they had prior knowledge that by doing so they could contract a dangerous illness; would they have taken this matter lightly? When they accept a job or get involved in a business, it is undertaken only on basis of belief in the unseen that such an undertaking would be beneficial for them. If they knew that taking up a job would land them in prison, or a business proposition could cause monetary loss; would they willingly accept such an offer? They support the marriage of their son or daughter with the belief in the unseen that the arrangement would be successful. If they knew that their loved ones would be hurt by the proposed union, would they have gone through with it? A person who does not believe in God travels in a car, bus or airplane with the belief in the unseen that he will be able to complete his journey. If he had known in advance that the vehicle he is traveling in would be involved in an accident, and he would die or get disabled, would he embark on such a journey? Thus it is quite apparent, that these persons with atheistic beliefs conduct their daily mundane affairs with belief in the unseen. Why then are they reluctant to believe in Allah, the Unseen?

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the Mujaddid (Reformer) of the 14th-Century Hijra, expresses this very eloquently in one of his writings, "Allah has manifested His Being clearly through luminescent arguments and circumstances. He then kept Himself in the Unseen so that mankind could believe and be rewarded for it." Every Muslim knows that the Holy Quran has mentioned a separate reward each for belief and goodly action. If God was visible to the human eye, then mankind would not deserve any credit for believing in Him, or for performing a righteous deed. We commonly observe that every one tries to follow the law in front of a policeman. This, however, does not make him a law-abiding righteous person.

The spiritual eye

The physical eye of a man disintegrates into the soil after his death. The spiritual eye which is a part of his soul, will accompany him into the life Hereafter. In the next lesson I will show that through prayer the spiritual eye of man begins to visualize God in this very life. That is why the Holy Quran states, "And whoever is blind in this (world) he will be blind in the Hereafter, and further away from the path"(17:72). It is quite evident that it is not the physically blind, but the spiritually blind that are spoken of in this verse. Therefore, man's spiritual eye which can visualize Allah through prayer in this life, will truly be able to see this complete manifestation of excellence and goodness in the life Hereafter. The Holy Quran tells us, "(Some) faces that day will be bright, looking to their Lord" (75:22,23). Thus on that day the countenance of the believers shall be radiant with joy, because they will be able to see the One Who is their Lord. The sight of the Divine Being will be the greatest blessing of paradise.

AL-Baqarah (The Cow) (Quranic Lesson 12)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Who believe in the Unseen, And keep up prayer, and spend out of what We have given them.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ
وَمِمَّا سَرَّاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ ﴿٣﴾

CH.2:3

Prayer the means of Divine Realization

In the preceding lesson we have discussed the wisdom behind Allah keeping His Being in the unseen, and the spiritual benefits of our belief in Him as such. As a result of this wisdom, Allah is Invisible to the human eye, and therefore liable to be easily forgotten. Prayer is what keeps this memory alive in the human mind. Thus further on in the Holy Quran in the Chapter *Taha* it is said, “And keep up prayer for My remembrance”(20:14). There are some basic facts to keep in mind about the remembrance of Allah. He is Omnipresent and not confined to the church, temple, mosque or heaven. That is why the Holy Quran states, “And He is with you wherever you are”(57:4). Prayer can, therefore be said at any location. It is true that prayer, especially the obligatory prayers are considered most excellent and blessed when recited together in congregation. For this very reason a mosque is essential as a gathering place for people to get together and supplicate. However, when the need arises, congregational prayers can be said in any location. If a congregation is not available, prayer can be said alone, in the house, on the ground, while in a journey, standing, sitting, lying down or by using signs. Prayer can be said even in the battlefield.

God is Omnipresent

Prayer, therefore serves as a reminder to mankind that God is with him everywhere, and all the time. This is the way it ought to be; otherwise how could Divine protection and help be rendered to mankind in times of need? Questions arise about the Divinity of the Being Who is confined to a place like an

idol, or a human being, and as far as we are concerned, is not able to observe, protect, help and nurture us unto perfection. It is also essential for the Divine Being to be able to observe His creation at all times in order to nurture it unto perfection. This is even more so in case of mankind who is the vicegerent of God on earth. Man needs to be constantly observed and evaluated for his actions and the performance of his duty; for as I have stated in my commentary on the verse, "Master of the Day of Requit," every action good or evil has an effect, or consequence which occurs instantaneously. Similarly it is necessary for Allah to be able to hear mankind. The reason for this is twofold. First, because mankind is accountable not only for his actions but also for the statements he makes; and second, when man prays, God should be able to hear Him. It is also essential for Allah to be aware of man's inner secrets, because by hiding his inner thoughts from fellow beings he is capable of great deception and damage to others. The good or evil of any action depends upon the intent, which is again hidden deep within the recesses of the human mind. For example a murderer may slash a person's throat, so does a surgeon; because there is such a great difference of intent in each case, the murderer is hanged, while the surgeon gets paid a fee, with gratitude, even if the operation does not succeed. God is the Creator of man's inner self; how could he be unaware of what goes on inside his mind?

The Holy Quran elaborates all this by frequently referring to the Divine attributes; *Sami'* (The Hearing), *Baṣīr* (The Seeing), *'alīm bidhāt Alṣudūr* (He is Knower of what is in the hearts). The act of praying creates the awareness of these attributes within us. Belief in these attributes of Allah is strengthened, when we stand humbly with our hands folded, and bow down and prostrate with the knowledge that Allah is seeing us. Part of the prayer is said in a loud voice, while most of it is said silently. This is because Allah hears our speech and knows what is within our hearts. Prayer (*ṣalāt*) recited at least five times a day reminds us of the existence of the Divine Being. It nourishes our belief in Allah, and reminds us of the strong bond that exists between God and man, simultaneously strengthening our belief in it. Prayer, thus lifts the veil off the face of the Unseen, that is why right after the injunction to believe in the Unseen, we are enjoined to keep up prayer.

The true spirit of prayer

It must be noted that the Holy Quran always commands us to keep up prayer, not to merely recite it. Reciting the prayer is mentioned only on one occasion and that also in way of a reprimand, as in the verses, "So woe to the praying ones, Who are unmindful of their prayer! Who do good to be seen, and refrain from acts of kindness!" (107:4-7). This means that such people recite prayer, but are unaware of its true implications. The proof of

this is that their prayer is merely a performance to impress other people. It is not said with an honest intent and a truthful heart. The heart in this case is imbued with the love of material wealth, rather than with the thought of Allah. This causes it to forbid acts of kindness, due to lack of compassion towards God's creation.

As I have just mentioned, the Holy Quran has frequently praised, 'the prayer which is kept up.' One meaning of this is (as we have commonly experienced) that in the beginning, when a person recites the prayer, the devil (*shaitān*) tries to distract his thoughts in every way to keep him from converging his attention towards the Divine Being. In this situation, when one gets distracted, prayer instead of being kept up falls down from a righteous state. Under these circumstances, the believer refocuses his thoughts and brings back his prayer to the right state. Despite these trials, if the believer remains steadfast in his prayer, it eventually becomes a source of enjoyment for his spirit, just like good food is for the body. According to Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani (renowned Muslim saint), "Man is rewarded for the effort he makes to keep up his prayer." He was then asked if this reward ends once a person reaches the stage of full concentration in prayer? To this he replied, "his prayer then becomes a gift from God, and its reward is the pleasure and tranquillity that such a person experiences through prayer." That is why when the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used to command Bilal (one of his companions), to recite the *Adhan* (call to prayer), he would say, "Oh Bilal arrange for our pleasure." The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), also said, "the coolness of my eyes is in prayer."

Rules of prayer

The following requirements are essential for keeping up prayer.

- 1) Bodily cleanliness, or ablution, bathing and cleanliness of apparel. Injunctions in this regard are given in 5:6; 7:31; 74:4.
- 2) Obligatory prayers are to be recited at certain fixed times as indicated in the verse, "Prayer indeed has been enjoined on the believers at fixed times"(4:103). However, while in a journey, or in the battlefield, or for some other valid reason, or disability, prayers can be combined.
- 3) Effort should be made to keep up all prayers consistently as in the verse, "Who are constant at their prayer"(70:23).
- 4) Prayer should be safeguarded, i.e., kept up during a journey, illness, war, or any other time of distress and difficulty as indicated by the verse, "And those who keep a guard on their prayer"(70:34).
- 5) Prayer is to be recited with understanding, i.e., one must be aware of what is being said, and to whom it is addressed. Also one should be

aware of one's helplessness and humbleness, and pray in a respectful manner; then only can true spiritual awakening occur during prayer. This has been referred to in verse, "Who are humble in their prayers"(23:2).

- 6) During prayer one should not allow one's attention to get distracted as explained above in the commentary on, 'And keep up prayer.'
- 7) Prayer should not be performed with intent of impressing others as in, "Who do (good) to be seen"(107:6).
- 8) One should not be lazy in the performance of prayers. The Holy Quran speaks of the hypocrites as, "And when they stand up for prayer, they stand up sluggishly"(4:142).
- 9) As far as possible prayers, in particular, the obligatory prayers should be said in congregation as indicated by the verse, "And bow down with those who bow down"(2:43).

To recite the prayers quickly, and afterwards to raise the hands for prolonged periods of supplications, is akin to wastage of one's prayer, and mars its effectiveness. The Arabic word for obligatory prayers is *salaat* which means praying, and includes the whole of the obligatory prayer service. The proper manner is, therefore to understand the meaning of the whole prayer, to recite it thoughtfully, and with humility. Any prayer that comes to mind while saying the obligatory prayers (which are in Arabic), can be recited during the obligatory service, particularly while prostrating. This is the way (*sunnat*) of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). The example of a person who hurriedly recites his obligatory prayers, and then embarks on a course of prolonged supplication with raised hands, is like the one who goes into the court of a king, and instead of presenting his problems while he is there, comes out, and then tries to address the king, or the emperor in a loud voice.

