

Sermon 91: Praise belongs to God, Who is ...

This sermon is known as the Sermon of Skeletons¹ (Khutbatu'l-Ashbah) and it holds one of the highest positions among the sermons of Amir al-mu'minin.

Mas'adah ibn Sadaqah has related from al-Imam Ja'far ibn Muhammad as-Sadiq (p.b.u.t.) saying: "Amir al-mu'minin delivered this sermon from the pulpit of (the mosque of) Kufah when someone asked him, 'O Amir al-mu'minin! Describe Allah for us in such a way that we may imagine that we see Him with eyes so that our love and knowledge may increase about Him.'

Amir al-mu'minin became angry at this (request of the questioner) and ordered the Muslims to gather in the mosque. So many Muslims gathered in the mosque that the place was over-crowded. Then Amir al-mu'minin ascended the pulpit while he was still in a state of anger and his colour was changed. After he had praised Allah and extolled Him and sought His blessings on the Prophet he said:

(ومن خطبة له (عليه السلام

تعرف بخطبة الاشباح وهي من جلائل الخطب

:روى مسعدة بن صدقة عن الصادق جعفر بن محمد (عليهما السلام) أنه قال

خطب أمير المؤمنين عليه السلام والصلاة بهذه الخطبة على منبر الكوفة، وذلك أن رجلاً أتاه فقال له: يا أمير المؤمنين! صف لنا ربنا مثلما نراه عياناً لنزداد له حباً وبه معرفة. فغضب (عليه السلام) ونادى: الصلاة جامعة، فاجتمع الناس حتى غصّ المسجد بأهله. فصعد المنبر وهو مغضب متغيّر اللون، فحمد الله سبحانه وصلى على النبي (صلى الله عليه وآله)، ثم قال

Description of Allah

وصف الله تعالى

Praise be to Allah Who is not enriched by the refusal to give away and stinginess, and Who is not impoverished by munificence and generosity, although everyone who gives away loses (to that extent) except He, and everyone who withholds is blamed for his niggardliness but He. He obliges through beneficial bounties and plentiful gifts and grants. The whole creation is His dependants (in sustenance).²

He has guaranteed their livelihood and ordained their sustenance. He has prepared the way for those who turn to Him and those who seek what is with Him. He is as generous about what He is asked as He is about that for which He is not asked. He is the First for whom there was no 'before' so that there could be anything before Him.

He is the Last for whom there is no 'after' so that there could be anything after Him. He prevents the pupils of the eyes from seeing Him or perceiving Him. Time does not change over Him, so as to admit of any change of condition about Him. He is not in any place so as to allow Him movement (from one place to another).

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي لَا يَفْرُهُ الْمَنَعُ وَالْجُمُودُ، وَلَا يُكْدِيهِ الْأَعْطَاءُ وَالْجُودُ؛ إِذْ كُلُّ مُعْطٍ مُنْتَقِصٌ سِوَاهُ، وَكُلُّ مَانِعٍ مَذْمُومٌ مَا خَلَاهُ، وَهُوَ الْمَنَّانُ بِفَوَائِدِ النِّعَمِ، وَعَوَائِدِ الْمَزِيدِ وَالْقِسَمِ، عِيَالُهُ الْخَلَائِقُ، ضَمِنَ أَرْزَاقَهُمْ، وَقَدَّرَ أَقْوَاتَهُمْ، وَنَهَجَ سَبِيلَ الرَّاعِبِينَ إِلَيْهِ، وَالطَّالِبِينَ مَا لَدَيْهِ، وَلَيْسَ بِمَا سُئِلَ بِأَجُودَ مِنْهُ بِمَا لَمْ يُسْأَلْ. الْأَوَّلُ الَّذِي لَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ قَبْلُ فَيَكُونُ شَيْءٌ قَبْلَهُ، وَالْآخِرُ الَّذِي لَيْسَ لَهُ بَعْدُ فَيَكُونُ شَيْءٌ بَعْدَهُ، وَالرَّادِعُ أَنَا سَيِّ الْأَبْصَارِ عَنْ أَنْ تَنَالَهُ أَوْ تُدْرِكَهُ، مَا اخْتَلَفَ عَلَيْهِ دَهْرٌ، فَيُخْتَلَفُ مِنْهُ الْحَالُ، وَلَا كَانَ فِي مَكَانٍ فَيَجُوزُ عَلَيْهِ الْإِنْتِقَالُ

If He gives away all that the mines of the mountains emit out or the gold, silver, pearls and cuttings of coral which the shells of the ocean vomit out, it would not affect his munificence, nor diminish the extent of what He has. (In fact) He would still have such treasures of bounty as would not decrease by the demands of the creatures, because He is that generous Being Whom the begging of beggars cannot make poor nor the pertinacity of beseechers make miser.

وَلَوْ وَهَبَ مَا تَنَفَّسَتْ عَنْهُ مَعَادِنُ الْجِبَالِ، وَضَحِكَتْ عَنْهُ أَصْدَافُ الْبِحَارِ، مِنْ فِلِزِّ اللَّجَيْنِ وَالْعَقِيَانِ، وَنُثَارَةِ الدُّرِّ وَحَصِيدِ الْمَرْجَانِ، مَا أَثَّرَ ذَلِكَ فِي جُودِهِ، وَلَا أَنْفَدَ سَعَةً مَا عِنْدَهُ، وَلَكَانَ عِنْدَهُ مِنْ دَخَائِرِ الْأَنْعَامِ مَا لَا تُنْفَدُهُ مَطَالِبُ الْإِنَامِ، لِأَنَّهُ الْجَوَادُ الَّذِي لَا يَغِيضُهُ سُؤَالُ السَّائِلِينَ، وَلَا يُبْخِلُهُ إِلْحَاحُ الْمُلِحِّينَ

Attributes of Allah as described in the Holy Qur'an

صفاته تعالى في القرآن

Then look on, questioner; be confined to those of His attributes which the Qur'an had described and seek light from the effulgence of its guidance. Leave to Allah that knowledge which Satan has prompted you to seek and which neither the Qur'an enjoins you to seek nor is there any trace of it in the actions or sayings of the Prophet and other leaders (*A'immah*) of guidance. This is the extreme limit of Allah's claim upon you.

Know that firm in knowledge are those who refrain from opening the curtains that lie against the unknown, and their acknowledgement of ignorance about the details of the hidden unknown prevents them from further probe. Allah praises them for their admission that they are unable to get knowledge not allowed to them. They do not go deep into the discussion of what is not enjoined upon them about knowing Him and they call it firmness. Be content with this and do not limit the Greatness of Allah after the measure of your own intelligence, or else you will be among the destroyed ones.

