

## 3. Qur’anic Discourses

*In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate*

**‘He frowned and turned away \* Because the blind man came to him.’**

STUDENT. Some Sunni exegeses consider the Messenger of Allah to be the subject of these verses:

***He frowned and turned away \* Because the blind man came to him. (80:1-2)***

And so the subsequent verses would also be about him:

***And thou knowest not, perchance he would purify [his soul] \* Or take heed, and the reminder benefit him. As with one who thinketh himself self-sufficient \* Thou turnest thy attention to him \* And it is not thy concern if he doth not purify [his soul] \* But as with one who rusheth toward thee \* While he fears [Allah] \* Thou art distracted from him. (80:3-10)***

If so, these verses would rebuke the Messenger of Allah for frowning and turning away.<sup>1</sup>

‘ALLAMAH. That is not so. First of all, many such rebukes in the Noble Qur’an appear to be directed at the Messenger of Allah while he clearly did not do the reprimanded action. For example, consider these two verses:

***And when thou seest those who [insolently] plunge into Our signs [and verses], turn away from them until they engage in some other talk; and if Satan causes you to forget, then sit not with the party of offenders once thou rememberest. (6:68)***

***And He hath already sent unto you in the scripture that when you hear the signs [and verses] of Allah being repudiated and derided, sit not with them until they engage in some other talk; you would otherwise be just like them! Truly Allah will gather all hypocrites and disbelievers in hell.***

(4: 140)

If we compare and match the two verses, it becomes evident that the second verse refers to the command in the first verse. On one hand, it addresses the believers, and on the other hand, it refers to the revelation of the first verse. Thus it is deduced that the first verse is also addressed to the believers, even though it is apparently addressed to a single audience (the Noble Messenger).

And these instructions for the people were aimed at the Messenger of Allah because he was responsible for reaching out to the entire community. This is a form of literary elegance (*fasahah*) and eloquence (*balaghah*), and is also quite common in everyday language. Many times the sultan addresses the vizier while the address applies to the common people.

*... And We have sent down to thee the Remembrance [the Qur'an], that thou mayst make clear to mankind what hath been sent down to them, and that haply they may reflect. (16:44)*

Here, the Messenger of Allah is the channel for delivering these commands which have been decreed for all people.

## **Verses of Chapter 74 (al-Muddaththir) about Walid ibn Mughirah**

'ALLAMAH. The person really meant in these two verses, the one who repudiated and derided the signs and verses of Allah, was Walid ibn Mughirah.[2](#) Allah relates his account in Chapter 74:

*Leave me with him whom I created alone \* And provided him with abundant wealth \* And children that are in his presence \* And I arranged for everything for him \* Then he desireth that I do more [for him] \* Never! For indeed he was obstinately inimical to Our verses \* I will constrain him to a severe ascent \* He contemplated and reckoned \* So be he killed; how he reckoned! \* Again be he killed; how he reckoned! \* Then he reflected \* Then he frowned and scowled \* Then he turned away arrogantly \* And claimed, 'This [Qur'an] is nothing but a sorcery from the yore \* This is nothing but the word of mankind' \* I will soon enter him into [and burn him in] saqar \* And thou knowest not what saqar is \* [Such fire that] it doth not spare [anyone] and doth not leave out [any limb] \* It transforms the skin's colour \* Nineteen [guarding angels] are at it. (74: 11-30)*

So Walid made these blasphemous statements and called the Qur'an 'a powerful sorcery'.

Walid, Abu Jahl, and their friends used to get together and scoff at the Qur'an. When the verse, 'Nineteen [guarding angels] are at it' was revealed, Abu Jahl contemptuously told a party of the Quraysh, 'May your mothers mourn your deaths! I have heard from Ibn Abi Kabshah [referring to the Messenger of Allah] that there are nineteen guards assigned to hell. But there is a whole crowd of you! Are there not ten of you, only ten, who can attack the guards of hell, knock them down and tightly capture them, and thus liberate this hell that Muhammad describes from these nineteen guards?' Abu al-Asad ibn Usayd ibn Kaldah Jumahi[3](#) replied, 'Since I am a brave man and a robust hero, I can alone

take on seventeen of them; you guys cover the other two!'

So the above verses are about the derision and disbelief of those like Walid and his companions. The believers are told not to sit with such offenders or listen to their blasphemies.

## **The second reason why ‘He frowned and turned away’ does not refer to the Messenger of Allah**

‘ALLAMAH. A few verses later, Allah says:

***May man be killed; how ungrateful he is! \* From what did He create him? \* He created him from a sperm-drop and then proportioned him \* Then made the path easy for him \* Then He maketh him die and burieth him [in a grave] \* Then, when He wills, He will resurrect him \* No way; he hath not accomplished what He ordered him. (80: 17-23)***

All Shi'a and Sunni exegetes concur that this curse of Allah is apparently upon the person who frowned and turned away; this is evident from the trend of the verses.

Given how the Qur'an addresses him elsewhere, such words could not be aimed at the Messenger of Allah. Therefore, the Sunni exegetes who presumed the first verse was about the Messenger of Allah had to give up the apparent sense that these verses are connected. They claimed that these verses were revealed on a different occasion and were two independent parts which were later joined together.

Such a claim denies the eloquence and uniformity of the Qur'an, and it is only a result of claiming that the verse ‘He frowned and turned away’ refers to the Messenger of Allah.

Thirdly, everyone, whether Shi'a or Sunni, agrees that Chapter 68 (*al-Qalam*) is one of the ‘ancient chapters’ (*al-suwar al-’ata’iq*), the first chapters to be revealed in Mecca. In particular, Chapter 68 was revealed at the beginning of the prophethood, after the revelation of Chapters 96 (*al-’Alaq*), 74 (*al-Muddaththir*) and 73 (*al-Muzzammil*). There, Allah praises and describes His Messenger:

***And indeed thou art of a magnificent character. (68:4)***

If the Messenger of Allah was such at the beginning of his prophethood, he should only have risen to higher stages of excellence. So how could he do such an act? How could he frown and turn aside only because he saw a blind but self-restrained believer in order to attract the heads of Quraysh to Islam, and appeal to the hearts of the self-indulgent and haughty people among the Arabs? Not only is such conduct not typical of the Prophet of Islam, but it is also not typical of the rest of Allah’s prophets and friends. In fact, no devoted, self-restrained, and vigilant believer would behave like that.

From what I know, the subject of ‘He frowned and turned away’ was ‘Uthman ibn ‘Affan, who turned his face away when the blind Ibn Umm Maktum approached the Messenger of Allah. Narrations also confirm

this, as it has been narrated that he was ‘a man from the Umayyads (Bani Umayyah).’<sup>4</sup>

## **Tiwal ('lengthy'), mi'in ('hundreds'), and mufassal ('extended') chapters**

STUDENT. There is a tradition from the Messenger of Allah:

I have been given the *tiwal* ('lengthy') chapters in place of the Torah, the *mi'in* ('hundreds') chapters in place of the Gospel, and the *mathani* ('repeated') chapters in place of the Psalms. And I have been favoured above them by the sixty eight *mufassal* ('extended') chapters. That [the Noble Qur'an] encompasses the other books [of the previous prophets].<sup>5</sup>

In this narration, what is meant by the *tiwal*, *mi'in*, *mathani*, and *mufassal* chapters?