One must remember that it is a great privilege to be allowed to appear before the Supreme Being five times a day. This is the opportune moment for the believer to attain the pleasure of the Best of judges, Who is the Master of his being, his entire life, and the life Hereafter. Allah, Who is the Source of all blessing, becomes the Friend, Patron and Helper of the believer, as is frequently mentioned in the Holy Quran. In this world if one of us befriends a powerful or influential person, he is manifestly proud of his association, and frequently brags about it. Who is more unfortunate than the person given the privilege of appearing five times a day before the Master and Lord of the heavens and earth, and perhaps the honor of His friendship; is unable to take advantage of or benefit from this opportunity?

I will, if Allah pleases, continue discussion on the subject of prayer in my next lesson, and discuss one of its most important benefit and need for mankind.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 13)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Who believe in the Unseen, And keep up prayer, and spend out of what We have given them.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ
وَمِمَّا سَرَرْنَا لَهُمْ يَنْفِقُونَ ﴿٣﴾

CH.2:3

Prayer as a means of guarding against evil

In my last two lessons I have discussed the important reasons underlying the Divine intent to keep Himself in the Unseen. As a result of being in the Unseen, people tend to forget Allah, and are in need of a reminder. Prayer serves as such a reminder. Thus the Holy Quran states, “And keep up prayer for my remembrance”(20:14). It is not just enough to recite the prayer. In fact, a believer is enjoined to keep up prayer. In the previous chapters I have discussed the injunctions pertaining to this. In brief, prayer should be recited with understanding of its meaning, and with the realization that one is standing in front of Allah. It should be considered a great privilege to be given the opportunity to stand before the Best of judges, five times a day. The words of the prayer create the most excellent concept of the Divine Being and His attributes (provided, prayer is kept up, and not just said in a hurry). Prayer also strengthens the belief in our hearts that Allah, the Possessor of all perfect attributes is with us all the time; He sees us, and we can pray to Him wherever we are. He is able to hear our prayers, and is aware of our inner secrets. This is why during prayer we stand with our hands folded, bow down and prostrate; and some of the prayer is recited loudly while the rest is said in silence. When faith firmly becomes established in all of these concepts, the truth of the Quranic statement, “Surely prayer keeps (one) away from indecency and evil”(29:45), is fully manifested. This means that no dirt, or evil collects in one’s heart, or remains behind as a part of his actions. He reaches the state of *taqwā* or guarding against evil, which is a great achievement.

Spiritual sustenance

Now I would like to mention another great objective of prayer; knowledge of which has only been given to us by the Holy Quran. No other revealed scripture or religion mentions this. The human soul requires sustenance for its well-being, progress and existence, in the same way that the body requires food for health and development. This spiritual nourishment is provided by the institution of prayer. Our physical bodies which are maintained by the daily intake of food and water, will eventually die and perish into the earth. The human soul is the part that remains behind forever, and on it is based our life Hereafter. This is the reason why so much stress has been laid on prayer in the Holy Quran and Hadith, and it is a major edict of Islam. The human spirit which is nurtured by prayer, stays healthy, develops, and remains alive. This is the greatest blessing for mankind. The Holy Quran explains this vital truth in the verses, “And strain not thine eyes toward that with which We have provided different classes of them, (of) the splendour of this world’s life, that We may thereby try them. And the sustenance of thy Lord is better and more abiding. And enjoin prayer on thy people, and steadily adhere to it. We ask not of thee a sustenance . We provide for thee. And the (good) end is for guarding against evil” (20:131,132).

It is a distinctive characteristic of the literary eloquence of the Holy Quran that in very few and simple words, it sheds light on some very important and complex issues. The essential facts which have been described in these two verses can be summarized as follows.

- 1) Allah has created different classes of men. This is mentioned in another place in the Holy Quran in (17:21), “See how We have made some of them to excel others.” This Divine wisdom makes it possible for the activities of daily life to be conducted in a satisfactory manner.
- 2) Each class of men has been given variable amounts of material possessions. Abundance of wealth, however, is a means of trial. This occurs because the attraction of material wealth is such that man makes it the purpose of his life, despite the fact that the world is a temporary abode. The sorrow of leaving one’s prized possessions, and the realization in the Hereafter of the immense loss sustained by not having exerted oneself for the greatest blessing, the love of Allah, is in itself akin to the torment of hell. In addition, one will have to account for all that he was given in this world. If man considered his worldly possessions, a trust of God, and spent out of them according to Divine injunctions, he would be secure. His punishment otherwise, would be that of a dishonest person who betrays a trust given to him.
- 3) A believer should not greedily long for the fineries of this world. Worldly sustenance is temporary, and one is held accountable for its

appropriate disposal. For the believer, however, the everlasting reward is the spiritual sustenance which is bestowed without the need for accountability, and is of a far superior quality.

- 4) This spiritual sustenance is acquired through prayer. The Holy Quran is a wonderful book of knowledge and profound wisdom. While mentioning the procurement of this sustenance through prayer, the believer is first enjoined to ask his family to keep up prayer, and also to provide a strong personal example of steadfastness in the keeping up of prayer. This is so mandated because even in case of physical sustenance, man gives preference to his wife and children. A large portion of his earnings are spent in providing food, clothing and other essentials for his family. The man of the house who is usually the wage earner and spends very little on his personal needs, is thus told that just as he worries for the physical maintenance of his family, he should be even more concerned for their spiritual well-being. In order to accomplish this he is advised not only to enjoin them to keep up prayer, but also to set an example by keeping up prayer himself. Without a personal example it would be difficult to get the family's compliance.
- 5) Allah provides us with physical sustenance, and does not ask us for it. In a similar manner, when He enjoins prayer, it is not for His own benefit. It is purely for the good of mankind, and provides him with a spiritual sustenance which is not only essential, but of a far superior quality, and everlasting nature.
- 6) The final comment is that *taqwa* (keeping one's duty, guarding against evil) leads to a better end. Keep your duty also in regards to the physical sustenance you are given, for you will be held accountable for it. Utilize the spiritual sustenance provided to you in the form of prayer to strengthen and keep your spirit healthy, so that it can control your animal desires. If the animal within you is left unbridled, it will weaken your defenses (*taqwa*) against evil, resulting in loss and torment of hell. As I have already mentioned, if prayer is kept up and not merely recited, it leads to living faith in God, which of course gives rise to the quality of guarding against evil.

Spiritual Ascension

I will end this discussion by mentioning one other important aspect of prayer. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "Prayer is the ascension (*Mi'rāj*) of the believer." Now the event of *Mi'rāj* (ascension) is well-known to the Muslims. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) in a state of vision (*kashf*) ascended to the spiritual heavens. He progressed in spiritual status beyond the level of all

other prophets. At a certain point in this spiritual journey, the Angel Gabriel who escorted him on this journey also parted his company, stating that from there on he would not be able to withstand the manifestation of the Divine presence. He advised the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) to go on further by himself. As the Holy Prophet proceeded ahead, he came in the presence of Allah. He sat down respectfully with his legs folded in front of Allah and said, “All services rendered by words, and bodily actions, and sacrifice of wealth are due to Allah.” To this Allah replied, “Peace be on thee, O Prophet and the mercy of Allah and His blessings.” To this the Holy Prophet answered, “Peace be upon us and on the righteous servants of Allah.” What other conversation took place during this spiritual encounter is not recorded. The extraordinary precious treasure or reward, however, that he brought back with him was the permission for his followers to pray five times a day. The lessons that we learn from these events of the Ascension (*Mi‘rāj*) are.

- 1) If we follow completely the footsteps of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), we can ascend to the highest levels in the life after death, where we have to go eventually.
- 2) By completely following the path of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), one can progress further than even the reaches of the angels. The Quran also tells us that if a man truly becomes the vicegerent of Allah, angels are committed to bow before him.
- 3) The spiritual status achieved by the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is the ultimate stage of *Fanā-fi-Allah* (loosing oneself completely in Allah). At this stage every word, action, and possession is spent in the way of Allah, and under His direction. This is apparent from the words of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), “All prayers and worship rendered through words, bodily actions and sacrifice of wealth are due to Allah.”
- 4) As a result of this complete obedience and service with humility, Allah rewarded the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) with peace, mercy and everlasting blessings in this world, and the Hereafter. He immediately conveyed these to his followers, and all the righteous servants of Allah, because he knew that whenever Allah says something it is fulfilled. This is clearly indicated by his words, “Peace be upon us and the righteous servants of Allah.” In these words we see a remarkable display of the feelings of selflessness, love and caring for humanity that the heart of this pure and saintly person was endowed with.
- 5) Going directly into the Divine presence is a historically unique occurrence. What did the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be

upon him) request from Allah? He asked Allah to bless His followers with the same honor and blessing that he was blessed with in obtaining nearness to God. The permission to pray five times a day was granted for this very purpose. How unfortunate is the being who keeps himself deprived of this blessing, and does not keep up prayer; or merely recites it as a custom without acquiring its full benefit.