فَانْظُرْ أَيُّهَا السَّائِلُ: فَمَا ذَلِكَ الْقُرْآنُ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ صِفَتِهِ فَأَنْتُمْ بِهِ وَاسْتَضِيءَ بِنُورِ هِدَايَتِهِ، وَمَا كَلَّفَكَ الشَّيْطَانُ عِلْمَهُ مِمَّا لَيْسَ فِي الْكِتَابِ عَلَيْكَ فَرَضُهُ، وَلَا فِي سُنَّةِ النَّبِيِّ (صلى الله عليه وآله) وَأَيْمَةِ الْهُدَى أَثَرُهُ، فَكُلُّ عِلْمِهِ إِلَى اللَّهِ سُبْحَانَهُ، فَإِنَّ ذَلِكَ مُنْهَى حَقِّ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكَ. وَاعْلَمْ أَنَّ الرَّاسِخِينَ فِي الْعِلْمِ هُمُ الَّذِينَ أَغْنَاهُمْ عَنِ اقْتِحَامِ السُّدْرِ الْمَضْرُوبَةِ دُونَ الْغُيُوبِ، الْإِقْرَارُ بِجُمْلَةٍ مَا جَهِلُوا تَفْسِيرَهُ مِنَ الْغَيْبِ الْمَحْجُوبِ، فَمَدَحَ اللَّهُ - تَعَالَى - اعْتِرَافَهُمْ بِالْعَجْزِ عَنْ تَنَاوُلِ مَا لَمْ يُحِيطُوا بِهِ عِلْمًا، وَسَمَّى تَرْكَهُمُ التَّعَمُّقَ فِيمَا لَمْ يَكْلِفْهُمْ الْبَحْثَ عَنْ كُنْهِهِ رُسُوحًا، فَاقْتَصَرَ عَلَى ذَلِكَ، وَلَا تُقَدِّرْ عَظَمَةَ اللَّهِ سُبْحَانَهُ عَلَى قَدْرِ عَقْلِكَ فَتَكُونَ مِنَ الْهَالِكِينَ.

He is Powerful, such that when imagination shoots its arrows to comprehend the extremity of His power, and mind, making itself free of the dangers of evil thoughts, tries to find Him in the depth of His realm, and hearts long to grasp realities of His attributes and openings of intelligence penetrate beyond description in order to secure knowledge about His Being, crossing the dark pitfalls of the unknown and concentrating towards Him He would turn them back. They would return defeated admitting that the reality of His knowledge cannot be comprehended by such random efforts, nor can an iota of the sublimity of His Honour enter the understanding of thinkers.

هُوَ الْقَادِرُ الَّذِي إِذَا ارْتَمَتْ الْأَوْهَامُ لِنُدْرِكَ مَنْقَطَعِ قُدْرَتِهِ، وَحَاوَلَ الْفِكْرُ الْمُبْرَأُ مِنْ خَطَرَاتِ الْوَسَاوِسِ أَنْ يَفَعَ عَلَيْهِ فِي عَمِيقَاتِ غُيُوبِ مَلَكُوتِهِ، وَتَوَلَّهَتْ الْقُلُوبُ إِلَيْهِ لِتَجْرِيَ فِي كَيْفِيَّةِ صِفَاتِهِ، وَغَمَضَتْ مَدَاخِلُ الْعُقُولِ فِي حَيْثُ لَا تَبْلُغُهُ الصِّفَاتُ لِتَنَالَ عِلْمَ ذَاتِهِ، رَدَعَهَا وَهِيَ تَجُوبُ مَهَاوِي سُدَفِ الْغُيُوبِ، مُتَخَلِّصَةً إِلَيْهِ - سُبْحَانَهُ - فَرَجَعَتْ إِذْ جَبْهَتْ، مُعْتَرِفَةً بِأَنَّهُ لَا يُنَالُ بِجَوْرِ الْاِعْتِسَافِ كُنْهُ مَعْرِفَتِهِ، وَلَا تَخْطُرُ بِبَالِ أُولِي الرُّوِيَاتِ خَاطِرَةٌ مِنْ تَقْدِيرِ جَلَالِ عِزَّتِهِ.

About Allah's creation

He originated the creation without any example which He could follow and without any specimen prepared by any known creator that was before Him. He showed us the realm of His Might, and such wonders which speak of His Wisdom. The confession of the created things that their existence owes itself to Him made us realise that argument has been furnished about knowing Him (so that there is no excuse against it). The signs of His creative power and standard of His wisdom are fixed in the wonderful things He has created. Whatever He has created is an argument in His favour and a guide towards Him. Even a silent thing is a guide towards Him as though it speaks, and its guidance towards the Creator is clear.

الَّذِي ابْتَدَعَ الْخَلْقَ عَلَى غَيْرِ مِثَالٍ امْتَثَلَهُ، وَلَا مِقْدَارٍ احْتَدَى عَلَيْهِ، مِنْ خَالِقٍ مَعْبُودٍ كَانَ قَبْلَهُ، وَأَرَانَا مِنْ مَلَكُوتٍ قُدْرَتِهِ، وَعَجَائِبٍ مَا نَطَقَتْ بِهِ آثَارُ حِكْمَتِهِ، وَاعْتِرَافِ الْحَاجَةِ مِنَ الْخَلْقِ إِلَى أَنْ يُقِيمَهَا بِمِسَاكِ قُوَّتِهِ، مَا دَلَّنَا بِاضْطِرَارٍ قِيَامِ الْحُجَّةِ لَهُ عَلَى مَعْرِفَتِهِ، وَظَهَرَتْ الْبِدَائِعُ الَّتِي أَحْدَثَهَا آثَارُ صَنْعَتِهِ، وَأَعْلَامُ حِكْمَتِهِ، فَصَارَ كُلُّ مَا خُلِقَ حُجَّةً لَهُ وَدَلِيلًا عَلَيْهِ، وَإِنْ كَانَ خُلُقًا صَامِتًا، فَحُجَّتُهُ بِالتَّدْبِيرِ نَاطِقَةً، وَدَلَالَتُهُ عَلَى الْمُبْدِعِ قَائِمَةً.

(O Allah) I stand witness that he who likens Thee with the separateness of the limbs or with the joining of the extremities of his body did not acquaint his inner self with knowledge about Thee, and his heart did not secure conviction to the effect that there is no partner for Thee. It is as though he has not heard the (wrongful) followers disclaiming their false gods by sayings

"By Allah, we were certainly in manifest error when we equalled you with the Lord of the worlds."
(Qur'an, 26:97-98).