'ALLAMAH. *Tiwal* chapters refer to the seven long chapters at the beginning of the Qur'an. They are Chapters 2–7 and Chapter 10. However, when collecting and putting the Qur'an together, 'Uthman positioned Chapters 8 and 9 (al-Anfal and al-Tawbah) before Chapter 10 (Yunus). That was because he considered Chapter 9 to be a continuation of Chapter 8, and not an independent chapter, since it does not start with 'In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate'. Since he took them as one chapter, they were counted among the *tiwal* ('lengthy') chapters. And he had no answer when the objection was put forth that the Messenger of Allah had placed Chapter 10 (Yunus) after Chapter 7 (al-A'raf) and had considered it among the *tiwal* chapters. He only said, 'I was not aware of that arrangement of the Messenger of Allah.'<sup>6</sup>

Then the *mi'in* chapters are those that contain approximately a hundred verses. The Qur'an is conventionally categorised into three parts: the *tiwal* ('lengthy') chapters, the *mi'in* ('hundreds') chapters, and the *mufassal* ('extended') chapters. The chapters from Chapter 78 (al-Naba') to the end of the Qur'an are also called the *qisar* ('short') chapters.

## **Mutashabih (analogous) and mathani (repeated)**

'ALLAMAH . As with *mathani* (double, repeated), to the best of my knowledge, it is not the name of any particular group of the chapters of the Qur'an. The root of the term (*thana, yathni* ) means to bend and fold. Since many verses of the Qur'an relate to the other verses, it is as if those verses have appeared twice: once in the verse itself, and once through its implication in the other verse. And the other verse also comes up twice: once by itself, and once through the other verse to which it relates and which it explains. Since the verses of the Qur'an relate to one another, the whole Qur'an may be called *mathani* (repeated).

***Allah hath revealed the best speech, a Scripture that is analogous and repeated [in verses]; by which the skins of those who fear their Lord shiver, then their skins and hearts soften by [or for]***

***the remembrance of Allah. That is Allah's guidance by which He guideth whom He wills; and whomever Allah misguideth, for him there is no guide. (39:23)***

In this verse, the term *mathani* refers to the whole revealed book which is the best speech.[7](#)

And the term *mutashabih* (analogous) in this verse means that some parts of the Qur'an are similar to some other parts, and they all have a common basis. This meaning of *mutashabih* is different from *mutashabih* as ambiguous, which is the opposite of *muhkam* (solid, clear). The latter is referred to in:

***He it is Who hath sent down upon thee the Scripture; wherein are solid verses – those are the substance of the Book – and others [that are] ambiguous.... (3:7)***

Here, *muhkam* is that which is clear and apparent in meaning, while *mutashabih* is not. Thus *mutashabih* in this verse refers to those verses that require interpretation and commentary.

## **Chapters with disjointed (muqatta'ah) letters**

STUDENT. Some chapters of the Qur'an start with disjointed (*muqatta'ah*) letters such as *alif-lam-mim*, *ha-mim*, and so on. Has the real meaning of these letters been identified so far, so that one could be certain in translating and interpreting them?

'ALLAMAH. Generally speaking, these letters are connected with the contents of the chapter. Hence, chapters with the same disjointed letters at their beginning discuss topics of a similar nature.

Six chapters of the Noble Qur'an start with *alif-lam-mim*. They are Chapters 2 and 3, which follow one another, and Chapters 29 to 32, which are also grouped together.

Seven chapters start with *ha-mim* and are known as '*hawamim*'. They are Chapters 40–46. As with the *alif-lam mim* chapters, these chapters are also similar in topic and are in sequence.

Then there are the five 'glorification chapters' (*musabbihat*), which begin with 'glorifies' (*yusabbihu*) and 'glorified' (*sabbaha*). They are: Chapter 57, 59, 61, 62, and 64. Although Chapter 87 (al-A'la) also starts with 'glorify' (*sabbih*, in imperative form), it is not considered one of the 'glorification chapters'. It is included among them in one narration, but a more reliable narration identifies the 'glorification chapters' as the five chapters mentioned above.

It is narrated that the Messenger of Allah used to recite these five chapters every night before going to sleep. When asked why, he replied: 'There is a verse in each of these chapters that is equivalent to a thousand verses of the Qur'an.' And according to another narration, whoever recites the *musabbihat* at night before sleeping will see the Honourable Messenger before death, and he will show him his place and station in paradise.[8](#)

Chapters 10 to 15 start with *alif-lam-ra*. These six chapters are also consecutive and have a similar tone

and style:

And there are three chapters that begin with *ta–sin*. These chapters too are in sequence and similar in tone. They are Chapters 26 to 28.

Chapter 7 (al-A’raf) starts with *alif–lam–mim–sad*, and incorporates the tone and style of both the *alif–lam–mim* chapters and Chapter 38 (Sad), showing that, as we said, the disjointed letters at the beginning of the chapters of the Qur’an are brief, hidden allusions to all of the topics revealed in that chapter. Thus the *alif–lam–mim* at the beginning of Chapter 7 (al-A’raf) indicates its similarity with the *alif–lam–mim* chapters, and the *sad* indicates that it shares the tone and style of Chapter Sad.

Chapter 19 (Maryam) starts with *kaf–ha–ya–’ayn–sad*, and has its own special tone and style. Chapter 50 (Qaf) has a particular form, and that form and mode is distinct in all of the Qur’an, as do Chapters 20 (Ta–Ha) and 36 (Ya–Sin). However, many have considered ‘Ta–Ha’ as a single word and one of the names of the Messenger of Allah. The same has been said about ‘Yasin’; this is verified by the verse:

***Peace be upon il-Yasin [Elias] (37: 130)***

where *il* is an abbreviation for ﴿‘family’, so *il–Yasin* would mean ‘Yasin’s family’). In fact, in an uncommon (*shadhdhah*) recitation, this verse is pronounced as ﴿*i*–*Yasin* (Yasin’s family).<sup>9</sup>

Therefore one may say that in the first verse of Chapter 36 (Ya–Sin), the two letters are actually two words: the first one is used when someone is being addressed, and the next letter is a name of the Messenger of Allah. But *ya* and *sin* could also be two disjointed letters, like the other disjointed letters in the Qur’an that refer to the contents of the chapter. At the same time, these letters could also be references to the Messenger of Allah. That would be just like Chapter 20 (Ta–Ha), where *ta* and *ha* are two letters, but in addition to referring to the contents of the chapter, they also designate the Messenger of Allah.

Note that Chapter 42 (al-Shura) begins with ‘*Ha–mim. ’Ayn–sin–qaf.*’ It is characterised by the *ha–mim* chapters, but it also has some of the tone of Chapter 19 (Maryam), which has ‘*ayn* among its disjointed letters. In addition, it incorporates the tone of Chapter 36 (Ya–Sin), which has the letter *sin* in it, and Chapter 50 (Qaf), which has the letter *qaf*.

In general, the disjointed letters indicate the contents of the whole chapter. Thus one should study these chapters with thorough reflection and attention, and deduce the commonalities between the chapters by comparing the chapters that start with the same disjointed letters with each other and also against the other chapters. Of course, such a study is very difficult and precise; nevertheless, it leads to important results.

The different tones of the chapters and the connection between the disjointed letters and the content of the chapters are among the miracles and wonders of the Noble Qur’an. All praise is to Allah, the Lord of

all beings.

## **The Messenger of Allah was himself a miracle**

STUDENT. It is very astonishing that even though the Messenger of Allah would not record the verses himself, as he never wrote anything, he used to recite the revealed chapters of Qur'an without a single letter out of place. Whenever he received revelation, he must have summoned the scribes right away and recounted the verses for them. His entire life, he was never seen taking a pen in his hand or writing anything.