- 6) The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has called prayer the Ascension (*Mi'rāj*) of the believer. This tells us that prayer is the means to get close to Allah and recognize Him. The conversation which took place between Allah and him, is recited in the obligatory prayer service after the prostration. From this it is quite apparent that prostration is the posture of closest proximity to the Divine Being. Prolong your prostration and understand what is being recited, i.e., "My Lord (*Rabb*) is free of all faults, and He is the most High." In reciting these words, we are imploring Allah, Who has created the means for our spiritual evolution; just as He is free of all faults, may He nurture our spiritual progress, so that we can obtain freedom from all our shortcomings; just as He is the most High, due to His goodness and perfect attributes, may He create good qualities in us. If this prayer is rendered sincerely, in it lie all the blessings of this life and the life Hereafter. Besides the prayers of the Hadith and the Holy Quran, if one has to make any other request before Allah, he can pray in his own language. Say prayers with the soul moved to tears, for prostration is the time when one is closest to God. When a child wraps his arms around his mother and cries, maternal feelings of love and mercy are aroused. Crying of the suppliant in prostration evokes an outpouring of Divine mercy; for who is more Merciful and Bounteous than Allah?

Al-Baqarah (The Cow) (Quranic Lesson 14)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Who believe in the Unseen, And keep up prayer, and spend out of what We have given them.

And who believe in that which has been revealed to thee and that which was revealed before thee, and of the Hereafter they are sure.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ
وَمِمَّا سَرَقْنَا لَهُمْ يَنْفِقُونَ ﴿٣﴾

وَالَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا
أُنزِلَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ ۗ وَالْآخِرَةُ لَهُمْ يُؤْفِقُونَ ﴿٤﴾

CH.2:3,4

Broad concept of charity

In the previous two lessons we discussed the keeping up of prayer. In our lesson today, we shall discuss the verse, “and spend out of what We have given them (sustenance, *rizq*).” The Arabic word for sustenance (*rizq*) is ordinarily considered as meaning food and drink, or material wealth. It, however, has a much broader meaning. The dictionary meaning of the word *rizq* (sustenance) is, ‘any beneficence of Allah that is ongoing either in this life, or the life Hereafter.’ Sometimes it stands for the share, or fortune which a person has received, or the food he consumes. ‘What we have given them,’ includes not only the material wealth, but also the physical, mental and spiritual faculties a person is given. A person’s intelligence, insight, or knowledge are all included in the meaning of the word *rizq* (sustenance). In fact, the position in society, skills, or opportunities in life one receives are all included in this category. Knowledge signifies understanding about both spiritual and temporal matters. If one thinks about it, the physical faculties given to us are not by our own choice or will. In a similar manner our intellectual and spiritual faculties are all a benefaction of Allah, some are given more, some less. The more blessed a man is with these faculties, the greater is his degree of accountability.

All Sustenance from Allah:

The sustenance provided in the form of material wealth, may be taken as an example. In the very beginning, a person benefits from the wealth he receives from his parents. It depends upon the will and discretion of Allah, that a person is born in a rich family, or a middle income household, or to poor parents. Every individual comes into, and leaves this world empty-handed. Who is it that inspires the love of their children in the hearts of parents? They spend all their wealth for their children when they are alive, and leave behind for them what remains of it, when they pass away. A man cannot even control what he earns. His earning is not dependent upon his intelligence, knowledge, skill or degree of effort. For example, nobody works harder than a manual laborer, but what sort of return does he get? I have observed many highly learned and knowledgeable people who go hungry and remain in a state of poverty. On the other hand, totally ignorant people are overwhelmed with abundance of riches. Individuals with degrees in business and commerce can hardly make a living, while affluent businessmen, most of whom have no degrees, in fact are totally uneducated, and cannot even sign their names, are earning millions. If acquisition of wealth was under the control of man, every person would have been the owner of the fabulous riches of Korah. This, however, is not the case. The reason why money is worshipped all over the world today, is because all daily affairs of business are conducted through it. Acquisition of wealth has become the purpose of life, and man has forgotten God. On seeing this very detrimental effect of material wealth, religions other than Islam, felt that the emancipation of mankind lay in encouraging their followers towards adoption of nunnery and monasticism.

The Middle Course:

Islam takes the middle course. It encourages its followers to earn wealth honestly, discourages its hoarding, and enjoins its spending in the way of Allah Who has provided it. This is why it is stated, "out of what We have given them," meaning whatever sustenance is provided, is granted by Allah. If someone takes possession of the wealth of a donor, and considers it his own right and property, he would be considered a dishonest person, in fact an outright thief. For example, if you give a hundred dollars to a person with the instructions to spend a certain amount for helping the poor and needy, and to utilize the remainder for his own personal needs. If this person then turns around and spends all the money on himself, disregarding and resenting your instructions; would you not consider such a person as dishonest and thankless and hand him over to the police for criminal prosecution?

Means of spiritual development:

Why is there promise of so much reward, for spending according to Divine injunctions out of what He has given us? Good news of this reward being ten times, seventy times or even seven hundred times the original has been given by the Holy Quran. Why is this so? The reason for this lies in the fact that, it appears to man that he earns this wealth with his own hands, and often he does not consider it to be Divine providence. He, therefore considers it his own property. The things that can be accomplished with money, the fineries of this world and the luxuries that can be bought with it, all lead man to the great love for acquisition of wealth. Allah says, in the Holy Quran that when We ask of hell, if it is full? It's reply will be, 'Is there more?' The craving for wealth manifests in a similar manner. The one who earns hundreds is yearning for thousands, and the one who makes thousands desires to make millions, and so on. The greed for more money is never satisfied, it flares up and spreads out of control like an inferno.

In contrast to this the love of Allah, His Prophet, Religion, His Book, the love of one's poor brothers and sisters, and God's creation, is a form of love that is cool in nature. It has a calming effect over the warm and burning fire of the lust for wealth. A fire that is under control is useful. The one that flares up and burns out of control, becomes the fire of hell. The act of giving makes the desire for wealth subservient to the love of higher moral values. Sacrifice of the love of wealth to serve God and His creation, by spending one's wealth in His way, becomes a source of recompense for mankind. The Holy Quran states, "and spend out of what We have given them." They, the believers spend out of what has been given to them, according to the need and requirement. To spend every thing during the time of an important national, or religious need as demonstrated by Hazrat Abu-Bakr on one occasion, or to spend half of one's wealth as done by Hazrat Umar is the correct way. On other occasions, one should spend according to need. Since all the wealth belongs to Allah, why did He not keep all of it under His own control, and spent it on important religious and social needs? If He had done so, how would we have had the opportunity to develop spiritually and earn reward for the life Hereafter? The only wealth that one could acquire over there in abundance, is the recompense one would receive for righteous spending in this life. By spending one's wealth in the way of Allah, Divine attributes are evolved and nurtured in mankind, and there is no greater success than this. There are four basic attributes of Allah as narrated in the Chapter *Al-Fātiḥah: Rabb Al 'ālamīn* (Lord of the worlds), One Who nurtures, or evolves all His creation from the lowest to the highest stage of perfection; *Al-Raḥmān* (the Beneficent), One Who gives without asking, purely out of His mercy; *Al-Raḥīm* (the

Merciful), One Who rewards manifold, on our asking for it, and making the effort; *Māliki yaum Al-dīn* (Master of the Day of Requit). The attributes of Allah are generated in us, to a degree proportionate to the amount of wealth we spend in His way. A person is doing the work of *rabūbiyat* (nurturing unto perfection), when he aids his poor and destitute brothers financially, and helps to improve their lot. Spending for religious propagation, to draw the attention of the worldly inclined towards religious duty, is nurturing them from a lower to a higher state of spiritual existence. Similarly, if a person helps God's creation without their asking for it, and voluntarily spends for the cause of religion, the attribute of *Al-Raḥmān*, becomes a part of his character. Giving bountifully upon being asked, reflects the color of *Al-Raḥīm*, and paying a laborer more than his due wages is invoking the attribute of *Māliki yaum Al dīn*. A person who spends in the way of Allah will be wealthy not only in the Hereafter which is a permanent abode, but by generating the Divine attributes within himself, he receives perpetual joy and contentment.

Service of humanity:

I have explained earlier that the word *rizq* (sustenance), signifies Divine benefaction to a person in the form of his physical faculties, intellectual capabilities and skills. A nurse who uses his or her physical and mental faculties to serve humanity, or an individual who strives in the way of Allah, are all included amongst those, "who spend out of what We have given them." A person serving God and His creation with his intellect and knowledge also falls under this category. In a similar manner those who serve their religion by dispersing their spiritual sustenance or knowledge, that they receive through the keeping up of their prayers, and the study of the Holy Quran, are also included amongst those, "who spend out of what We have given them."

Universality of Divine Revelation

Now I will discuss the last verse of our lesson today:

"And who believe in that which has been revealed to thee, and that which was revealed before thee, and of the Hereafter they are sure."

How can it be that God creates the whole universe for mankind, but does not inform him about the purpose of his own creation, or guides him towards the fulfillment of this objective? In my commentary on *Al-Fātiḥah*, I pointed out that the highest goal of man's creation is to find God. In discussing the first verse of *Al-Baqarah*, I mentioned that the Holy Quran shows us the path which leads towards God. By following its guidance, one

can establish a relationship with God. It is, therefore necessary to believe and act upon the teachings of the Holy Quran. In the verse, “And who believe in that which has been revealed to thee, and that which was revealed before thee,” the Holy Quran enjoins belief in the previous scriptures to prevent the development of arrogance in the Muslims. This also discourages narrow-minded beliefs like those of previous nations who received revealed scriptures. They believed that they were the only recipients of Divine guidance. The Quranic teaching, therefore promotes the feeling of universal brotherhood. The Holy Quran also informs us, and other religious authorities agree with this, that the previous scriptures have either been lost, or subjected to alterations and interpolations. It is, therefore difficult to believe in them today, and accept that they are Divinely inspired. This is the reason why belief in the Holy Quran is mentioned first, although the other books were revealed earlier. Only by believing in the word of the Holy Quran, can one acknowledge these previous scriptures to be Divinely inspired. This shows the great spirit of tolerance and benevolence of the Holy Quran towards other faiths. Only by recognizing the scriptures of other religions can mutual tolerance and peace be promoted. Due to the fact that these revelations have either been lost or interpolated, it is now not feasible to act upon them. In addition, these scriptures were revealed to certain nations, for example, the Israelite nation, or the Indo-aryans, and their teachings were temporary and incomplete. The Bible acknowledges this in John 16:12-14. The teachings of the previous scriptures that needed to be preserved and were practical, have been included in the Holy Quran as stated in the verse, “Wherein are (all) right books” (98:3). Thus, acting upon the teachings of the Holy Quran is equivalent to following all the excellent teachings of the former scriptures.