They are wrong who liken Thee to their idols, and dress Thee with apparel of the creatures by their imagination, attribute to Thee parts of body by their own thinking and consider Thee after the creatures of various types, through the working of their intelligence. I stand witness that whoever equated Thee with anything out of Thy creation took a match for Thee, and whoever takes a match for Thee is an unbeliever, according to what is stated in Thy unambiguous verses and indicated by the evidence of Thy clear arguments. (I also stand witness that) Thou art that Allah who cannot be confined in (the fetters of) intelligence so as to admit change of condition by entering its imagination nor in the shackles of mind so as to become limited and an object of alterations.

فَأَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مَنْ شَبَّهَكَ بِتَبَائِنِ أَعْضَاءِ خَلْقِكَ، وَتَلَاحُظِ حَقَاقِ مَفَاصِلِهِمُ الْمُحْتَاجَةِ لِتَدْبِيرِ حِكْمَتِكَ، لَمْ يَعْقِدْ غَيْبَ ضَمِيرِهِ عَلَى مَعْرِفَتِكَ، وَلَمْ يَبَاشِرْ قَلْبُهُ الْيَقِينَ بِأَنَّهُ لَانِدَّ لَكَ، وَكَأَنَّهُ لَمْ يَسْمَعْ تَبَرُّؤَ التَّابِعِينَ مِنَ الْمَتَّبِعِينَ إِذْ يَقُولُونَ: (تَاللَّهِ إِنْ كُنَّا لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ * إِذْ نُسَوِّكُمْ بِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ). كَذَبَ الْعَادِلُونَ بِكَ، إِذْ شَبَّهُوكَ بِأَصْنَافِهِمْ وَتَحَلُّوكَ حَلِيَّةَ الْمَخْلُوقِينَ بِأَوْهَامِهِمْ، وَجَزَّأوكَ تَجْزِئَةَ الْمُجَسَّمَاتِ بِخَوَاطِرِهِمْ، وَقَدَّرُوكَ عَلَى الْخُلُقَةِ الْمُخْتَلِفَةِ الْقُوَى، بِقِرَائِحِ عُقُولِهِمْ.

فَأَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مَنْ سَاوَاكَ بِشَيْءٍ مِنْ خَلْقِكَ فَقَدْ عَدَلَ بِكَ، وَالْعَادِلُ كَافِرٌ بِمَا تَنَزَّلَتْ بِهِ مُحْكَمَاتُ آيَاتِكَ، وَتَطَقَّتْ عَنْهُ شَوَاهِدُ حُجَجِ بَيِّنَاتِكَ، وَإِنَّكَ أَنْتَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَمْ تَتَنَاهَ فِي الْعُقُولِ، فَتَكُونُ فِي مَهَبٍ فِكْرَهَا مُكَيِّفًا، وَلَا فِي رَوِيَّاتِ خَوَاطِرِهَا فَتَكُونُ مَحْدُودًا مُصَرِّفًا.

A part of the same sermon about the greatest perfection in Allah's creation

He has fixed limits for every thing He has created and made the limits firm, and He has fixed its working and made the working delicate. He has fixed its direction and it does not transgress the limits of its position nor fall short of reaching the end of its aim. It did not disobey when it was commanded to move at His will; and how could it do so when all matters are governed by His will. He is the Producer of varieties of things without exercise of imagination, without the urge of an impulse, hidden in Him, without (the benefit of) any experiment taken from the vicissitudes of time and without any partner who might have assisted Him in creating wonderful things.

قَدَّرَ مَا خَلَقَ فَأَحْكَمَ تَقْدِيرَهُ، وَدَبَّرَهُ فَأَلْطَفَ تَدْبِيرَهُ، وَوَجَّهَهُ لِرُجُوعِهِ فَلَمْ يَتَعَدَّ حُدُودَ مَنْزِلَتِهِ، وَلَمْ يَفْصُرْ دُونَ الْإِنْتِهَاءِ إِلَى غَايَتِهِ، وَلَمْ يَسْتَصْعِبْ إِذْ أُمِرَ بِالْمُضِيِّ عَلَى إِرَادَتِهِ، وَكَيْفَ وَإِنَّمَا صَدَرَتْ الْأُمُورُ عَنْ مَشِيئَتِهِ؛ الْمُنْشِئُ أَصْنَافَ الْأَشْيَاءِ بِلَا رَوِيَّةٍ فِكْرَ آلِ إِلَيْهَا، وَلَا قَرِيحَةٍ غَرِيْزَةَ ضَمَرٍ عَلَيْهَا، وَلَا تَجَرِبَةَ أَفَادَهَا مِنْ حَوَادِثِ الدُّهُورِ، وَلَا شَرِيكَ أَعَانَهُ، عَلَى ابْتِدَاعِ عَجَائِبِ الْأُمُورِ،

Thus the creation was completed by His order and it bowed to His obedience and responded to His call. The laziness of any slug or the inertness of any excuse-finder did not prevent it from doing so. So He straightened the curves of the things and fixed their limits. With His power He created coherence in their contradictory parts and joined together the factors of similarity. Then He separated them in varieties which differ in limits, quantities, properties and shapes. All this is new creation. He made them firm and shaped them according as He wished and invented them.

فَتَمَّ خَلْقُهُ، وَأَدْعَنَ لِبَطَاعَتِهِ، وَأَجَابَ إِلَى دَعْوَتِهِ، لَمْ يَعْتَرِضْ دُونَهُ رَيْثُ الْمُبْطِئِ، وَلَا أَنَاةُ الْمُتَلَكِّيِّ، فَأَقَامَ مِنَ الْأَشْيَاءِ أَوْدَهَا، وَتَهَجَّ حُدُودَهَا، وَلَا عَمَ بِقُدْرَتِهِ بَيْنَ مُتَضَادِّهَا، وَوَصَلَ أَسْبَابَ قَرَائِنِهَا، وَفَرَقَهَا أَجْنَاسًا مُخْتَلِفَاتٍ فِي الْحُدُودِ وَالْأَقْدَارِ، وَالْغَرَائِزِ وَالْهَيْئَاتِ، بِدَايَا خَلْقٍ أَحْكَمَ صُنْعَهَا، وَقَطَرَهَا عَلَى مَا أَرَادَ وَابْتَدَعَهَا

A part of the same sermon, containing description of the sky

منها: في صفة السماء

He has arranged the depressions and elevations of the openings of the sky. He has joined the breadths

of its breaches, and has joined them with one another. He has made easy the approach to its heights for those (angels) who come down with His commands and those (angels) who go up with the deeds of the creatures. He called it when it was yet (in the form of) vapour. At once the links of its joints joined up. Then Allah opened up its closed door and put the sentinels of meteors at its holes, and held them with His hands (i.e. power) from falling into the vastness of air.