Is it plausible to merely call this the power of memory? Has anything like this been observed throughout the whole history of mankind? Without recording his words in writing or audio, has any speaker or lecturer, even the most talented lecturer with the strongest memory in the world, been able to repeat even two minutes of his speech precisely as delivered before, without adding, missing, or misplacing a single letter? This in itself is certainly a very amazing and peculiar miracle.

'ALLAMAH. Yes, indeed it is so! The Messenger of Allah used to recite the verses of the Qur'an without misplacing, adding, or dropping a single letter. In fact, sometimes those who used to memorise the Qur'an checked their memorisation with him.

Besides the Qur'an, he also used to exactly repeat the phrases that he had stated many years back, just as if he were composing them right at that time. When he was on his deathbed, Hadrat Fatimah was very sad. 'O, woe on us,' she was crying. There he told her, 'O, Fatimah, do not say that! [Instead,] say the same words that I said upon the death of my son Ibrahim:

The heart grieves, and the eyes weep, yet we say not but the truth. And we are certainly sorrowful because of thee, O Ibrahim.[10](#)

Notice that the Noble Prophet was going through the difficult phases of death. His illness had intensified, and his condition had become heavy and difficult. Yet he repeated the exact words that he had said many years ago at the time of Ibrahim's death. This is a strange miracle. This is due to having dominance over the Divine Realm (*malakut*) and supremacy over the Spiritual World (*ma'na*). It is not about the corporeal power of memory – that is the power of memory within the body and coupled with it, though the actual power of memory is immaterial.

STUDENT. There is so much difference between this statement of yours, in meticulously analysing and verifying a simple sentence of the Messenger of Allah at the difficult state of death, and 'Umar's statement that 'Pain has overcome him; this man is indeed hallucinating.'[11](#)

## The meaning of ahqaf

STU D E N T . What is meant by *ahqaf* (sands) in the verse:

***And make mention of the brother of 'Ad [tribe] when he warned his people in ahqaf [sandy deserts] – and verily warners came and went before and after him – saying, 'Worship none but Allah. Lo! I fear for you the punishment of a tremendous day.' (46:21)***

'ALLAMAH. *Ahqaf* refers to certain villages between Iraq and Yemen, where the Prophet Hud called to the people of his tribe, 'Ad. They did not accept his message, so Allah exterminated them by sending poisonous or hot deadly winds (*samum*). Nowadays nothing of their towns is left, as all have disappeared.

## The verse, 'And of the earth like them'

STUDENT . The last verse of Chapter 65 (al-Talaq) is:

***Allah is Who created seven heavens, and of the earth like them. The command descendeth amidst them, so that you may know that truly Allah is All-Powerful over everything and that truly Allah has encompassed everything in knowledge. (65: 12)***

What is meant by 'And from the earth like them,' and how are there seven earths like the seven heavens?

'ALLAMAH. There are two interpretations here. The first one is that just like Allah created seven skies, He also created seven earths, and therefore we have seven heavens and seven earths.

The second meaning is that, *from* the earth, He created a being which is like the seven heavens, and that is the human being. This latter exegesis is apparently narrated from Ibn 'Abbas. Some have maintained that every human being includes in himself 'the seven firm ones [i.e. heavens]' (*sab'an shidada*, 78:12) and all their powers. They are all under the rule of mankind. And this human being, in whom all the seven heavens are integrated, is created from the earth.[12](#)

But this interpretation does not sound quite plausible. Of course it is justifiable to identify man as being 'from the earth' because his creation essentially emanates from the earth. It is after growing from the earth that man develops and achieves a status of an immaterial soul and spirit:

***And Allah caused you to grow out of the earth like a plant [or such a growth!]. (71:17)***

Nonetheless, the first interpretation seems more appropriate, and is also confirmed by some narrations and supplications.

## **'And His Throne goes back on water'**

STUDENT. In your treatise on eschatology (*al-Insan ba'd al-Dunya*), you have mentioned the verse:

***The day [when] the earth is changed to other than the earth, and [the same with] the heavens, and they come forth to Allah, the One, the Dominant. (14:48)***

There you have written:

In the explanation of 'The day [when] the earth is changed to other than the earth,' it is reported from Imam Sajjad:

It means [the earth changes] to an earth on which no sin is committed, and is all seen to have no mountains or vegetation on it, as it was [created and] expanded the first time. And His Throne [God's status of power and authority] goes back onto the water as it was at first. Thus Allah will be All-Independent in magnificence and power.[13](#)

And there you have made a side note:

His [Imam Sajjad's] phrase, 'Independent in magnificence and power' is the explanation of His Throne's being established on water. The Qur'an indicates that water refers to the source of all life, power and magnificence. If water adopts and is given the forms of the creatures, then the beings emerge; and if the forms are removed, the Throne goes back onto the water.[14](#)

Here, is water the selfsame *al-wujud al-munbasit* ('expansive being', the Universal Soul)?

'ALLAMAH. First of all note that it is a verse of the Qur'an, and so we cannot be a hundred percent sure about our interpretation. What seems apparent from the verse is that on that day (the Day of Resurrection), water, which is God's power and life, will take on the status of God's Throne and authority. Thus it will take over all existents. However, concerning the reality of that power and life, we have no idea.

At any rate, the verse conveys the idea that in the beginning, there was some broad reality that was under the rule of God's Throne in place of the universe, and God's Throne governed over it. Afterwards, these forms and shapes emerged from that broad reality, but then again these forms will disappear and fade away. Thus the universe will return to that broad reality once again, without any forms and shapes. But what is that broad reality? There are different possibilities; it could be 'the Merciful's Breath' (*al-nafas al-rahmaniyyah*, the first manifestation of the Truth in creation), 'the Sacred Diffusion' (*al-fayd al-muqaddas*), 'the expansive being' (*al-wujud al-munbasit*), or what is referred to in a narration as 'the light of your prophet, O Jaber'.[15](#)

STUDENT. Are they different possibilities or are they different names for the same reality?

'ALLAMAH. For me they are different possibilities, and for the one who is asking, they are only names (for a single reality).

*However, the one who was asking knows the fact of the matter! I am wretched; what do I know? What do I know of the Book of Allah?*

## **'Then a wall will be set up between them...'**

***... Then a wall will be set up between them wherein is a door; its inside containeth mercy, and its outside is toward punishment. (57: 13)***

STUDENT. In your treatise on eschatology, you have discussed this verse:

'This wall is a single thing with an inside and an outside. Allah's mercy is for those who achieve the felicity and salvation of the inside, and His punishment is for those who perish in the outside. It seems that if those who are outside pass through and reach the inside, they will achieve Allah's blessing and great bounty (*ni'mah, na'im*), and the divine mercy will take them under its cover.'