Belief in Life After Death

The last part of the verse under discussion is, “and of the Hereafter they are sure.” This is the greatest piece of good news for mankind, because no human being wants his life to end with death. In this verse he is informed that just as death is certain in this life, it is equally true that death is not the end, but the beginning of a new and higher existence. In the life Hereafter one has to account for his actions in this earthly abode. If man conducts his life in accordance with the Quranic injunctions, then the life Hereafter would be blessed with the joy and contentment of paradise. Remedial purification will otherwise be brought about through the chastisement of hell-fire, which is a unhappy and fearful closure. In this life the righteous are sometimes faced with difficulty, and the evil-doers have a good time. The end result of righteousness is, however good, and that of evil is bad. It,

therefore, makes sense to show concern for the Hereafter, and not be misled by some temporary benefit, or convenience. The pupil who remains oblivious of the end result, and wastes his time in play and entertainment, eventually faces disgrace and despondency. On the other hand, the student who foresees a better future after the qualification of an exam, and works hard to achieve this by not wasting his time in useless undertakings, will eventually be rewarded with everlasting satisfaction and ease. Without belief and conviction in the Hereafter, reformation of man cannot take place, nor can he undertake the hard work and struggle involved in the pursuit of righteous action. The purpose of man's life is to seek and find God; meeting with Allah and closeness with Him in a more perceptible form is only possible in the life Hereafter.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 15)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

O men, serve your Lord Who created you and those before you, so that you may guard against evil.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ
وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ ﴿١﴾

CH.2:21

Message of the Quran is for all nations

This verse contains the first commandment of the Holy Quran. I, therefore felt obligated to include it in our Quranic study. The first point to note is that it addresses all of mankind in the words, “*Yā ayyuhā Al nās* (O men).” All religions prior to this were meant to be for a particular nation, for example, the Israelites, or the Indo-Aryans etc. Their concept of the Divine Being was also that of a tribal, or national deity; such as the God of Israel, or the various Hindu deities whose domain was confined to India only. As we have already seen in our discussion of the *Al-Fātiḥah*, that in Islam the concept of the Divine Being is of the Lord of the Worlds, that is Allah is the Lord of all nations and nationalities, in fact the whole universe, and He nourishes unto perfection whatever is within it. Science, today accepts that there is one single Universe, within which prevail the same universal laws, therefore its Creator, Master, and Sovereign is One. In the verse I have quoted for this lesson, the Holy Quran addresses the whole human race. Further on in the Quranic text, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is mentioned as the messenger to all of mankind as in the verse, “Say : O mankind, surely I am the Messenger of Allah to you all” (7:158). This concept of world prophet hood was completely novel, and therefore totally invalidates the objection of some Non-Muslim critics that the Holy Prophet had copied ideas from previous revealed scriptures. This universal concept was altogether new and unique, as it was presented at a time when the human race was divided into nations

separated by vast distances. In fact, it was even new and unacceptable for the Arabs who were the immediate recipients of the prophetic message. The Arabs of those days would have been much happier if the religion being revealed was only for them, and not for all the nations whom they considered inferior. Today, when the world is becoming rapidly unified, the birth of such an idea, could be labeled as a result of the social environment. In those days, however, such a concept could only be acquired through Divine revelation, and in it was contained the great prophecy for the future, that the world would one day be united under the banner of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), by the grace of Allah Almighty.

Service with humility

The first commandment given by the Holy Quran, therefore was to the whole human race, “O men, serve (*na‘budu*, verb of *‘Ibādat*) your Lord Who created you.” In *Al- Fātiḥah*, commenting on the word *Ibadat*, I have explained its meaning as service with humility. The word used for prayer in the Holy Quran is *ṣalāt*. This difference has been clearly elaborated in the verse, “So serve Me (*fa‘budni*), and keep up prayer for My remembrance (*wa‘aqim Alṣalātā li dhikri*)” (20:14).

If we carefully think about it, we reach the undeniable conclusion, that the whole world is serving the Creator with humility. It is completely subservient to His laws and follows His command. If and when He desires, He can bring it to an end. We can observe a graphic illustration of this exhibited by the instantaneous destruction of stars in the universe billions of times larger, and more powerful than our planet earth. The sun, also has explosions with energy equivalent to millions of hydrogen bombs every minute, and it manifests fearsome and gigantic flames of flagrant firestorms. Although it is hundreds and thousands of times larger than the earth, yet it is bound to serve life on it in such a precise manner that there is not a seconds delay in its rising, nor does it stray an inch away from its orbit. Scientific discovery, today has recognized that this universe, the extent, immensity, and the power of which is hard to imagine, is made up of the same type of matter, and follows with complete obedience and humility the same type of laws laid down by its Creator.

This subject matter is very extensive, and I would now like to refocus on my original discussion. In the human organism itself, all the body organs such as the musculoskeletal system, the liver, stomach, intestines, heart, lungs etc., share a similarity with other animals in that they follow completely the guidance, and program laid down by their Creator. Mankind is totally helpless in this matter, and even a doctor can only intervene by following the laws laid down by the Creator. When Allah’s command of death

comes, both the doctor and the patient are helpless and the human body gives up its life.

Observe the animals and you will notice that their bodies are functioning a hundred percent in accordance with the laws laid down by their Creator. As far as the animals are concerned, their eating and drinking, locomotion, social interactions etc., are all governed by their instinct. There is no way an animal can go against its instincts. A lion for example, will never eat grass, nor a goat will become carnivorous. Animals are guided by their intrinsic computer, pre-programmed by the Creator for each animal species individually.

Freedom of Will

If Allah had so desired, He could have bound human beings by a similar design, however, He chose not to do so. This is such a great act of benevolence towards man that he should be thankful every moment of his life towards his Great Benefactor. All of nature and its forces are bound in obedience to the Creator. Man is the only creation Allah has empowered with the freedom of will. This power in the whole universe belongs only to Allah, as mentioned in the Quranic verse, “He does what He intends” (2:253). When Allah created man, and appointed him as His vicegerent on earth (2:30), He also gave him the freedom of will. An emperor appointing a Viceroy, or a Governor General gives him some executive powers, but at the same time carefully observes the deployment of these powers by his appointee, and intervenes, in case of abuse of such authority. Similarly Allah, by giving mankind some power through freedom of will, has not Himself become totally powerless. Whenever He deems appropriate, He uses His power to intervene.

Power to suppress animal instincts:

Instinct, in man is similar to animals. However unlike like an animal, it does not tie him down to make him a powerless slave. Man can thus, suppress his instinctive drive when he so desires. For example, he can control his anger. In fact, going quite contrary to his instinct, he can forgive the one who he is angry at, and thus remove the rancor from his own heart. He can actually go a step beyond this, and do good to such a person. The Holy Quran teaches us the method to suppress our animal instincts in the verse, “And those who restrain (their) anger and pardon men. And Allah loves the doers of good (to others)” (3:134). It is easy to suppress minor degree of anger, but very difficult to control overwhelming anger or rage. A person who can do so is capable of controlling all his emotional outbursts. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said it very well,

“The real strong person is the one who can control himself during extreme anger.” In another Hadith it is stated, “Whosoever controls his rage, Allah will fill his belly with (the sustenance of) tranquillity and faith.” The Quranic verse quoted above enjoins not only suppression of anger, but also forgiveness. An even higher moral standard is, that one should not only suppress his anger and forgive, but in addition do good to the one who is the object of his wrath. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has sworn by three things: wealth does not decrease by giving away in charity; those who forgive others, Allah increases their respect and honor; and whosoever adopts humility and meekness for the sake of Allah, his spiritual status is elevated in return by the Almighty. This in reality is teaching man Divine attributes.

Spiritual benefits of:

Allah is Aware of all the misdeeds committed by humanity; if He was not the One to suppress His anger, and forgive mankind as indicated in verse, “And He pardons much” (42:30), this world would be destroyed in a split second. On the contrary, He continues to give worldly blessings to the non-believers, the atheists, the evildoers, even those who disrespect Him. The heart of a man that does not reflect the spirit of Divine tolerance, fails to recognize the Divine within itself.

We can therefore, conclude that if man like other animals was subject to the control of his instincts, he would seek retribution immediately when angered. Those who do so are at the level of animals. Allah wants to raise man above this level, so that he is capable of not only controlling his natural instincts, but also of acting quite contrary to them when necessary.