وَنَظَّمَ بِلاَ تَعْلِيْقٍ رَهَوَاتِ فَرْجِهَا، وَلَاحَمَ صُدُوعَ انْفِرَاجِهَا، وَوَشَّجَ بَيْنَهَا وَيَبْنَ أَزْوَاجِهَا، وَذَلَّلَ لِلْهَاطِطِينَ بِأَمْرِهِ،
وَالصَّاعِدِينَ بِأَعْمَالِ خَلْقِهِ، حَزُونَةَ مِعْرَاجِهَا، وَنَادَاهَا بَعْدَ إِذْ هِيَ دُخَانٌ مُبِينٌ، فَالْتَحَمَتْ عُرَى أَشْرَاجِهَا، وَفَتَقَ بَعْدَ
الارْتِنَاقِ صَوَامِتَ أَبْوَابِهَا، وَأَقَامَ رَصْدًا مِنَ الشُّهُبِ التَّوَاقِبِ عَلَى نِقَابِهَا، وَأَمْسَكَهَا مِنْ أَنْ تَمُورَ فِي خَرْقِ الْهَوَاءِ بِأَيْدِيهِ

He commanded it to remain stationary in obedience to His commands. He made its sun the bright indication for its day, and moon the gloomy indication for its night. He then put them in motion in their orbits and ordained their (pace of) movement in the stages of their paths in order to distinguish with their help between night and day, and in order that the reckoning of years and calculations may be known by their fixed movements.

Then He hung in its vastness its sky and put therein its decoration consisting of small bright pearls and lamp-like stars. He shot at the over-hearers arrows of bright meteors. He put them in motion on their appointed routine and made them into fixed stars, moving stars, descending stars, ascending stars, ominous stars and lucky stars.

وَأَمَرَهَا أَنْ تَقِفَ مُسْتَسْلِمَةً لِأَمْرِهِ، وَجَعَلَ شَمْسَهَا آيَةً مُبْصِرَةً لِنَهَارِهَا، وَقَمَرَهَا آيَةً مَمْحُوءَةً مِنْ لَيْلِهَا، وَأَجْرَاهُمَا فِي
مَنَاقِلَ مَجْرَاهُمَا، وَقَدَّرَ مَسِيرَهُمَا فِي مَدَارِجِ دَرَجِهِمَا، لِيُمَيِّزَ بَيْنَ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ بِهِمَا، وَلِيُعْلَمَ عَدَدُ السِّنِّينَ وَالْحِسَابُ
بِمَقَادِيرِهِمَا، ثُمَّ عَلَّقَ فِي جَوْهَا فَلَكَهَا، وَنَاطَ بِهَا زِينَتَهَا، مِنْ خَفِيَّاتِ دَرَارِيِّهَا، وَمَصَابِيحِ كَوَاكِبِهَا، وَرَمَى مُسْتَرْقِي
السَّمْعِ بِتَوَاقِبِ شُهُبِهَا، وَأَجْرَاهَا عَلَى أَذْلالِ تَسْخِيرِهَا مِنْ ثَبَاتِ ثَابِتَتِهَا، وَمَسِيرِ سَائِرِهَا، وَهَبُوطِهَا وَصُعُودِهَا، وَنُحُوسِهَا
وَسُعُودِهَا.

A part of the same sermon, containing description of Angels

(ومنها: في صفة الملائكة عليهم السلام)

Then Allah, the Glorified, created for inhabiting of His skies and populating the higher strata of his realm new (variety of) creatures namely the angels. With them He filled the openings of its cavities and populated with them the vastness of its circumference. In between the openings of these cavities there resounds the voices of angels glorifying Him in the enclosures of sublimity, (behind) curtains of concealment and in veils of His Greatness. And behind this resounding which deafens the ears there is the effulgence of light which defies the approach of sight to it, and consequently the sight stands,

disappointed at its limitation.

ثُمَّ خَلَقَ سُبْحَانَهُ لِسَكَانَ سَمَاوَاتِهِ، وَعِمَارَةَ الصَّفِيحِ الْأَعْلَى مِنْ مَلَكُوتِهِ، خَلْقًا بَدِيعًا مِنْ مَلَائِكَتِهِ، وَمَلَأَ بِهِمْ فُرُوجَ
فِجَاجِهَا، وَحَشَا بِهِمْ فُتُوقَ أَجْوَائِهَا، وَبَيَّنَ فَجَوَاتِ تِلْكَ الْفُرُوجِ زَجْلُ الْمُسَبِّحِينَ مِنْهُمْ فِي حَظَائِرِ الْقُدُسِ، وَسُتْرَاتِ
الْحُجُبِ، وَسُرَادِقَاتِ الْمَجْدِ، وَوَرَاءَ ذَلِكَ الرَّجِيجِ الَّذِي تَسْتَكُّ مِنْهُ الْأَسْمَاعُ سُبْحَاتُ نُورٍ تَرْدُعُ الْأَبْصَارَ عَنْ بُلُوغِهَا،
فَتَقِفُ خَاسِئَةً عَلَى حُدُودِهَا.

He created them in different shapes and with diverse characteristics. They have wings. They glorify the sublimity of His Honour. They do not appropriate to themselves His skill that shows itself in creation. Nor do they claim they create anything in which He is unparalleled.

"But they are rather honoured creatures who do not take precedence over Him in uttering anything, and they act according to His command." (Qur'an, 21: 26–27).

He has made them the trustees of His revelation and sent them to Prophets as holders of His injunctions and prohibitions. He has immunised them against the waviness of doubts. Consequently no one among them goes astray from the path of His will. He has helped them with the benefits of succour and has covered their hearts with humility and peace. He has opened for them doors of submission to His Glories. He has fixed for them bright minarets as signs of His Oneness.

The weights of sins do not burden them and the rotation of nights and days does not make them move. Doubts do not attack with arrows the firmness of their faith. Misgivings do not assault the bases of their beliefs. The spark of malice does not ignite among them. Amazement does not tarnish what knowledge of Him their hearts possess, or His greatness and awe of His glory that resides in their bosoms. Evil thoughts do not lean towards them to affect their imagination with their own rust.