It is as if there is only one thing that separates the believers from the infidels. Their difference is only in what they conceive, just as it was in this world (*dunya*). Their difference is in the route that they take toward Allah. The believers follow on the straight path (*al-sirat al-mustaqim*) and the non-believers go astray and follow diverging paths. These verses are along the same lines:

***And the dwellers of the Paradise will call unto the dwellers of the Fire that 'We have found that which our Lord promised us true; have you [also] found that which your Lord promised you true?' They will say, 'Yes.' Thereby a herald will proclaim between them: Allah's curse be upon the oppressors \* [Those] who debar [people] from the path of Allah and want [to make and present] it crooked and are disbelievers in the hereafter. (7:44-5)***

There is only one path to Allah; it belongs to Him and goes toward Him. The journeyer toward Allah follows that path properly and with forbearance. But one who does not journey toward Allah bends the path and follows a distorted way. This idea repeatedly comes up in the Noble Qur'an, both explicitly and implicitly. For example:

***They know an appearance of the present life (dunya), while of the hereafter they are heedless \* Have they not pondered within themselves? Allah created not the heavens and the earth and what is between them except with truth and for a destined end. (30:7-8)***

Later you say:

One of the most expressive verses on this subject is:

***Hast thou not seen those who exchanged the bounty of Allah with ingratitude, and settled their***

**people in the abode of loss? \* [It is] hell, that they exposed to, a dreadful dwelling. (14:28-9)**

As discussed earlier, *ni'mah* (bounty, boon) refers to guardianship (*wilayah*), and guardianship is the very path toward Allah. Contrary to this path is *kufr* (infidelity and ingratitude), which is the same as the abode of loss (*dar al-bawar*), the house of fatality, being set afire in hell, and settling in that dreadful place. So the journey of the infidels ends in loss and ruin, which consists of sticking to the outward (*zahir*) and ignoring the inward (*batin*). However, clearly the outward is perishable and fading, but the inward is stable and lasting.<sup>16</sup>

Why have you identified this verse (14:28) as the most expressive verse on this subject?

## **In the Qur'an, ni'mah always refers to wilayah**

'ALLAMAH. The term *ni'mah* (bounty) occurs in several places in the Noble Qur'an. It is deduced from these verses that this term refers to guardianship (*walayah* and *wilayah*), by which is meant the *wilayah* of the Household of the Prophet (Ahl al-Bayt). And that is to follow the path they followed to reach the Threshold of their Lord, the Supreme Allah, which is the path of sheer servitude (*al-'ubudiyyat al-mahdah*).

The above verse is one of those verses. It describes the change of Allah's bounty to ingratitude, and thus entry into the hellfire. Thus *ni'mah* is in fact the straight path (*al-sirat al-mustaqim*) and the shortest distance that a servant can take toward his God, whereby he attains the status of absolute and sheer servitude. To exchange this *ni'mah* with *kufr* is to abandon the straight path for distorted routes which diverge from the destination, and therefore thrust the traveller into hell.

Perhaps a more expressive and explicit verse is in Chapter 102 (al-Takathur): '**Then, on that day, you will surely be asked about the great bounty.**' This chapter refutes all pluralities (*katharat*) in a strange and astonishing – yet clear and lucid – style. It calls everyone to the Realm of Unity ('alam al-wahdah). It questions man and holds him accountable for *na'im* (great bounty), which is the selfsame *wilayah* (guardianship):

***In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the All- Compassionate \* Rivalry in worldly increase distracted you \* Until you visited the graves \* No indeed; you will come to know \* Again no indeed; you will come to know \* No indeed; if you know with knowledge of certitude \* You would [or will] surely see the hell \* Then you will surely see it with vision of certitude \* Then, on that day, you will surely be asked about the great bounty. (102:1-8)***

Commenting on this chapter, Imam Sadiq said that *na'im* (great bounty) is not things like bread and cheese so to speak, but it refers to the high stages of servitude and sincerity in the path of *tawhid* (monotheism) and *wilayah* (guardianship). Once, when he encountered Abu Hanifah, Imam Sadiq asked him about this verse and the meaning of *na'im* for which the people will be questioned and held

accountable. Abu Hanifah replied, ‘It refers to these [everyday] bounties that Allah has bestowed on the people, such as foods, fruits and their likes.’ Then the Imam told him:

Is it really like a munificent host to provide his guests with all these boons and bounties that cover them from head to toe, so that they may eat and drink and satiate all their needs, but then have an agent who interrogates them upon exiting [from the feast], ‘What did you eat and drink?’ Would they be held accountable for that, so that they would reply, ‘We had, say, bread and dates and so on’? That is not the case. Rather, *na’im* denotes the guardianship of us Ahl al-Bayt.<sup>17</sup>

So people will be asked, ‘On your way toward Allah, to what extent did you follow the approach, practice, and way of your Imams? And to what extent did you achieve the status of absolute and sheer servitude?’

And the Garden of Great Bounty (*jannat al-na’im*) that is mentioned [several places] in the Qur’an refers to the same idea. <sup>18</sup> It means the paradise of guardianship, which is the selfsame paradise of the chosen and intimate friends of Allah (*mukhlasin* and *muqarrabin*). It is the paradise of those who attained the station of God’s Unity of Essence, those who were annihilated in the realms of the Divine Attributes of Beauty and Majesty, and those who entirely renounced every facet of their existence and submitted them all to the Truth (*al-Haqq*, i.e. Allah).

## **Ni’mah and na’im mean wilayah**

‘ALLAMAH. Thus, one can infer from the verses of the Qur’an and the traditions that bounty (*ni’mah*) is an allusion to guardianship (*wilayah*). Though it appears that *ni’mah* means bounty and blessing in the general sense, in these cases it refers to the bounty of *wilayah* in particular. But let us try to not base our interpretation on the narrations. Instead, let us see if we can infer this from the Qur’an alone.

Note that first, the chapter considers rivalry in pluralities (*takathur*) as something distracting. And one who attains the knowledge and the vision of certitude (*‘ilm al- yaqin* and *‘ayn al-yaqin*) will see this distraction as hell and burning fire. Then the Noble Qur’an contrasts this rivalry in pluralities with *na’im*. Here, the Qur’an identifies *na’im* as the biggest asset which is worthy of one’s being held accountable for and questioned about. So *na’im* is the Station of Unity (*maqam al-tawhid*), which manifests in a servant and is referred to as sheer servitude (*al-’ubudiyat al- mahdah*). Therefore one should detest and reject *takathur*, which is the view of plurality and multiplicity, and instead return to *na’im*, which is the approach of unity.

From the verses alone, one can deduce that *na’im* is something truly prized and valuable. In fact, it should have been the most valuable end and objective of the creation. And as the Imam said, it is seemingly very unlikely for Allah to question one’s reality and essence, of all the bounties that he has seen and benefited from in his life, from beginning to end.

This means that throughout life, amidst all the bounties that Allah has bestowed upon human beings, they must diligently and vigorously strive for and acquire that one real and genuine bounty: guardianship, which is the bond between the created world and God, between the created and the Creator, between the originated (*hadith*) and the Primordial (*qadim*), between the contingent (*mumkin al-wujud*) and the Necessary (*wajib al-wujud*). Guidance is to acquire that bounty, and everything else is misguidance.

Everyone in the world lives, communicates, marries, eats, rests, and sleeps. They all do the same careers of trading, manufacturing, gardening, and farming. However, some of them only see the outer side of these matters and miss out on the interior; they are the ones '**Who exchanged the bounty of Allah with ingratitude.**' And some others seek that single reality within these numerous and multiple matters; and that is the great bounty (*na'im*).

## **'For the benefit of you and your livestock'**

***And fruits and abb \* For the benefit of you and your livestock. (80:31-2)***

STUDENT. It is narrated from Imam 'Ali that the verse 'For the benefit of you and your livestock' is an explanation for the verse before it: '**And fruits and abb.**' Therefore the meaning of *abb* (fodder, pasture) will be clear, as it would refer to the food for the livestock. So it is the same as the fodder and hay that they feed on.<sup>19</sup> The verse, '**For the benefit of you and your livestock**' has also come up in Chapter 79 (al-Nazi'at):

***From it [the earth] He brought forth its waters and its pastures \* And the mountains He set firm \* For the benefit of you and your livestock. (79:31-3)***

However, obviously it is not appropriate to consider '**For the benefit of you and your livestock**' as an explanation for '**And the mountains He set firm.**' Does the fact that we cannot consider '**For the benefit of you and your livestock**' as an explanation for its previous verse here mean that we also cannot do so in Chapter 80?