Guidance for proper usage: Sometimes, however it is appropriate to utilize the natural instincts. For example, if one does not get angry, he would be unable to fight gallantly in war, or on other occasions in self-defense, against murderers and thieves. He may also become extremely shameless, if somebody tries to molest his wife, or sister, he acts like a swine, and instead of showing revulsion and anger he actually encourages such advances. What then is the proper use of animal emotions? A man, who gets overwhelmed by his emotions cannot make the appropriate decision in this regard. One may then ask, why has Allah not tied down man’s nature to follow only the path of goodness? This is because a task accomplished through force cannot be called a good deed, or quality. A good deed can only become so when man has the opportunity to commit evil, but he controls himself, and goes against the evil suggestion of the devil by suppressing his evil tendencies. Honesty can only be called a virtue when one has the opportunity to be dishonest, and despite the need for monetary gain,

chooses to be honest. In short, moral qualities evolve only when man does good while fighting evil with his own free will, and not under duress. Angels, are programmed for goodness under Divine command as shown in the verse, “But do as they are commanded” (66:6), i.e., by nature they do as commanded by Allah, not having the freedom to act even slightly contrary to it, and therefore remain in a static state of development. Man, on the other hand, in the course of resisting evil evolves spiritually, and becomes the one to whom angels submit. Thus, by giving man the freedom of will, Allah has not only given him a great honor and a portion of His complete omnipotence, but also created the means of his spiritual development, and the realization of the Divine within him, provided he uses this freedom appropriately. I have already illustrated this with the following example. By controlling his rage, forgiving people, and doing good to them, man partakes of a Divine attribute; the very same attribute of Allah which is working every moment in this world. If this was not the case, man would have been eliminated a long time ago as a result of his misdeeds. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) laid down this very objective before us when he said, “Create the qualities of Allah within yourself,” and the Holy Quran states, “Allah’s color, and who is better than Allah at coloring” (2:138); color meaning the attributes of Allah. The words of this verse that follow, tell us how these attributes can be developed in mankind, “And we are His worshippers (*‘ābidūn*)” i.e., serve Him with humility. Commentary on this will follow shortly.

We now return back to the initial statement made in the verse under discussion today, “O men serve (with humility) your Lord (*Rabb*).” *Rabb* is the One Who gradually evolves His creation from the lower to the higher stages of development. Man’s attention is thus drawn to the fact that the command to serve with humility does not benefit the Creator, but is for his own benefit. Almighty Allah will evolve him from the lower animal stage to the level where he will be able to reflect the Divine attributes within himself. The injunction of service with humility is worth pondering upon. The individual who serves his Benefactor with humility, stands to benefit from His nurturing sustenance, unlike the one who is critical and disrespectful. For example, the pupils who are disrespectful and insolent, do not fully benefit from the guidance of their teachers or parents. On the other hand, those who consider their teachers and parents as their well-wishers and benefactors, and obey them with respect and humility, are the ones that fully benefit from their guidance.

Who is a greater Benefactor of mankind than Allah?

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 16)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

O men, serve your Lord Who created you, and those before you, so that you may guard against evil.

CH.2:21

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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

Guidance for all Nations

In my previous lesson, I discussed the first portion of this verse, “O men, serve your Lord.” As pointed out this first commandment of the Holy Quran addresses not only the Muslims, or the believers, but all of mankind. Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was the messenger of Allah to all of mankind, and the Holy Quran was revealed to him for the guidance of all nations; the Divine objective being unification of the human race in peace and harmony within Islam. Due to deterioration of previous religious orders, people had gone astray and were involved in religious conflict and warfare. The human race was, therefore given the same commandment that applies to the creation in general, that is to serve their Lord with humility. All of creation observes this Divine command in the form of natural laws, and serves with humility to the fullest possible extent.

Purpose of Divine Guidance

The ‘body,’ which is the physical part of man, follows the command, or law of his Lord without the slightest deviation. On the other hand, the ‘spirit,’ which Allah has breathed into man, and which forms the basis of his personality has been given the freedom of will by Divine wisdom. This leads to the development of moral and spiritual values in mankind. Without the freedom of will, and the ability to do good or evil, these qualities would fail to evolve. Only by having the freedom to lie, and choosing not to do so, can one nurture the quality of telling the truth. If there was no opportunity to be

dishonest, honesty would not be a virtue. The command to serve one's Lord was, therefore given; Lord (*Rabb*) being the One Who nurtures gradually, from the lower to the higher stage of development. Man's ability for action is motivated by the animal desires and emotions generated in his body. This is something that he shares in common with other animals, that is why doctors test medicines in animals before using them on human beings. Without Divine guidance man would continue to follow his low desires, and fail to rise above the animal state. We commonly see this today, in the western oriented materialistic culture. In fact, man falls even below the animal level, because animals do not commit acts that are against their nature. Such unnatural behavior is commonly observed in our civilized western societies, at times with the sanction of the law. In addition, drug usage which is detrimental to our health has become rampant. Animals on the other hand, would never consume anything that is harmful to their health. This is because they are fully controlled by their instinct, unlike mankind, which has been given the freedom of will. By proper utilization of this privilege, spiritual and moral values can be nurtured, as I just pointed out. Guidance to man for proper utilization of his desires and emotions, could only have been given by the Creator. This is the reason why in this verse man has been given the injunction to serve his Lord (*Rabb*) with humility.

The Creator, alone knows best, the purpose of man's creation, the appropriate use of the faculties and capabilities He has given him to achieve this goal, and the course of action to avoid. It is essential to follow His commandments, for He is not only the Creator, but also the One Who nourishes unto perfection (*Rabb*). He has not deserted His creation after bringing it into existence. He is nurturing it continuously to evolve it from a lower to a higher stage of existence. The rest of His creation, by manifesting unquestionable loyalty to His guidance, benefits from His nurturing (*Rabubiyat*), and continues to evolve and fulfill the purpose of its creation. Man, as already mentioned was given the freedom of will in order to evolve spiritual and moral qualities. This evolution would be impossible without being given the opportunity and freedom to commit good or evil. Man, therefore should also serve and obey his Creator and Lord (*Rabb*-One Who nourishes unto perfection) with humility, so that he can benefit from His guidance and reach the goal of his creation, which is recognition of the Divine Being. This purpose can obviously not be accomplished without perpetual nurturing and guidance by Allah Almighty. I have repeatedly mentioned the word '*ibadat* or '*abudiyat*, which means service with humility. Only the one who follows guidance with humility benefits from it, and not the one who submits only with reluctance and disrespect. We see an example of this in the nurturing provided by parents, or the education given by a teacher. The child who considers his parents and teachers as well-wishers and

benefactors, accepts their guidance with humility, and derives the proper and complete benefit from it. On the contrary, the reluctant and disrespectful pupil fails to take advantage of these opportunities. The question one may ask is, who is a greater benefactor, and well-wisher of mankind than Allah?

Uniqueness of man's physical and spiritual faculties

We need to contemplate further on the words, "Who created you." Man's creation is both physical and spiritual as stated in the verse, "He is Allah; the Creator, the Maker, the Fashioner" (59:24). If we observe the physical creation of mankind, no two individuals would be found alike. From the top of the head, to the bottom of the feet, each individual human being is a distinct entity. Modern scientific research has determined that even the hair of each person has unique characteristics. In London for example, a thief got convicted on the basis of evidence provided by a strand of his hair in his cap which he forgot at the scene of crime. The forensic expert in this case, by microscopically analyzing the hair, provided the testimony that the hair belonged to the person who was eventually convicted for the crime. The footprints of individuals are also distinct, which accounts for the success of experts in tracking people down. Fingerprints and thumbprints are also unique to each human being, that is why such evidence is accepted in court. Even the body odor of every individual is unique, thus making it possible for blood hounds to hunt down criminals. Scientists, today have also confirmed that the DNA pattern of each human cell is also distinctly individualized. In short the Creator, Who is incomparable in greatness, has for this temporary worldly abode, bestowed upon each individual member of the human species, a distinct physical identity. How could the human spirit which is everlasting, not be blessed with such a distinction? The human spirit is, therefore also truly individualized in its capabilities and other characteristics.

The nurturing unto perfection (*Rabūbiyat*), which is specific for every human body, is also uniquely designed for the human spirit. This spirit, within its abode in the human body is called the *Nafs*, and with its separate upbringing, an individual forms a distinct personality. For this spiritual advancement it is absolutely essential that the human spirit should obey its Creator and Lord (*Rabb*), and thus achieve the objective for which it was created. This is the reason why man is enjoined in this verse to serve his Lord with humility, Who not only created him but, is the only One Who can nurture, and evolve him into the unique being he is meant to be.

Man's tendency to follow the religion of his forefathers

The verse then goes on to say, "And those before you," i.e., Allah Who has created you, also created your forefathers. Man has a strange weakness; in matters of religion he blindly obeys and follows his forefathers, without using his own reasoning to make the appropriate decision for himself. A Christian today, is a Christian because his parents and grandparents were Christians. For the same reason a Hindu professes Hinduism, even though the religion may not appeal to him, and this applies to all people of different national origin. In our society today, much is made of the generation gap, and it is put forward as an excuse frequently to disobey the parents. Strangely enough, in matters of religion, people blindly hold on to the faith of their forefathers, even though they may not practically follow it; hence the Divine word that He not only created you, but also your ancestors, and guided them likewise. It was their own fault that they formed associates with God, and became involved in all kinds of wrong beliefs, as indicated in this verse, "Mankind is a single nation. So Allah raised prophets as bearers of good news and as warners, and He revealed with them the Book with truth, that it might judge between people concerning that in which they differed" (2:213). Allah gave all prophets similar type of teachings so that He may decide between the people, regarding that which they differed in. In spite of Divine guidance, disagreements arose between them again.

The fact that all prophets were sent with similar teachings, is further elaborated in the verse, "And We sent no messenger before thee but We revealed to him that there is no God but Me, so serve Me" (21:25). In the verse under discussion today, it is therefore clearly stated that Allah created your forefathers and ordained upon them the same teachings He has given you. They got involved in religious strife, and did not follow Divine guidance; why then are you embarked upon a similar self destructive course?