نَشَأَهُمْ عَلَى صُورٍ مُخْتَلِفَاتٍ، وَأَقْدَارٍ مُتَفَاوِتَاتٍ، (أُولَى أَجْنَحَةٍ تُسَبِّحُ جَلَالَ عِزَّتِهِ، لَا يَنْتَحِلُونَ مَا ظَهَرَ فِي الْخَلْقِ مِنْ
صُنْعِهِ، وَلَا يَدْعُونَ أَنَّهُمْ يَخْلُقُونَ شَيْئًا مَعَهُ مِمَّا انْفَرَدَ بِهِ، (بَلْ عِبَادٌ مُكْرَمُونَ * لَا يَسْبِقُونَهُ بِالْقَوْلِ وَهُمْ بِأَمْرِهِ يَعْمَلُونَ).
جَعَلَهُمُ اللَّهُ فِيمَا هُنَالِكَ أَهْلَ الْأَمَانَةِ عَلَى وَحْيِهِ، وَحَمَلَهُمُ إِلَى الْمُرْسَلِينَ وَدَانِعَ أَمْرِهِ وَنَهْيِهِ، وَعَصَمَهُمْ مِنْ رَبِّ
الشُّبُهَاتِ، فَمَا مِنْهُمْ زَانِعٌ عَنْ سَبِيلِ مَرْضَاتِهِ، وَأَمَدَّهُمْ بِفَوَائِدِ الْمَعُونَةِ، وَأَشْعَرَ قُلُوبَهُمْ تَوَاضُعَ إِخْبَاتِ السَّكِينَةِ، وَفَتَحَ
لَهُمْ أَبْوَابًا دُلًّا إِلَى تَمَاجِيدِهِ، وَنَصَبَ لَهُمْ مَنَارًا وَاضِحَةً عَلَى أَعْلَامِ تَوْحِيدِهِ، لَمْ تَتَقَلَّبْهُمْ مُوَصِّرَاتُ الْأَنَامِ، وَلَمْ تَرْتَحِلْهُمْ
عُقُبُ اللَّيَالِي وَالْأَيَّامِ، وَلَمْ تَرْمِ الشُّكُوكُ بِنَوَازِعِهَا عَزِيمَةَ إِيْمَانِهِمْ، وَلَمْ تَعْتَرِكِ الظُّنُونُ عَلَى مَعَاقِدِ يَقِينِهِمْ، وَلَا قَدَحَتْ
قَادِحَةَ الْأَحْنِ فِيمَا بَيْنَهُمْ، وَلَا سَلَبَتْهُمْ الْحَيْرَةُ مَا لَاقَ مِنْ مَعْرِفَتِهِ بِضُمَائِهِمْ، وَسَكَنَ مِنْ عَظَمَتِهِ وَهَيْبَتِهِ جَلَالَتِهِ فِي أَثْنَاءِ
صُدُورِهِمْ، وَلَمْ تَطْمَعْ فِيهِمُ الْوَسَاوِسُ فَتَقْتَرِعَ بَرِينَهَا عَلَى فِكْرِهِمْ.

Among them are those who are in the frame of heavy clouds, or in the height of lofty mountains, or in the gloom of over-powering darkness. And there are those whose feet have pierced the lowest boundaries of the earth. These feet are like white ensigns which have gone forth into the vast expanse of wind. Under them blows the light wind which retains them upto its last end.

مِنْهُمْ مَنْ هُوَ فِي خُلُقِ الْعَمَامِ الدُّلَجِ، وَفِي عِظَمِ الْجِبَالِ الشَّمَخِ، وَفِي قَتَرَةِ الظَّلَامِ الْإِيْهِمْ ، وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ قَدْ خَرَقَتْ أَقْدَامُهُمْ
تُخُومَ الْأَرْضِ السُّفْلَى، فَهِيَ كَرَائِيَاتٍ بَيَضَ قَدْ نَفَذَتْ فِي مَخَارِقِ الْهَوَاءِ، وَتَحْتَهَا رِيحٌ هَفَافَةٌ تَحْبِسُهَا عَلَى حَيْثُ انْتَهَتْ
،مِنْ الْحُدُودِ الْمُتَنَاهِيَةِ

Occupation in His worship has made them carefree, and realities of Faith have served as a link between them and His knowledge. Their belief in Him has made them concentrate on Him. They long from Him not from others. They have tasted the sweetness of His knowledge and have drunk from the satiating cup of His love. The roots of His fear have been implanted in the depth of their hearts. Consequently they have bent their straight backs through His worship. The length of the humility and extreme nearness has not removed from them the rope of their fear.

قَدِ اسْتَفْرَغَتْهُمْ أَشْغَالُ عِبَادَتِهِ، وَوَسَلَتْ حَقَائِقُ الْإِيْمَانِ بَيْنَهُمْ وَبَيْنَ مَعْرِفَتِهِ، وَقَطَعَهُمُ الْإِيْقَانُ بِهِ إِلَى الْوَلَةِ إِلَيْهِ، وَلَمْ تَجَاوِزْ
رَغْبَاتُهُمْ مَا عِنْدَهُ إِلَى مَا عِنْدَ غَيْرِهِ. قَدْ ذَاقُوا حَلَاوَةَ مَعْرِفَتِهِ، وَشَرَبُوا بِالْكَأْسِ الرَّوِيَّةِ مِنْ مَحَبَّتِهِ، وَتَمَكَّنَتْ مِنْ سُوَيْدَاءِ
قُلُوبِهِمْ وَشَبِجَةُ خَيْفَتِهِ، فَحَنَوْا بِطُولِ الطَّاعَةِ اعْتِدَالَ ظُهُورِهِمْ، وَلَمْ يُنْفِدْ طُولُ الرَّغْبَةِ إِلَيْهِ مَادَّةَ تَضَرُّعِهِمْ، وَلَا أَطْلَقَ
،عَنْهُمْ عَظِيمُ الزُّلْفَةِ رَيْقَ خُشُوعِهِمْ

They do not entertain pride so as to make much of their acts. Their humility before the glory of Allah does not allow them to esteem their own virtues. Languor does not affect them despite their long affliction. Their longings (for Him) do not lessen so that they might turn away from hope in (Allah) their Sustainer. The tips of their tongues do not get dry by constant prayers (to Allah). Engagements (in other matters) do not betake them so as to turn their (loud) voices for Him into faint ones. Their shoulders do not get displaced in the postures of worship. They do not move their necks (this and that way) for comfort in disobedience of His command. Follies of negligence do not act against their determination to strive, and the deceptions of desires do not overcome their courage.