'ALLAMAH. It is reported that when Abu Bakr was asked about the meaning of *abb* in the verse in Chapter 80, he had no answer. And some have considered this as an objection to Abu Bakr, for how could he not recognise the meaning of *abb* despite being a native Arab?

*Abb* is the fodder with which animals are typically fed, like alfalfa and such. If considered in a broader sense, it could perhaps be applied to human and animal nourishments that mainly consist of herbs and vegetables. It is quite clear that in Chapter 80, '**For the benefit of you and your livestock**' is an explanation for '**And fruits and fodder.**' This is an example of when previously noted subjects are expounded on in the same order (*al-laff wa al-nashr al-murattab*).<sup>20</sup> In other words, the meaning of 'fruit' (*fakihah*) is obvious, and we know that fruits are not feed for the livestock, but are rather specifically for the benefit of mankind. Therefore 'For the benefit of you' will be an explanation for 'fruits'; and

consequently, ‘and [for] your livestock’ will be an explanation for ‘abb’. Hence it is evident that *abb* is fodder and hay for the animals.

However, in Chapter 79 (al-Nazi’at), **‘For the benefit of you and your livestock’ (79:33)** is an explanation for the sentence **‘From it [the earth] He brought forth its waters and its pastures’ (79:31)**. And this is not based on ordered (or even disordered) expounding of previously noted subjects. It is rather an overall explanation meaning, ‘Allah has provided benefits and sustenance for you and your livestock through the water and vegetation that grow on the earth.’

The word *mar’ā* means *rīy*, which means plants, and is not specifically for animals. But note that the verse **‘And the mountains He set firm’ (79:32)** is a separate sentence (*istitradiyyah*) that has appeared between the explanation and the explained. The middle verse (79:32) is mentioned in order to describe the earth’s stability. It asserts that ‘Allah restrained the earth from agitation and deviation by means of firm and stable mountains, so that it may grow plants and bring out its water, so that the sustenance of you and your livestock is provided.’ This is how I see it, and Allah knows best.

## **The Qur’anic addresses starting with *qul* (say)**

STUDENT. In many verses of the Qur’an, the orders to the Messenger of Allah start with ‘*qul*’ (say, tell). For example:

**Say: He, Allah is One. (112: 1)**

**Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind. (114: 1)**

**Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of the disjunction [between night and day]. (113: 1)**

**Say: O disbelievers. (109: 1)**

**Say: certainly all of the predecessors and the successors \* Will indeed be gathered for the tryst of an appointed day. (56:49–50)**

**Say: I am only a human being like you.... (18: 110)**

**Say: obey Allah and the Messenger.... (3:32)**

**Say: Allah has spoken the truth; so follow the religion of Abraham, the upright.... (3:95)**

**... Say: the good of this world is little; while the hereafter is better for he who restrains.... (4:77)**

And many other verses, which would make a long list. Obviously, what the Messenger of Allah was commanded was not the literal phrase, but rather the content and the message. That is, when he is told, ‘Say: He, Allah is One,’ he is ordered to say, ‘He, Allah is One,’ not to say, ‘Say: He, Allah is One.’

Saying the latter would not be following Allah's order and instruction. The point is to express the message and content of the order, and this is quite obvious! For example, if someone tells us 'Go in between the people and say: Allah is One!' then we must go in between the people and say, 'Allah is One,' not 'Say: Allah is One.'

In these cases, the order to 'say' serves as means for the actual message that is to be said. It should not be viewed as an independent order by itself. In the above example, saying, 'Allah is One' is carrying out the order, while saying, 'Say: Allah is One' is not. It is the content of the order that is meant to be said, not the whole set of instructions.

Therefore the Messenger of Allah should tell the people, 'He, Allah is One.' And so is the case with the other verses; he should only convey the content of the order. However, we see throughout the Noble Qur'an that the phrase 'Say' is also included in the verses, and the exact words that addressed the Prophet appear in the Qur'an.

'ALLAMAH. There are two things to be discussed here. The first one is about Allah's command to His Prophet, his duty, and how he carried out the instructions in general. With regard to this, it is certain that the Messenger of Allah used to follow Allah's command and perform the orders just as they were. Even in the very addresses that begin with '**Say**' (*qul*), the Noble Messenger has expressed the content of the order. Allah's commands to His Messenger to say something are just like His other commands without the phrase, 'Say'. For instance:

***Proclaim that which thou art commanded, and turn away from the polytheists \* Truly We have sufficed thee against the scorners. (15:94-5)***

In following this order of Allah, the Prophet would publicly announce the unity of Allah and would turn away from the polytheists. Similarly, in the example with '**Say: He, Allah is One,**' he would tell the people 'He is Allah, He is One.'

The second point is about how Allah's orders appear in the Qur'an in particular. This is a different story. As we know, the Qur'an is a divine revelation (*wahy*), and a divine revelation should be conveyed without the addition or omission of anything, not even a single word or letter. Hence, the Qur'an reflects the exact message that addressed the Messenger of Allah. And this is how the Qur'an should be (as a divine scripture).

If the phrase 'Say' (*qul*) is dropped in '**Say: He, Allah is One**' or in '**Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind,**' and thus one says, 'He, Allah is One,' and 'I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind,' then that would not be Qur'an anymore. That would not be the words of Allah, but would rather be the words of the Prophet who is saying, 'Allah is One.' Since the Glorious Qur'an is the exact revelation, it cannot be without the phrase 'Say'. This is just like the other orders of Allah that do not begin with the phrase, 'Say,' like the verse mentioned above: '***Proclaim that which thou art commanded, and turn away from the polytheists.***' There we see that the Noble Qur'an literally mentions the whole command word-

by-word.

In addition, in the divine addresses to the Messenger of Allah in the Qur'an, the Noble Messenger acts as a mirror for all Muslims, rather for all mankind. So in fact it is the people that are being addressed as the audience of the commands. It is only that the address to the people is through the channel and mirror of the soul of the Messenger of Allah, who – due to his capacity and breadth – encompasses all the people of the nation, rather all humankind. He has covered them all under the breadth of his knowledge and existence. This idea is clarified quite well in the verse,

***... And We have sent down to thee the Remembrance [the Qur'an], that thou mayst make clear to mankind what hath been sent down to them, and that haply they may reflect. (16:44)***

The Messenger of Allah only elucidates the contents of the divine revelations that were sent to the people.

## **Ayat al-Kursi is just the first verse**

STUDENT. Does the so-called *Ayat al-Kursi* (The Throne Verse, 2:255) refer to only one verse, which ends with:

***... And preserving those two [the heavens and the earth] doth not tire Him; and He is the Supreme, the Magnificent. (2:255)***

Or does it also include the next two verses, which end with:

***... They are the dwellers of the Fire; they are there forever! (2:257)***

'ALLAMAH. It ends with '***And He is the Supreme, the Magnificent.***' That is why this verse, which contains the word *kursi* (chair, throne), is called the Verse of the Throne. The following two verses are not part of the Verse of the Throne. And the first verse (i.e. 2:255) is sufficient for supplications and optional prayers that involve recitation of the Verse of the Throne.

## **'Say: each behaves according to his formation'**

***And when We bestow blessings upon man, he balketh and turneth aside; and when evil toucheth him, he is in despair. Say: each one behaveth according to his formation; and thy Lord knoweth best who is most guided in his way. (17:83-4)***

STUDENT. This verse describes two different states of mankind. First it talks about man's initial formation (*shakilah*), disposition, and character. It says that when We bring about ease and expansion for man and bestow blessings on him, arrogance and heedlessness overwhelm him. His haughtiness, self-conceit and egotism cause him to turn away from Us, balk, and deviate. And when an evil – like

stress, trouble, tension, or poverty – touches him, he suddenly loses hope and becomes disappointed, abject, and distressed. The second state is how some people are guided to Allah. They find the straight path and leave behind the initial formation. For some of them in particular, this condition develops further; their guidance intensifies and their path becomes brighter and straighter.