The consequences of following and ignoring Divine Guidance

The verse concludes with the statement, "So that you may guard against evil." The purpose of Divine guidance in other words is that mankind may guard against evil. Those who do not follow the Divine Guidance revealed in His Book, the Holy Quran, would then submit to their low desires and emotions. This in turn tends to cloud their judgment, and leads them to all kinds of loss and suffering in the form of evil. We see an example of this in our western societies today. If these Christian nations followed the edicts of the Bible, however faulty they may be; would those evils and cardinal sins that are being openly committed today in these societies be existent?

Every act of man can have either a good, or evil form. On the basis of his emotional involvement and desires, man is unable to decide when a good action becomes evil. For example, the search for and acquisition of wealth is in itself not a bad deed. Allah has called it His blessing, and enjoined that one should pursue it, but man on account of his lust and greed, fails to perceive when such an acquisition becomes detrimental to him. Wealth, after it is earned can be spent on good and evil deeds. The wealthy man cannot distinguish between the good and evil course of such an action on his own. This is to be determined by the Greatest Being Allah, Who is Free of all Faults (*Ṣubḥān*).

One meaning of *taqwā* is the keeping of one's duty. The duty of each individual towards another is a matter which cannot be decided upon by the parties involved. For example, there is always a disagreement between men and women regarding their individual rights, and a consensus has never been reached. The Holy Quran has, therefore discussed the rights of men and women in detail. To recognize these rights, and fulfill them is also keeping one's duty (*taqwā*), and no one can decide upon them other than Allah, the Best of judges. He created both men and women so that they could live together, and He ordained upon them their rights towards each other.

Before closing this lesson, I would like to point out that in both these lessons stress was laid on serving Allah with humility. The natural question that arises in one's mind is; how should he serve Allah? The answer to this question is given in the subsequent verses which tell us that the obedience of Allah lies in following the Quranic injunctions.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 17)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Who made the earth a resting place for you and the heaven a structure, and sends down rain from the clouds then brings forth with it fruits for your sustenance; so do not set up rivals to Allah while you know.

And if you are in doubt as to that which We have revealed to Our servant, then produce a chapter like it and call on your helpers besides Allah if you are truthful.

CH.2:22,23

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝

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

وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِمَّا نَزَّلْنَا عَلَىٰ عَبْدِنَا فَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِثْلِهِ وَادْعُوا شُهَدَاءَكُمْ مِمَّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ۝

Purpose of man's creation

In the preceding verse I had explained, mankind was commanded to serve his Lord (*Rabb*) with humility. Only the Creator of man knows best the purpose for which He has created him and the course he needs to follow in order to achieve this objective. The Arabic word *Rabb* (upon which I have commented in *Al-Fātiḥah*), indicates that just as Allah has physically and intellectually developed man from a lowly stage to a higher stage of development, He also wants to evolve him morally and spiritually. He wants to raise man from an animal level of existence, to the heights of moral development, and by nurturing him spiritually, wants to bestow upon him that higher life which is everlasting and is to continue after death. In this way man can achieve happiness and contentment in his temporal life, and the life Hereafter. This moral and spiritual upbringing can be accomplished satisfactorily only if man serves Allah with humility. For example, the obedient child who humbly complies with his parents and teachers wishes,

benefits the most from their guidance, unlike the one who is disinterested and rude. The humble servant, thus benefits from the nurturing of Allah, for He is a far greater Benefactor of mankind than his parents and teachers.

The Metaphor of spiritual sustenance

In the verses under discussion today, Allah has drawn our attention towards the external means He has created for our physical existence, in order to explain the internal and spiritual resources He has provided for our development. This is a distinctive excellence of the Holy Quran that it uses analogies from the extrinsic milieu to illustrate the internal truths for man, who possesses only vision capable of observing his external surroundings. Thus, we are told to observe how Allah Almighty has spread out the vast earth for us like a carpet, although in fact it is round. Although it is spinning fast on its axis, and also revolving around the sun, He has made it a stable resting place for us. In the last verse of the section from which these verses have been quoted, it is stated, “He it is Who created for you all that is in the earth” (2:29). For the earthly existence and the physical development of mankind, He has made the essential provisions and has bestowed upon him countless blessings beyond the power of his estimation.

Seven realms of spiritual development

Attention is then drawn towards the heavens that they are not a mere scattered collection of stars, but a structure made with order and organization. Today, after fourteen hundred years of Quranic revelation modern scientific thought has corroborated this, that in fact the starry creation is divided into galaxies and a systematic arrangement exists throughout the universe. Towards the end of this section it is further elaborated that after creating for you in the earth what is above and beyond your imagination, “He directed Himself to the heaven, so He made them complete seven heavens; and He is Knower of all things” (2:29). In the physical universe we do not see the seven heavens, nor does scientific technology shed light on it, however, the Holy Quran and the Hadith both give us knowledge of seven levels of existence in the spiritual realm, or the life Hereafter. The verse under discussion today, therefore gives us a hint, that after giving you all the provisions and blessings for this worldly existence, Allah has made for you seven superior levels of spiritual existence in the life Hereafter. After death, spiritual progress through Divine nurturing (*Rabūbiyat*) continues within these seven levels of the spiritual heavens. It should be remembered that during the *Mi‘rāj* (spiritual ascension), the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) saw people, in fact even the prophets were divided into seven levels of heavenly existence. Glory be to Allah, all praise is His!

Glory be to Allah Who is incomparable in greatness! How Great is the Lord, and how magnanimous a Benefactor of mankind He is. In the verse being discussed today, making of the earth as the resting place also indicates that man's abode on the earth is temporary. Using the word structure for the heavens signifies that the earthly mode of existence is the foundation on which the edifice of heavenly life is raised. The way man leads his temporal life fashions his heavenly existence; that is why the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "The world is the cultivating ground for the life Hereafter." Whatsoever one sows in this world, he shall reap its harvest in the life to come.

Once again after drawing attention towards an external phenomenon, an internal spiritual secret is revealed in the Divine words, "And (Allah) sends down rain from the clouds then brings forth with it fruits for your sustenance." The flow of heavenly rainwater stimulates the earth to generate its sustenance, and its fruits and flowers bloom. If rain were to stop, the rivers and waterways would dry up leaving mankind without food or life giving water, ultimately leading to his demise. Likewise in the spiritual realm, if there was no revelation (which has been repeatedly likened to rainwater in the Holy Quran), spiritual sustenance would not be produced, and man would die spiritually. Just as the rain water enlivens the dead earth to produce fruits and flowers responsible for the physical maintenance, and the development of the human species, revelation of the Divine word generates life in the dead souls of men, and provides the sustenance needed for the maintenance of their spiritual life. With it spring out the fruits and flowers which were previously lying dormant. These fruits and flowers are those fine qualities and excellent attributes that evolve in every righteous person who guards against evil, and become such an apparent part of his character, that they are perceived even by those who are of a worldly disposition. Although physical sustenance and produce, is created by Allah, man is duty bound to utilize the rainwater, soften and shear the land with the plow, sow the God given seedling, and put in the sweat and toil so familiar to the farmer. In a like manner, spiritual rainwater (revelation), the soil of man's inner soul, the seedlings of his good deeds, moral and spiritual blessings, and the spiritual exercise in facing trials and tribulations of destiny and heaven, all combine together to evolve a man spiritually, and produce the fragrant flowers, and the fresh fruits within his inner soul

Revelation a source of life for the spirit

Just as the rain in the physical world provides the link between the heavens and the earth, revelation is the bond between the earthly and the heavenly life of man. Divine revelation gives all the essential news of the world

Hereafter, and improves the worldly life of man in such a manner that it leads to improvement in his life after death. Allah has created such excellent means for nurturing the worldly and heavenly existence of mankind, that even if he spends every moment of his life in thanksgiving, praise and glorification of his Lord, it will not suffice. Therefore, it is stated, "Do not set up rivals with Allah while you know," i.e., you are commanded not to set up associates with Him, while possessing knowledge that Allah is your sole Creator, and the One Who nourishes you unto perfection. Any worldly idol, be it an effigy of stone, a prophet, or a spiritual, or a worldly leader raised to divinity, did not create man, nor was it responsible for the magnificent nurturing of man's worldly and heavenly existence that I have just briefly touched upon. In fact, like other human beings they too were dependent on Allah for their development. What a gross injustice it is to raise them to divinity, or as partners with God! The Holy Quran further expresses this in the verse, "Surely ascribing partners to Allah is a greivous iniquity" (31:13). There can be no greater self-inflicted injustice for the human soul, because man thereby deprives himself of the unparalleled worldly, and the everlasting heavenly source of Divine nurture.