لَمْ يَقُولَهُمُ الْأَعْجَابُ فَيَسْتَكْثِرُوا مَا سَلَفَ مِنْهُمْ، وَلَا تَرَكَتْ لَهُمْ اسْتِكَانَةُ الْأَجَالِ نَصِيْبًا فِي تَعْظِيمِ حَسَنَاتِهِمْ، وَلَمْ تَجِرْ
الْفَتَرَاتُ فِيهِمْ عَلَى طُولِ دُؤُوبِهِمْ، وَلَمْ تَغْضُ رَغْبَاتُهُمْ فَيُخَالِفُوا عَنْ رَجَاءِ رَبِّهِمْ، وَلَمْ تَجِفْ لِطُولِ الْمُنَاجَاةِ أَسْلَاطُ
أَلْسِنَتِهِمْ، وَلَا مَلَكَتُهُمُ الْأَشْغَالُ فَتَنْقَطِعَ بِهِمْ الْخَبَرُ إِلَيْهِ أَصْوَاتُهُمْ، وَلَمْ تَخْتَلِفْ فِي مَقَاوِمِ الطَّاعَةِ مَنَاكِبُهُمْ، وَلَمْ يَنْتَوُوا
إِلَى رَاحَةِ التَّقْصِيرِ فِي أَمْرِهِ رِقَابَهُمْ، وَلَا تَعْدُوا عَلَى عَزِيْمَةِ جِدِّهِمْ بِلَادَةُ الْغَفَلَاتِ، وَلَا تَنْتَضِلْ فِي هِمَمِهِمْ خَدَائِعُ
الشَّهَوَاتِ

They regard the Master of the Throne (Allah) as the store for the day of their need. Because of their love (for Him) they turn to Him even when others turn to the creatures. They do not reach the ending limit of His worship. Their passionate fondness for His worship does not turn them except to the springs of their own hearts, springs which are never devoid of His hope and His fear. Fear (of Allah) never leaves them so that they might slacken in their efforts, nor have temptations entrapped them so that they might prefer this light search over their (serious) effort.

قَدْ اتَّخَذُوا ذَا الْعَرْشِ ذَخِيرَةً لِيَوْمِ فَاقَتِهِمْ، وَيَمَّمُوهُ عِنْدَ انْقِطَاعِ الْخَلْقِ إِلَى الْمَخْلُوقِينَ بِرَغْبَتِهِمْ، لَا يَقْطَعُونَ أَمَدَ غَايَةِ عِبَادَتِهِ، وَلَا يَرْجِعُ بِهِمُ الْإِسْتِهْتَارُ بِلُزُومِ طَاعَتِهِ، إِلَّا إِلَى مَوَادٍّ مِنْ قُلُوبِهِمْ غَيْرِ مُنْقَطِعَةٍ مِنْ رَجَائِهِ وَمَخَافَتِهِ، لَمْ تَنْقَطِعْ أَسْبَابُ الشَّقَقَةِ مِنْهُمْ، فَيُنُوا فِي جِدِّهِمْ، وَلَمْ تَأْسِرْهُمْ الْأَطْمَاعُ فَيُوثِرُوا وَشَيْكَ السَّعْيِ عَلَى اجْتِهَادِهِمْ.

They do not consider their past (virtuous) deeds to be great, for if they had considered them great then (excessive) hope would have wiped away fearfulness from their hearts. They did not differ (among themselves) about their Sustainer as a result of Satan's control over them. The vice of separation from one another did not disperse them. Rancour and mutual malice did not overpower them. Ways of wavering did not divide them. Differences of degree of courage did not render them into divisions.

Thus they are captives of faith; neither crookedness (of mind), nor excess, nor lethargy nor languor loosens them from its bond. There is not the thinnest point in the skies but there is an angel over it in prostration (before Allah) or (busy) in quick performance (of His commands). By long worship of their Sustainer they increase their knowledge, and the honour of their Sustainer increases in their hearts.

وَلَمْ يَسْتَغْظِمُوا مَا مَضَى مِنْ أَعْمَالِهِمْ، وَلَوْ اسْتَغْظَمُوا ذَلِكَ لَنَسَخَ الرَّجَاءُ مِنْهُمْ شَفَقَاتِ وَجَلِّهِمْ، وَلَمْ يَخْتَلِفُوا فِي رَبِّهِمْ بِاسْتِحْوَاذِ الشَّيْطَانِ عَلَيْهِمْ، وَلَمْ يَفْرِقْهُمْ سُوءُ التَّقَاطُعِ، وَلَا تَوَلَّاهُمْ غِلُّ التَّحَاسُدِ، وَلَا تَشَعَّبَتْهُمْ مَصَارِفُ الرِّيبِ، وَلَا اقْتَسَمَتْهُمْ أَخْيَافُ الْهَمَمِ، فَهُمْ أُسْرَاءُ إِيْمَانٍ لَمْ يَفْكُهُمْ مِنْ رَبِّقَتِهِ زَيْغٌ وَلَا عُدُولٌ وَلَا وَنَى وَلَا فُتُورٌ، وَلَيْسَ فِي أَطْبَاقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ مَوْضِعٌ إِهَابٍ إِلَّا وَعَلَيْهِ مَلَكٌ سَاجِدٌ، أَوْ سَاعٌ حَافِدٌ، يَزْدَادُونَ عَلَى طَوْلِ الطَّاعَةِ بِرَبِّهِمْ عِلْمًا، وَتَزْدَادُ عِزَّةُ رَبِّهِمْ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ عِظْمًا.

A part of the same sermon, in description of earth and its spreading on water

ومنها: في صفة الارض ودحوها على الماء

Allah spread the earth on stormy and tumultuous waves and the depths of swollen seas, where waves clashed with each other and high surges leapt over one another. They emitted foam like the he-camel at the time of sexual excitement. So the tumult of the stormy water was subdued by the weight of the earth, when the earth pressed it with its chest its shooting agitation eased, and when the earth rolled on it with its shoulder bones the water meekly submitted.

Thus after the tumult of its surges it became tame and overpowered, and an obedient prisoner of the shackles of disgrace, while the earth spread itself and became solid in the stormy depth of this water. (In this way) the earth put an end to the pride, self conceit, high position and superiority of the water, and muzzled the intrepidity of its flow. Consequently it stopped after its stormy flow and settled down after its tumult.