Does that mean that the nature and formation of all people is according to that first state, which involves balking and turning aside from God upon receiving blessings, and losing hope of God's mercy upon evil and unfortunate events? And does it mean that those who achieve guidance, take up the path of Allah, and seek salvation, actually exit that initial and inherent nature? Do they take a shortcut out of their initial path and nature? Or is it that the guided individuals are still on their initial nature, formation, and character, and that their guidance is also based on their innate nature and formation?

The verse seems to suggest that they abandon their initial nature since their case is mentioned as an unconnected exception (*al-istithna' al-munqati'*). If so, then what would it mean to abandon one's nature (*fitrah*)? How can a being completely abandon its initial makeup, exit its existential form, and adopt another nature and formation? Besides, as we know, the nature of mankind is based on *tawhid* and the truth, not on misguidance.

The other solution is to say that the mentioned guidance is also according to one's nature. That means human nature has two states: the state of turning away, disobedience, despair and distress; and the state of exiting this condition and achieving foresight and guidance on the straight path. This would mean that the exception in the second verse is connected to and a part of the first verse (*muttasil*). But that would be against the apparent sense (*zahir*) of the verse, because the verse says that each behaves based on his formation. One's turning away and despair is based on his formation; thus guidance should be beyond and outside the formation (the makeup of man's being).

'ALLAMAH. It seems that formation (*shakilah*) here refers to one's initial makeup and tendency prior to undergoing any education and training, which would manifest and actualise his hidden capacities and talents. Man is a dynamic being, and is capable of growth and perfection. Therefore its initial nature and formation is sheer talent and absolute capacity. If that talent is left to its own in the world of nature (*tabi'ah*) and multiplicity (*kathrah*), it develops into 'He balks and turns aside' and 'he is in despair.' However, if the person is trained and shown the path, it passes this stage of weakness, lassitude, and indolence, and reaches the highest stations that one can achieve.

This capacity and aptitude is hidden within the nature of man; the capability and strength is latent in him. So one might appear to be a disappointed and ungrateful being, yet oceans of luminous beams of truth pervade him, and that is not separate from his nature. However, those beams only emerge as a result of training and discipline.

Man is an intricate being with various stages, which are all included in his nature. One cannot achieve a stage that is beyond and outside his nature. In the above verse, 'man' (*insan*) does not denote the

sacred soul (*al-nafs al-qudsiyyah*) or the rational spirit (*al-ruh al-natiqah*, i.e. the intellect).<sup>21</sup> Those are hidden stages of one's being, and they are achieved by Allah's guidance and one's diligence in His way. Instead, man (*insan*) denotes ordinary people with common thoughts and undeveloped aptitudes. Then of course what is seen from one at that stage of his formations is only diversion, turning aside, despair and ingratitude. And the person who is led and delivered out of this formation by Lordly guidance exits only this [particular] state of nature, as opposed to exiting his nature and formation altogether.

## **'Truly man was created intolerant..... save those that pray'**

'ALLAMAH. The idea in the above verses (17:83–4) is quite relevant to the verses in Chapter 70 (al-Ma'arij):

*Truly man was created intolerant (halu') \* Fretful (jazu') when evil toucheth him \* And grudging when good toucheth him \* Save those that pray \* Those who are constant at their prayers \* And those in whose wealth there is a right known \* For the beggar and the deprived \* And those who confirm the Day of Judgment \* And those who are fearful of their Lord's punishment \* Indeed, from their Lord's punishment, none can feel secure \* And those who protect their private parts \* Save from their wives and the maids that they own, for which they are not blameworthy \* But whoso pursues beyond that, they are the transgressors \* And those who keep their trusts and covenants \* And those who stand by their testimony \* And those who observe their prayers \* They will be in gardens, high-honoured \* Then what aileth those who disbelieve to keep staring at thee [or stretch their necks toward thee] \* From the right and from the left, in groups? \* Doth each of them hope to enter a Garden of Great Bounty? \* Not so... (70: 19–39)*

These noble verses also seem to maintain that the initial creation and nature of man consists of being *halu'*, which means intolerant, anxious, rash, and agitated. This involves one's being *manu'* (acquisitive for one's own self and not giving to others) when God gives him some wealth, power or position; and being *jazu'* (complaining, whining and clamouring) upon evil and unpleasant events or when he loses some riches.

It is only the performers of prayer who are excluded from this general rule about mankind's initial makeup. Who are these performers of prayer? They are described in the verses that follow: they adhere to prayer and almsgiving, are fearful of Allah's retribution, believe in the Day of Judgment and Resurrection, restrain themselves from adultery and shameful deeds, keep their trusts and maintain their covenants, and are firm and stand by their testimony. Here the Noble Qur'an mentions all good deeds one by one and does not spare anything.

Then it says: what is with these infidels around you; those who are unaware and ignorant of these real virtues, of human morality, and of spiritual deeds? What do they say? And what do they want? Do they conjecture that they can reach the status of [a perfect] man and enter the Bounteous Paradise without performing prayer – with the mentioned conditions and results? No! That is not so; they will never reach

such a status.

In these verses, the performers of prayer are excluded from man's initial nature – being *halu'* (intolerant), which consists of being *manu'* (selfishly restrictive) and *jazu'* (impatient, whining). This means that the idea of 'prayer', with its mentioned outcomes and effects, is a part of man's nature and formation. However, it should come to manifestation and actualisation. Man's dormant divine aptitude should be awakened. Hence, the idea that man was created intolerant refers to only one of his states and moods, as opposed to the reality and essence of his creation and nature. So this verse describes man's ordinary and basic formation, not the origin of his sacred soul (*al-nafs al-qudsiyyah*) and rational spirit (*al-ruh al-natiqah*).

## **Intercession is for the believers with major sins**

***... And they [the angels] intercede not except for him with whom He is satisfied; and they are fearful in awe of Him. (21:28)***

STUDENT. In this noble verse, '***with whom He is satisfied***' implies absolute satisfaction. That is, in order for one to benefit from intercession (*shafa'ah*), Allah should be pleased with every aspect of his being, even his essence and his heart. Thus the verse refers to the stage of those who are chosen and intimate (*mukhlasin* and *muqarrabin*).