A challenge for the critics of Divine Revelation

Revelation is essential for the moral and spiritual development of man in this world, to elevate him from an animal level of spiritual existence to that of a civilized human being, and to bless him with inner tranquillity. It is also necessary for the everlasting progress of the life Hereafter. This is fully expressed in the Divine words, "And if you are in doubt as to that which We revealed to Our servant, then produce a chapter like it, and call on your helpers besides Allah if you are truthful." Critics find Divine revelation as an easy target for their criticism. This is something they cannot visualize descending from heaven. They do readily admit to the fine and noble qualities of the Holy Prophet's character, and no fair minded person can object to the reasonable and excellent teachings of Islam. Those who did object to Quranic injunctions on certain issues, (such as defensive warfare and matters of divorce) have had to shamefully retract their statements, by practically following the same direction in their own practical conduct in these matters. In the case of revelation, as it cannot be perceived visually, objections were raised during the time of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and, can even be put forward today. One, for example, can cast suspicion on the Holy Quran not being the revealed word of God, but a creation of the mind of the Holy Prophet (we seek refuge in Allah from saying so). A very simple and forceful reply to this is given by the Holy Quran that Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon

him) was illiterate. The Holy Quran further challenges the skeptics that there exist many educated and knowledgeable persons amongst them, (as do exist in large numbers in Europe and America today) and if this is not the case, then they can enlist help from all over the world. In Arabia, during the Prophet's time, there were certainly many persons highly skilled and knowledgeable in the Arabic language. All of them, the modern and the ancient are collectively challenged by the Holy Quran to bring the likeness of its single chapter. Historically, in the text of the Holy Quran the challenge put forward initially was to bring forth a book like the Holy Quran. When this challenge went unanswered, the equivalent of ten chapters was demanded. When even this was not met, it was further reduced to what is demanded in this verse, "Then bring a chapter like it." It must be remembered that in the Holy Quran, while there do exist many lengthy chapters, there are shorter ones consisting of three or four verses like *Al-Kausar* and *Al-Ikhlās*. Can the entire world of critics with its large numbers of scholars and language experts even produce the equivalent of these three or four Quranic verses? What a baseless objection it is then to say (we seek the refuge of Allah from saying so) that an unlettered inhabitant of Arabia, 1400 years ago crafted the whole Quran himself and put it forward as the word of God. The skeptics were, however, as dumbfounded towards this challenge 1400 years ago in the time of the Holy Prophet as they are today. This challenge of the Holy Quran stands for the whole world today as it did fourteen centuries ago.

It must be noted that this challenge is not only in the matter of eloquence and the quality of language, for which the Holy Quran remains, and has always been the standard authority. It is in fact a challenge to match the knowledge, wisdom and the light of guidance that the Divine revelation contains. It was through the miraculous effect of the Holy Quran, that within a short span of twenty three years, a nation sunk into the depths of depravity was raised not only to the level of decent human behavior, but found closeness with God. To comply with all these requirements, will really amount to meeting the challenge of the Holy Quran. In the verse under consideration today the word '*abd-i-nā*' i.e., our humble servant is proof in itself that the Holy Quran is the word of Allah, and not of Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). In this one word, the Holy Quran has encoded a sea of Divine wisdom. It is pointed out, that do you not observe that Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is the first and foremost servant of Allah, who follows this guidance revealed to him with complete obedience and humility. Could any liar or fabricator act upon his self created guidance in the manner the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) did? He used to say, "I am the first of the Muslims," meaning, "I am the first of those who submit to Allah." He

was so conscientious of his status as a humble servant, that in all the formulae of faith, the word humble servant was placed before the word Messenger. He was more proud of being the humble servant of Allah than of being His Messenger. The sense of honor of Allah Almighty, in the matter of the Holy Quran is so great, that after putting forward this challenge, He has given the critics permission to call upon helpers, but has categorically stated, "Besides Allah." He has thus expressly forbidden them to call upon Him. We shall discuss this further in the next lesson.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 18)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

And if you are in doubt as to that which We have revealed to Our servant, then produce a chapter like it and call on your helpers besides Allah if you are truthful.

But if you do(it) not—and you can never do it— then be on your guard against the fire whose fuel is men and stones; it is prepared for the disbelievers.

And give good news to those who believe and do good deeds, that for them are Gardens in which rivers flow. Whenever they are given a portion of the fruit thereof, they will say: This is what was given to us before; and they are given the like of it. And for them therein are pure companions and therein they will abide.

CH.2:23-25

Quranic teachings are practical for all times

The first among the three verses quoted above was discussed at length in the previous lesson. To the critics' objection that the Holy Quran was not the revealed word of God, a simple and forceful answer is given. Another doubt that can arise in this matter is with regards to the feasibility of acting upon the Quranic injunctions in daily life. For a person who lives a monastic life, it is possible to comply with the religious injunctions. Is it,

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝

وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِّمَّا نَزَّلْنَا عَلَىٰ عَبْدِنَا
فَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِّثْلِهِ ۚ وَادْعُوا شُهَدَاءَكُمْ
مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ۝

فَإِنْ لَّمْ تَفْعَلُوا وَلَكِنْ تَفْعَلُوا فَأْتُوا نَارَ الَّتِي
وُتُوذُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَابَةُ ۚ أُعِدَّتْ لِلْكَافِرِينَ ۝

وَبَشِّرِ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ
جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ كُلَّمَا رُزِقُوا
مِنْهَا مِنْ ثَمَرَةٍ رِّزْقًا قَالُوا هَذَا الَّذِي رُزِقْنَا
مِنْ قَبْلُ وَأَنُؤَاهُ ۚ مُمْتَسِكِينَ ۚ وَلَهُمْ
فِيهَا أَزْوَاجٌ مُّطَهَّرَةٌ ۚ وَهُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ۝

however, possible to do so for the one who is involved in worldly pursuits? The reply to this was given in the words, “Our servant (*‘abdi-nā*).” Allah has called the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) as His servant, the one who served Allah with complete humility and submission. He complied to the fullest extent with all the Quranic injunctions, and at the same time carried out all his worldly obligations. These being far beyond the level of an ordinary person. He carried out the common worldly duties of being a husband, a father, a kinsman and a bread-winner for the family. In addition to this, he was also a king, and a lawmaker. It was his duty to formulate such religious laws (*shariat*), that would remain useful and viable till the Day of Judgment. As a judge he had to rule in legal matters, and simultaneously meet the heavy burden of his duties as a commander in chief. If somebody fell sick, the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was at his bedside to inquire about his well being. When somebody passed away, he would participate in, and lead his funeral prayers. People seeking religious knowledge flocked to his doorstep day and night. One is amazed at how a single person met all these personal and national obligations. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) did all this, and at the same time complied with all the Quranic injunctions, thereby demonstrating that it was humanly possible to do so. This perfection as a role model is acknowledged by the Holy Quran in the verse, “Whoever obeys the Messenger, he indeed obeys Allah” (4:80). After his death, a group of young people while visiting Hazrat Ayesha (the Holy Prophet’s wife) inquired from her about the character of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). The reply of this noble lady was that his character was the Holy Quran i.e., his morals were a practical illustration of the Quranic teachings. The study of the Holy Quran is in itself a study of the noble character of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Some religions propound seemingly beautiful teachings, but which are totally impractical to implement while pursuing a normal worldly life. Such an assertion, however, cannot be made in respect of Islam.

In the modern age another doubt arises in the minds of people and is sometimes articulated. It is said that it may have been possible 1400 years ago to act upon the Quranic teachings, but that it is no longer possible today. The answer to this objection was given by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed, the vicegerent (*khalifa*) of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and the reformer of this age. By his example, he demonstrated that it is fully possible, and indeed necessary to act upon the teachings of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) today, as it was in the days gone by. He was thus able to find God, and achieve the object of man’s creation in this age of atheism and denial of

religion. He was a recipient of Divine communion, which has always been a sign of closeness with God, but has always been looked upon with cynicism by the skeptics. By being a recipient of Divine revelation (*wahy*) non prophetic revelation and voice messages (*ilhām*), he provided a very convincing, and a living proof of their truth. He proclaimed vociferously and repeatedly that the only way to truly find God in this day and age, was by acting upon the injunctions of the Holy Quran, and by following the footsteps of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). He openly challenged all other religions that claimed to establish a relationship with God. Was there even one votary of another religion that had established a relationship with God, in the manner he had done, by following the scripture and the Prophet of Islam? None, however, responded to this challenge.

A challenge and a prophecy

As mentioned before, the Holy Quran collectively challenges all knowledgeable scholars of the past and present, that if they are convinced that the Holy Prophet, (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) who was unlettered, fabricated the Holy Quran (we seek the refuge of Allah from saying so), then they should bring forward the equivalent of its smallest chapter. Another simple, but cogent proof that the Holy Quran is the Divine word is then provided by making a grand prophecy in the following Quranic verse, “But if you do (it) not—and you can never do it,” i.e., that this challenge will forever remain un-responded. Such a prophecy for all times provides clear evidence that the Holy Quran can only be the Word of God, Who is All- Powerful, and has knowledge of the future. This should suffice to convince equally an ignorant person or the greatest scholar of any age. No one was able to disprove this prophecy during the time of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), nor can it be done today.

Stones as fuel of fire

If even after this simple, easily understood, and irrefutable evidence, someone still remains skeptic, then it is stated, “be on your guard against the fire whose fuel is men and stones; it is prepared for the disbelievers.” It may be questioned, why should the stones be put to fire? Some interpreters of the Holy Quran conjecture that the reference is to the stone idols of the Arab idolaters. This explanation is not satisfactory, however, because what is the fault of the idols, if it was man who created them, and then started to worship them? How could these idols be in the world Hereafter? At the time of the fall of Mecca, the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) had destroyed these idols anyhow. This interpretation is, therefore,

erroneous. There are two other interpretations which seem appropriate, and I like them both. The word *hijarat* in Arabic while meaning a stone, can also be used for a stone hearted person. It has been used in this sense in a subsequent verse of *Al-Baqarah*, “Then your hearts hardened after that, so that they were like rocks, rather worse in hardness”(2:74). The phrase stone-hearted person is used commonly in both the Urdu and English languages. In Arabic, the word *hijr* is also used for a person of frightening demeanor. These were those leaders who used their political prowess to intimidate people, and stopped them from accepting the truth, or incited them to fight against it. Even today, this occurs quite frequently. The Quranic statement, therefore means that ordinary people, and their political, or religious leaders who play a major role in opposing the truth will be the fuel of this fire.