كَبَسَ الْأَرْضَ عَلَى مَوْرِ أَمْوَاجٍ مُسْتَفْجِلَةٍ، وَلَجَّجَ بِحَارٍ زَاخِرَةٍ، تَلْتَطِمُ أَوَادِيَّ أَمْوَاجِهَا، وَتَصْطَفِقُ مُتَقَانِفَاتٍ أُتْبَاجِهَا، وَتَرْغُو زَبْدًا كَالْفُحُولِ عِنْدَ هِيَاجِهَا، فَخَضَعَ جِمَاحَ الْمَاءِ الْمُتَلَاطِمِ لِثِقَلِ حَمْلِهَا، وَسَكَنَ هَيْجُ ارْتِمَائِهِ إِذْ وَطِنَتْهُ بِكُلْكُلِهَا، وَذَلَّ مُسْتَخْذِيهَا إِذْ تَمَعَّكَتْ عَلَيْهِ بِكَوَاهِلِهَا، فَأَصْبَحَ بَعْدَ اصْطِخَابِ أَمْوَاجِهِ، سَاجِيًا مَقْهُورًا، وَفِي حَكْمَةِ الذَّلِّ مُنْقَادًا أَسِيرًا، وَسَكَنَتِ الْأَرْضُ مَدْحُوءَةً فِي لُجَّةِ تَيَّارِهِ، وَرَدَّتْ مِنْ نَخْوَةٍ بَأْوِهِ وَاعْتِلَائِهِ، وَشُمُوحِ أَنْفِهِ وَسُمُوقِ غُلَوَائِهِ، وَكَعَمَتِهِ عَلَى كِظَّةِ جَرِيَّتِهِ، فَهَمَدَ بَعْدَ نَزَقَاتِهِ، وَبَعْدَ زَيْفَانٍ وَثْبَاتِهِ.

When the excitement of water subsided under the earth's sides and under the weight of the high and lofty mountains placed on its shoulders, Allah flowed springs of water from its high tops and distributed them through plains and low places and moderated their movement by fixed rocks and high mountain tops. Then its trembling came to a standstill because of the penetration of mountains in (various) parts of its surface and their being fixed in its deep areas, and their standing on its plains.

Then Allah created vastness between the earth and firmament, and provided blowing wind for its inhabitants. Then He directed its inhabitants to spread all over its convenient places. Thereafter He did not leave alone the barren tracts of the earth where high portions lacked in water—springs and where rivers could not find their way, but created floating clouds which enliven the unproductive areas and grow vegetation.

فَلَمَّا سَكَنَ هَيْجُ الْمَاءِ مِنْ تَحْتِ أَكْنَافِهَا، وَحَمَلَ شَوَاهِقَ الْجِبَالِ الْبُذْخَ عَلَى أَكْتَافِهَا، فَجَرَ يَنَابِيعَ الْعُيُونِ مِنْ عَرَائِنِ أَنْوْفِهَا، وَفَرَّقَهَا فِي سُهُوبٍ بَيْدَهَا وَأَخَادِيدِهَا، وَعَدَّلَ حَرَكَاتِهَا بِالرَّاسِيَّاتِ مِنْ جَلَامِيدِهَا، وَذَوَاتِ الشَّنَاقِبِ الشَّمَّ مِنْ صِيَاحِيدِهَا، فَسَكَنَتْ مِنَ الْمِيدَانِ بِرُسُوبِ الْجِبَالِ فِي قِطْعِ أَدِيمِهَا، وَتَغْلَغَلَهَا مُتَسَرِّبَةً فِي جَوَّاتِ خِيَاشِيمِهَا، وَرُكُوبِهَا أَعْنَاقِ سُهُولِ الْأَرْضِينَ وَجَرَائِمِهَا، وَفَسَحَ بَيْنَ الْجَوِّ وَبَيْنَهَا، وَأَعَدَّ الْهَوَاءَ مُتَنَسِّمًا لِسَاكِنِهَا، وَأَخْرَجَ إِلَيْهَا أَهْلَهَا عَلَى تَمَامٍ مَرَافِقِهَا. ثُمَّ لَمْ يَدَعْ جُرْزَ الْأَرْضِ الَّتِي تَقْصُرُ مِيَاهُ الْعُيُونِ عَنْ رَوَابِيهَا، وَلَا تَجِدُ جَدَاوِلَ الْأَنْهَارِ ذَرِيعَةً إِلَى بُلُوغِهَا، حَتَّى أَنْشَأَ لَهَا نَاشِئَةً سَحَابَ تُحْيِي مَوَاتَهَا، وَتَسْتَخْرِجُ نَبَاتَهَا.

He made a big cloud by collecting together small clouds and when water collected in it and lightning began to flash on its sides and the flash continued under the white clouds as well as the heavy ones. He sent it raining heavily. The cloud was hanging towards the earth and southerly winds were squeezing it into shedding its water like a she-camel bending down for milking.

When the cloud prostrated itself on the ground and delivered all the water it carried on itself Allah grew vegetation on the plain earth and herbage on dry mountains. As a result, the earth felt pleased at being decorated with its gardens and wondered at her dress of soft vegetation and the ornaments of its blossoms. Allah made all this the means of sustenance for the people and feed for the beasts. He has opened up highways in its expanse and has established minarets (of guidance) for those who tread on its highways.

أَلْفَ عَمَامَهَا بَعْدَ افْتِرَاقِ لُمَعِهِ، وَتَبَايُنِ قَزَعِهِ. حَتَّى إِذَا تَمَخَّضَتْ لُجَّةُ الْمُزْنِ فِيهِ، وَالتَّمَعَ بَرْقُهُ فِي كُفِّهِ، وَلَمْ يَنْمِ وَمِيزُهُ فِي كَنْهَوْرِ رَبَابِهِ، وَمُتَرَائِمِ سَحَابِهِ، أَرْسَلَهُ سَحَابًا مُتَدَارِكًا، قَدْ أَسَفَّ هَيْدَبُهُ، تَمْرِهِ الْجَنُوبِ دِرَّرَ أَهَاضِبِهِ، وَدَفَعَ

شَآئِبِهِ.

فَلَمَّا أَلْقَتِ السَّحَابُ بَرَكَ بِوَانِيهَا، وَبَعَاغَ مَا اسْتَقَلَّتْ بِهِ مِنَ الْعِبَاءِ الْمَحْمُولِ عَلَيْهَا، أَخْرَجَ بِهِ مِنْ هَوَامِدِ الْأَرْضِ النَّبَاتَ، وَمِنْ زُعْرِ الْجِبَالِ الْأَعْشَابَ، فَهِيَ تَبْهَجُ بِزِينَةِ رِبَاضِهَا، وَتَزْدْهِى بِمَا أُلْبَسَتْهُ مِنْ رِيطٍ، أَزَاهِيرِهَا، وَحِلْيَةِ مَا سُمِطَتْ بِهِ مِنْ نَاضِرِ أَنْوَارِهَا، وَجَعَلَ ذَلِكَ بَلَاغًا لِلْأَنَامِ، وَرِزْقًا لِلْأَنْعَامِ، وَخَرَقَ الْفَجَاجَ فِي آفَاقِهَا، وَأَقَامَ الْمَنَارَ لِلسَّالِكِينَ عَلَى جَوَادِ طُرُقِهَا.