'ALLAMAH. If that is so, then there would be no need for intercession. But that is not true. Satisfaction in this verse means being satisfied with one's religion. Of course, it is mentioned *mutlaq* (with no conditions), but it should be limited to satisfaction with one's religion. The verse is about one whose religion, beliefs and approach are approved of, as opposed to all of his deeds being approved of, which is certainly not meant here. Intercession only applies to sinners, and not only that, but it only applies to those who have committed major sins (*kaba'ir*). Because if someone avoids the major sins, this avoidance will itself cover his minor sins, in which case no sin will remain to be covered by intercession. There are two noble verses that assert that if the major sins are avoided, the small faults and minor sins will be forgiven automatically:

***If you avoid the major [sins] that you have been forbidden, We will remit from you your evil deeds.... (4:31)***

***[The good-doers are] those who avoid the major sins and indecencies, save *lamam* [lesser offences, sinning infrequently, or errors immediately followed by repentance].... (53:32)***

And the Messenger of Allah said,

I have saved my intercession for those of my nation who have committed major sins. And as for the righteous, there is no way [of blame] against them.[22](#)

There are also many narrations about how Imam Rida interpreted the above verse (21:28):

***And they [the angels] intercede not except for him whose religion is satisfied with.***[23](#)

Here, religion means believing in unity (*tawhid*) and denying polytheism (*shirk*). However, according to Imam Musa ibn Ja'far, if someone commits a major sin and does not repent from it, then his religion is not approved of.[24](#)

## **Prophet Abraham's asking forgiveness for his uncle, Azar**

***There has been a good exemplar for you in Abraham and those with him, when they told their people, 'Indeed we are averse to you and all that you worship beside Allah. We disapprove of you; and there hath arisen between us and you enmity and hatred forever until you believe in Allah alone' – save Abraham's word to his father that 'I will certainly ask forgiveness for thee, though I own nothing for thee from Allah.' [And they supplicated:] Our Lord, in Thee we trust, unto Thee we turn, and to Thee is the return. (60:4)***

STUDENT. The above verse has been explained as follows: 'Save Abraham's word' means that you should follow Abraham in all his actions save this statement of his, for which you should not follow him. Certainly he only asked forgiveness for his father 'because of a promise he had made to him' based on his accepting the faith. '***But when it became clear to him that he [his father] was indeed an enemy to Allah, he [Abraham] disowned him***' (9: 114).[25](#)

The above passage means that Prophet Abraham's promise to his uncle that he will ask forgiveness for him was not appropriate or commendable. That is why the Noble Qur'an has excepted this act from Abraham's perfect model.

'ALLAMAH. Chapter 19 (Maryam) mentions that Prophet Abraham sent *salaam* (peace) upon his uncle Azar and promised him to ask God to forgive him. This was when Azar was a polytheist and used to warn Abraham against forsaking his deities. Abraham tells him:

***'Father, I fear lest a punishment from the All-Merciful may strike thee, and thus thou become a companion of Satan' \* He [Azar] said, 'Dost thou shrink from my gods? If thou cease not, I shall certainly stone thee. So leave me for a long while' \* He said, 'Peace be upon thee! I will ask forgiveness of my Lord for thee; indeed He hath been ever gracious to me.'*** (19:45-7)

And in Chapter 26 (al-Shu'ara'), Prophet Abraham asks forgiveness for his father as his supplicates to God:

***My Lord, grant me command and join me with the righteous \* And appoint for me a tongue of truthfulness [i.e. good name, or upright descendants] amongst the posterity \* And include me amongst the inheritors of the Garden of Great Bounty \* And forgive my father; surely he was one***

**of those who went astray. (26:83–6)**

Of course he asked for Azar's forgiveness when it was not yet evident to him that Azar was destined for hell. So Abraham speculated that Azar might be guided and delivered. It was in such conditions that he asked forgiveness for Azar, based on his promise that 'I will ask my Lord for your forgiveness.' But when it became clear to Abraham that there was no hope in Azar's deliverance and that he was Allah's enemy, he did not ask forgiveness for him any more, but rather expressed detestation and disapproval of him.

***It is not for the Prophet and those who believe to ask forgiveness for the polytheists, even if they are their relatives, after it hath become clear for them that they are indeed dwellers of hell \* And Abraham asked not forgiveness for his father except of a promise he had made to him; but when it became clear to him that he is indeed an enemy to Allah, he [Abraham] disowned him. Truly Abraham was very suppliant and long-suffering. (9: 113–14)***

Based on these noble verses, what is not allowed for the Messenger of Allah and the believers is to ask forgiveness for the polytheists while clearly knowing that they are among the dwellers of hell. The same is true concerning Prophet Abraham: after it became evident for him that Azar was Allah's enemy, he detested him. Abraham's asking for Azar's forgiveness was prior to this stage.

That is why Allah warns and forbids His Messenger from asking mercy for them or standing by their graves:

***And never perform prayer over [or send mercy upon] any of their dead, nor stand by his grave. They indeed disbelieved in Allah and His Messenger and died while they were evil-doers. (9:84)***

***Ask forgiveness for them or ask not forgiveness for them; though thou ask forgiveness for them seventy times, Allah will not forgive them. That is because they disbelieved in Allah and His Messenger, and Allah guideth not the group of the evil-doers. (9:80)***

So Abraham's promise mentioned in, 'Save Abraham's word to his father that "I will certainly ask forgiveness for thee"' (60:4) was at the time when Azar's enmity to Allah was not yet evident to Abraham. Nevertheless, even such an unconditional promise to an infidel is not appropriate, so long as they are in the state of infidelity. Therefore, in this verse (60:4), the believers are warned against even this specific case of asking forgiveness, which was based on a promise made, and before it became clear that the infidel was a dweller of hell. The verse recognises the detestation and disapproval of Abraham and his companions against the polytheists as a perfect exemplar, but it is not a perfect exemplar to follow them in even this type of asking forgiveness for the polytheists.

## **Azar was Prophet Abraham's uncle and not his father**

**Note:** Azar was certainly not Prophet Abraham's father, and the Qur'an bears witness to that. It explicitly states that once it became evident to Prophet Abraham that Azar was Allah's enemy, he did not ask forgiveness for him, but rather detested him. But elsewhere in the Qur'an, Prophet Abraham asks God to forgive his parents:

***Our Lord, forgive me and my parents and the believers, the day when reckoning takes place.***  
**(14:41)**

This shows that Azar was not Prophet Abraham's father. There is a difference between *walid* (father, by birth) and *ab* (father, as guardian). *Walid* is only used for father, whereas *ab* is also used for uncle (especially when he is in charge of one's affairs after the death of his father).[26](#)

## **The extermination of the tribe of Thamud and the people of Madyan**

STUDENT. In your opinion, what is the most intense expression in the Qur'an concerning the punishments that have struck the oppressors in this world?

'ALLAMAH. In two parts of the Noble Qur'an, the way the Almighty Allah mentions the befallen punishment is incredible. The oppressors were wiped out in a way that absolutely no trace of them remained. It is as if they never existed, never came to this world, and never had a name or identity. The first one is in Chapter 11 (Hud), and is mentioned in two instances. One of them is regarding the tribe Thamud, who hamstrung Prophet Salih's camel:

***So when Our command came, We rescued Salih and those who believed with him by a mercy from Us from the ignominy of that day. Truly thy Lord, He is the All-Strong, the All-Mighty \* And the Cry overtook those who were oppressors, thus they dawned the day flat down (jathimin) in their homes \* As though they had not dwelt (yaghnaw) there. Lo! Surely Thamud disbelieved in their Lord. Lo! May Thamud be far [from God's mercy]. (11:66-8)***

The verb 'yaghnaw', when used with a location, means to reside there. And *jathimin* means something that is set flat down on the floor, like a carpet. So it means that the Cry overtook them in such a way that they became even with earth, as if they had never resided in that land. The other one is about the people of Madyan (a city near the Red Sea) who used to trouble their prophet Shu'ayb and threatened to stone him:

***So when Our command came, We rescued Shu'ayb and those who believed with him by a mercy from Us. And the Cry overtook those who were oppressors, thus they dawned the day flat down in their homes \* As though they had not dwelt there. Lo! May Madyan be far [from God's mercy]***

## **as Thamud was. (11:94–5)**

The second expression is in Chapter 23 (al-Mu'minun). It is more astounding, as it says, ‘We turned them into “tales”, meaning that only some story and account remained of them, without any custom or trace of them remaining. These verses are after the account of the drowning of Noah’s tribe in water. The verses say that after Noah’s flood, Allah created another group of people and sent a prophet for them. But they denied that prophet:

***Thus the Cry overtook them justly, and We made them as scum, so may the group of oppressors be far [from God's mercy] \* Then after them We brought forth other generations \* No nation can outstrip its term, nor do they postpone it \* Then We sent Our messengers one after another. Whenever its messenger came to a nation they denied him; so We caused them to follow one another [to disaster]; and we turned them into tales; so away [from Allah's mercy] with a people who believe not. (23:41–4)***

1. See Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, Mafatih al-Ghayb (al-Tafsir al-Kabir) (Beirut, 198?), 31:54ff.; Alusi, Ruh al-Ma’ani (Beirut, 198?), 30:39ff.; Suyuti, al-Durr al-Manthur fi al-Tafsir al-Ma’thur (Beirut, 197?), 6:314ff.