The concept of Hell and Heaven

The word fuel indicates that the fire of base desires and envy that smolders in the hearts of the disbelievers, and their opposition to the truth in this life will kindle into the fire of hell in the life Hereafter. In chapter 104:6-9 it is stated, “It is the fire kindled by Allah, Which rises over the hearts. Surely it is closed in on them, In extended columns.” There are few today who worship stone idols, but those who worship their low desires includes all those who do not obey Allah. It is quite obvious that he who does not obey Allah, follows his low desires and emotions, which have the nature of fire. This fire which first appears in the hearts of men, can ignite into the conflagration of warfare, and ultimately appears as pillars of hell-fire in the life Hereafter. The Holy Quran was revealed to control the internal fire of desires in mankind, and to make it useful. An analogy for this is the utilization of controlled energy in rockets and airplanes etc., which makes it a source of progress and development. If this same energy runs out of control, it destroys the vehicle it was suppose to propel. Just as surely unbridled desires can consume man in its aftermath. Whosoever rejects the Holy Quran, will be unable to control this internal fire of his low desires, and it will ultimately flare into the burning fires of Hell. Those who are slave to their emotions and desires, their condition is appropriately described by the Quranic phrase, “Is there more (*hal min mazid*).” This desire for more could be for wealth, power, or unbridled sexual passions. On the other hand, those who believe in the Holy Quran, and thereby exercise restraint against evil, and purify their souls, their hearts are filled with cool freshness and tranquillity. This is the paradise of the heart with which every believer is blessed in this world, and the Holy Quran points this out in the verse, “And for him who fears to stand before his Lord are two Gardens” (55:46).

The one who is fearful of the moment when he will have to answer before his Lord, is blessed with two kinds of paradise. Now it is quite apparent that most believers do not get the worldly paradise of material ease and comfort. What they are all blessed with is the paradise of the heart i.e., inner peace and contentment. After death this will assume a more palpable form of the blessing of paradise in the Hereafter. The young people today, who are influenced by the western culture, find it difficult to understand the paradise of the heart. A person who is content and lacks anxiety within his heart, is in paradise, although outwardly he may not be in gardens with flowing streams. The one, within whom burns the fire of discontent, is in a living hell, although he may be the owner of lush gardens with streams of running water. The last verse in this lesson gives good news to those who believe and do good, that they will have, "Gardens, wherein rivers flow." The Arabic word for belief (*imān*) is derived from the word *aman* which means peace, indicating contentment of heart. The word for paradise (*jannat*), means something which is not perceptible by the ordinary senses. This shows that by believing and doing good, a paradise of tranquillity is born within the soul of man, being hidden from the ordinary senses. This puts man in a state of blissful content, a heavenly existence in this world, and will assume a more perceptible form in the life Hereafter. When those blessed in this manner, are given such celestial sustenance, they will say it is similar to what they were given before. The spiritual blessings received by those hearts who enter paradise in this world, due to their belief and good deeds, are similar in their effect to the fruits of paradise in the world Hereafter. This is the reason why they would say, it is the same sort of sustenance they were given before. It is because of this resemblance, that the Holy Quran says, "and they were given the like of it." The spiritual delights of this life will be presented to them as the fruits of the life Hereafter.

Spirit - the real sensor of pain and pleasure

I would again like to lay stress on the fact that one should not look down upon spiritual blessings. In fact, all that brings happiness to the human mind is truly spiritual in nature. When the body dies, and the spirit leaves it, one is not able to taste even the most delicious of culinary delicacies, or appreciate the most melodious of tunes. The human body is merely the conduit, or channel through which the spirit perceives pleasure or pain. If the spirit is in serenity, it leads to individual satisfaction and likewise if it is in pain, the human body feels the effect of it. It is quite possible that an honest person may go to bed hungry, and a dishonest individual may have a table laden with dainties. The honest person's heart is, however, free from anxiety, and he is in a paradise of contentment, in comparison to the hell of

a crooked individual's anxious and fearful heart. A person may not have all the worldly goods and luxuries, but he may still be happy for the real happiness of a person lies in spiritual contentment.

Pure companionship and everlasting nature of Paradise: Two more things are mentioned after this, i.e., "And for them therein are pure companions and therein they will abide." It is no pleasure to be alone, and the best partner for a person is the spouse. They cover each others faults and deficiencies, and provide loving companionship and satisfaction. Being a pair is not however enough, it is pure companionship that is stressed. If a man's wife, though very beautiful, is impure and of a shady character, she becomes a source of discord in his life. The same rule applies to a woman; her life also becomes a living hell as a result of spousal infidelity. The other feature of this paradise is that it is everlasting. A beautiful garden which is just a temporary abode lacks the pleasure obtained from a permanent dwelling.

In the end I would like to mention that the heart of a righteous person even in this world is in heaven, and from it spring the streams of good deeds which benefit God's creation. This is the picture of this world's paradise which is described in the Holy Quran, "Gardens in which rivers flow." In the Hereafter the paradise of the heart takes the shape of external gardens, and the good and beneficial deeds of the righteous towards their fellow beings become the rivers which flow underneath these gardens.

Addendum to Lesson 18

Mr. Muhammad Aslam Rana, from the, 'Center for Research on Christianity,' at Shadara-Lahore sent us the following comments and inquiry on lesson 18. It is being published along with our reply. He writes:

For the students of the Holy Quran, it is refreshing to read Mr. Naseer Ahmed Faruqi's Quranic lessons which are being published regularly in the periodical *Paigham-e-Sulah*. In lesson 18, dated Jan. 19-26 1983, in his commentary on verse 23 of *Al-Baqarah* he states, Why then one may ask, should the stones be put to fire? Some interpreters of the Holy Quran conjecture that the reference is to the stone idols of the Arab idolaters. This explanation is not satisfactory, however, because what is the fault of the idols, if it was man who created them, and then started to worship them? How could these idols be in the world Hereafter? At the time of the fall of Mecca, the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) had destroyed these idols anyhow. This interpretation is therefore erroneous.' In this matter, it is respectfully stated that the commentators who consider these stones as the idols of Arabs, or other nations, are also correct. When these idols burn along with the idolaters in the fire of hell, the mere site of their predicament, degradation, and worthlessness, and the practical

illustration of the teachings of the honored prophets will be a source of spiritual and mental chastisement for those idolaters. As to the question, how could these idols be in the Hereafter, after having been destroyed by the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) at the time of the fall of Mecca? I would like to answer, 'For the Almighty, Who has the Power to raise mankind from the dust of his bones, it is not difficult to put together the broken pieces of these idols, and restore them to their original shape. The intent of this would be to question and chastise the idolaters. It is clearly mentioned in the Holy Quran that this will occur on the Day of Resurrection in the verses, "And on the day when He will gather them, and that which they serve besides Allah, He will say: Was it you who led astray these My servants, or did they themselves stray from the path? They will say: Glory be to Thee ! it was not befitting for us that we should take for protectors others besides Thee, but Thou didst make them and their fathers to enjoy until they forgot the Reminder, and they became a lost people. So they will give you the lie in what you say, then you can neither ward off (evil), nor (obtain) help. And whoever among you does wrong, We shall make him taste a great chastisement (25:17-19).

I hope these comments will reach the readers through the pages of your periodical *Paigham-e-Sulah*, so that they can be appraised of the correct situation.

Mr. Naseer Ahmad Faruqi's Answer:

Mr Muhammad Aslam Rana has ignored the following points in his commentary.

- 1) As mentioned in *Al-Baqarah* verses 23, 24 the Holy Quran collectively challenges all knowledgeable scholars of the past and present, that the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is unlettered, and if they are convinced that he fabricated the Holy Quran (we seek the refuge of Allah from saying so), then they should bring forward the equivalent of its smallest chapter. "But if you do (it) not—and you can never do it then be on your guard against the fire whose fuel is men and stones; it is prepared for the disbelievers" (2:24).

In these verses, clearly those critics are addressed, who do not accept the Holy Quran as the Divine word and not the idol worshipping polytheists of Arabia.

- 2) Despite this if we interpret this as the stone idols of these idolaters, we are faced with the following objection. What was the fault of those lifeless stones? It was after all the idolaters who fashioned them into idols and started to worship them. This interpretation certainly does not appeal to my mind.

- 3) Those addressed first in these verses were the people of Arabia. Their stone idols were destroyed by the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) after the fall of Mecca. The contention that they would also be the idols of other nations, and would be put in the fire of hell, to serve as a source of spiritual chastisement for the Arab idolaters, leads to the following objection. How could they be a source of such punishment for those idolaters? They would in fact be happy that their gods were better, because they were saved from that inferno. The gods of other nations were false and were therefore subjected to fire, while their gods (whom Allah could according to Mr. Rana restore to original shape, although they were shattered to pieces) were true because they were saved from such a fate.

In the reference of Ch. *Al-Furqān*, that Mr. Rana has quoted, there is no doubt a reference to the false gods. In these lessons I have, however, explained that the Arabic word *ibadat* means serving with humility. The word *salaat* has been used where ever prayer is meant. Therefore, the Quranic words in verse 17 of *Al-Furqān*, “And that which they serve (*Ta‘budun* from *‘ibādat*) besides Allah,” signify those political and religious leaders whom people serve instead of Allah. Those leaders who thus misled the masses, will definitely be brought back to life to face such punishment.

- 4) In any case the verses of *Al-Baqarah* under discussion do not mention association with God, so that one should bring the idols into this discussion. The discussion is about those who do not consider the Holy Quran as the revealed word of God.
- 5) My interpretation is therefore not only appropriate, but also the correct one. The ‘stones,’ here signify the stone hearted people, or their political and religious leaders who played a dominant role in misleading the masses, by objecting to the truth of the Holy Quran being the revealed Word of God. I have supported this interpretation by reference to the dictionary meaning of the word *hijr* in my preceding lesson. I hope that Mr. Muhammad Aslam Rana will agree with me.

Most humbly,
Naseer Ahmad Faruqi.