2. Note that this was Walid ibn Mughirah, one of the two prominent men about whom the polytheists claimed ‘Why was the Qur'an not revealed to one of these two?’ (43:31). He is different from Walid ibn ‘Uqbah ibn Abi Mu’it, about whom the Naba’ verse (49:6) was revealed.

3. [Translator’s note. He was a stout man among the enemies of the Prophet, who refused to embrace Islam until his death. The books of tafsir have mentioned different variations of his name; the above is based on al-Mizan.]

4. Fadl ibn al-Hasan Tabarsi, Majma’ al-Bayan (Beirut, 1995), 10:266.

5. Al-Najafi (Shaykh al-Jawahiri), Jawahir al-Kalam (Tehran, 1988), 9:401; reported from al-Kulayni, al-Kafi (al-Usul) (Tehran, 1388/1968), 2:601, who reports through his line of transmitters, from Sa’d al-Iskaf.

6. See Tirmidhi, Sunan al-Tirmidhi (Beirut, 1983), 4:336–7; Suyuti, al-Durr al-Manthur (Beirut, 197?), 3:207–8.

7. ‘Allamah has an explanation that could be one of the reasons why Allah refers to the Noble Qur'an as ‘the best speech’ (ahsan al-hadith): ‘Among the Divine Books, the Qur'an is the only book that, first, equates man's felicitous life with a simple unadulterated life based on one's nature (fitrah); and second, unlike most or all other practices, which separate man's worship of God from his everyday life and affairs, the Qur'an considers the religious practice as the very way of life, covering every aspect of one's social and individual life. Its orders are based on true knowledge [of God and the world]. In fact, the Qur'an entrusts people to the world and the world to the people, and entrust them both to God.’ Qur'an dar Islam (Tehran, 1350/1971): 61.

8. [Translator’s note. See Tabarsi, Majma’ al-Bayan, 9:381 for both narrations. Note that the second narration is as follows: ‘Whoever recites all of the musabbihat before sleeping, will not die unless he sees the Qa'im [Imam Mahdi], and if he dies [in sleep] he will reside by the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him and his family.’]

9. [Translator’s note. For a thorough discussion on different recitations (qira'at), see Chapter 7.]

10. It is narrated from Anas ibn Malik that ‘We went to the Messenger of Allah when Ibrahim [his son] was dying, and the Messenger of Allah was shedding tears. ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn al-'Awf said, “Even you, O Messenger of Allah [cry]?” That Honourable Messenger said twice, “O son of ‘Awf, this is compassion,” and continued: “Truly the eyes weep and the heart grieves, but we say not except what our Lord pleases; and indeed we are mournful for your separation O Ibrahim.”

‘Allamah Sayyid ‘Abd al-Husayn Sharaf al-Din ‘Amili, al-Nass wa al-Ijtihad (Qum, 1983): 294–5; narrated from Bukhari, Sahih al-Bukhari (Istanbul, 1981), 2:84–5, Bab al-Jana’iz. [Translator’s note. The words of the Prophet on his deathbed have been reported with minor differences. See Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, 24:263–4].

11. See the last reference in note 32 on Chapter 2.

12. Al-Mizan (Beirut, 1970), 19:326–7 and Suyuti, al-Durr al-Manthur, 6:374–5.

- [13.](#) ‘Ali ibn Ibrahim al-Qummi, *Tafsir al-Qummi* (Beirut, 1387/1968), 2:252.
- [14.](#) S.M.H. Tabataba’i, *al-Insan* (Beirut, 1989): 106.
- [15.](#) Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, 15:24, 25:21–2 & 54:170.
- [16.](#) S.M.H. Tabataba’i, *al-Insan*: 173–5.
- [17.](#) Tabarsi, *Majma’ al-Bayan*, 10:433.
- [18.](#) See 5:65, 10:9, 22:56, 26:85, 31:8, 37:43, 52:17, 56:12 & 89, 68:34, 70:38.
- [19.](#) Abu Bakr was once asked about this verse, *wa fakihatān wa abba* (‘And fruits and fodder,’ 80:31), but he did not know the meaning of *abb* in the Qur’an. So he said, ‘Which sky will protect me under its shade, which land will shield me, and what should I do if I say something about the Book of Allah that I know not? As with *fakihah*, I know what it means, but as with *abb*, Allah knows best.’ The news of this reached Imam ‘Ali, peace be upon him. ‘Glorified is Allah!’ he said, ‘Did he not know that *abb* refers to the plant and fodder on which animals graze? And that this word of the Supreme Allah expresses Allah’s kindness and grace over his servants regarding the food that He provides them, and the livestock that He created, which are used for people’s livelihood and add to their powers.’ *Al-Mizan*, 20:212; from Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Mufid, *al-Irshad* (Beirut, 1993), 1:200.
- [20.](#) [Translator’s note. This is a literary technique and style, where certain topics are first mentioned together, and then further explanations about each are presented in the same order that the topics were mentioned.]
- [21.](#) [Translator’s note: The rational soul (*al-nafs al-natiqah*, here used with *ruh*, spirit, instead of *nafs*), is man’s special form (*al-surat al-naw’iyah*), and that is the intellect (*‘aql*). The ‘sacred soul’ (*al-nafs al-qudsiyyah*) is a soul at the highest level of intuition (*hads*), whereby it can know certain and immediate knowledge without learning. The souls of the prophets and saints are at this highest level. See Dihkhuda, *Lughatnamah* (Tehran, 1993–4), under *nafs natiqah* and *nafs qudsi*.]
- [22.](#) *Al-Mizan*, 1:170 and 14:282, cited respectively from Ibn Babawayh al-Qummi (Shaykh al-Saduq), *al-Amali* (Qum, 1417/1996):56, and ‘Uyun Akhbar al-Rida (Beirut, 1984): 125; starting with *innama* (‘My intercession is only for...’).
- [23.](#) See al-Fattal al-Nisaburi, *Rawdat al-Wa’izin* (Qum, 198?): 501.
- [24.](#) ‘Allamah Tabataba’i has discussed about those who will receive intercession in *al-Mizan*, 1:169ff. and also in vol. 14 in exegesis of verse 21:28. He has narrated relevant hadiths from Shi’a sources and also from Suyuti’s *al-Durr al-Manthur fi al-Tafsir al-Ma’thur*.
- [25.](#) Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, 12:27; from Tabarsi, *Majma’ al-Bayan*, 9:448.
- [26.](#) [Translator’s note. In the previous verses, Azar was referred to as Abraham’s *ab*, but in this last one (14:41), Abraham asks forgiveness for his *walid*, which means that his *walid* is different from Azar (the *ab*) as Abraham had renounced Azar. Also note that Abraham’s asking forgiveness for his *ab* (Azar) in 26:86 is not concerning the Day of Judgment, as opposed to his supplication in 14:41.]

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