On the Creation of Man and the sending of the Prophet

When He spread out the earth and enforced His commands He chose Adam (peace be upon him) as the best in His creation and made him the first of all creation. He made him to reside in Paradise and gave him ample sustenance in it, and also instructed him regarding what He had prohibited him. He told him that proceeding towards it meant His disobedience and endangering his own position. But Adam did what he had been refrained from, just as Allah already knew beforehand. Consequently, Allah sent him down after (accepting) his repentance, to populate His earth with his progeny and to serve as a proof and plea for Him among his creatures.

فَلَمَّا مَهَّدَ أَرْضَهُ، وَأَنْفَذَ أَمْرَهُ، اخْتَارَ آدَمَ (عليه السلام)، خَيْرَهُ مِنْ خَلْقِهِ، وَجَعَلَهُ

أَوَّلَ جِبِلَّتِهِ، وَأَسْكَنَهُ جَنَّتَهُ، وَأَرْغَدَ فِيهَا أَكْلَهُ، وَأَوْعَزَ إِلَيْهِ فِيمَا نَهَاهُ عَنْهُ، وَأَعْلَمَهُ أَنَّ فِي الْأَفْدَامِ عَلَيْهِ التَّعَرُّضَ لِمَعْصِيَتِهِ، وَالْمُخَاطَرَةَ بِمَنْزِلَتِهِ؛ فَأَقْدَمَ عَلَى مَا نَهَاهُ عَنْهُ - مُوَافَاةً لِسَابِقِ عِلْمِهِ - فَأَهْبَطَهُ بَعْدَ التَّوْبَةِ لِيَعْمُرَ أَرْضَهُ بِنَسْلِهِ، وَلِيُقِيمَ الْحُجَّةَ بِهِ عَلَى عِبَادِهِ،

Even when He made Adam die, He did not leave them without one who would serve among them as proof and plea for His Godhead, and serve as the link between them and His knowledge, but He provided to them the proofs through His chosen Messengers and bearers of the trust of His Message, age after age till the process came to end with our Prophet Muhammad – Allah may bless him and his descendants – and His pleas and warnings reached finality.

وَلَمْ يُخْلِهِمْ بَعْدَ أَنْ قَبِضَهُ، مِمَّا يُؤَكِّدُ عَلَيْهِمْ حُجَّةَ رُبُوبِيَّتِهِ، وَيَصِلُ بَيْنَهُمْ وَيَبِينَ مَعْرِفَتِهِ، بَلْ تَعَاهَدَهُمْ بِالْحُجَجِ عَلَى أَلْسُنِ الْخَيْرَةِ مِنْ أَنْبِيَائِهِ، وَمُتَحَمِّلِي وَدَائِعِ رِسَالَتِهِ، قَرَأْنَا فَقَرَأْنَا؛ حَتَّى تَمَّتْ بِنَبِيِّنَا مُحَمَّدٍ (صلى الله عليه وآله) حُجَّتُهُ، وَبَلَغَ الْمَقْطَعُ عِذْرَهُ وَنَذْرَهُ،

He ordained livelihoods³ with plenty and with paucity. He distributed them narrowly as well as profusely. He did it with justice to test whomever He desired, with prosperity or with destitution, and to test through it the gratefulness or endurance of the rich and the poor. Then He coupled plenty with misfortunes of

destitution, safety with the distresses of calamities and pleasures of enjoyment with pangs of grief. He created fixed ages and made them long or short and earlier or later, and ended them up with death. He had made death capable of pulling up the ropes of ages and cutting them asunder.

وَقَدَّرَ الْأَرْزَاقَ فَكَثَّرَهَا وَقَلَّلَهَا، وَقَسَمَهَا عَلَى الضَّيِّقِ وَالسَّعَةِ فَعَدَلَ فِيهَا لِيَبْتَلِيَ مَنْ أَرَادَ بِمَيْسُورِهَا وَمَعْسُورِهَا، وَلِيَخْتَبِرَ
بِذَلِكَ الشُّكْرَ وَالصَّبْرَ مِنْ غَنِيِّهَا وَفَقِيرِهَا، ثُمَّ قَرَنَ بِسَعَتِهَا عَقَابِيلَ فَاقْتَتَلَهَا، وَبِسَلَامَتِهَا طَوَارِقَ آفَاتِهَا، وَبِفُرَجِ أَفْرَاجِهَا
غُصَصَ أَتْرَاجِهَا . وَخَلَقَ الْأَجَالَ فَأَطَالَهَا وَقَصَرَهَا، وَقَدَّمَهَا وَأَخَّرَهَا، وَوَصَلَ بِالْمَوْتِ أَسْبَابَهَا، وَجَعَلَهُ خَالِجًا
لِإِشْطَاتِهَا، وَقَاطِعًا لِمَرَائِرِ أَقْرَانِهَا.

He⁴ knows the secrets of those who conceal them, the secret conversation of those who engage in it, the inner feelings of those who indulge in guesses, the established certainties, the furtive glances of the eyes, the inner contents of hearts and depths of the unknown. He also knows what can be heard only by bending the holes of the ears, the summer resorts of ants and winter abodes of the insects, resounding of the cries of wailing women and the sound of steps.

He also knows the spots in the inner sheaths of leaves where fruits grow, the hiding places of beasts namely caves in mountains and valleys, the hiding holes of mosquitoes on the trunks of trees and their herbage, the sprouting points of leaves in the branches, the dripping points of semen passing through passages of loins, small rising clouds and the big giant ones, the drops of rain in the thick clouds, the particles of dust scattered by whirlwinds through their skirts, the lines erased by rain floods, the movements of insects on sand-dunes, the nests of winged creatures on the cliffs of mountains and the singing of chattering birds in the gloom of their brooding places.

عَالِمُ السِّرِّ مِنْ ضَمَائِرِ الْمُضْمِرِينَ، وَتَجَوَّى الْمُتَخَافَتِينَ، وَخَوَاطِرِ رَجْمِ الظُّنُونِ، وَعُقَدِ عَزِيمَاتِ الْيَقِينِ، وَمَسَارِقِ
إِيْمَاضِ الْجُفُونِ، وَمَا ضَمِنَتْهُ أَكْنَانُ الْقُلُوبِ، وَغَيَابَاتُ الْغُيُوبِ، وَمَا أَصْنَعَتْ لِاسْتِرَاقِهِ مَصَائِخُ الْأَسْمَاعِ، وَمَصَائِفُ
الدَّرِّ، وَمَشَاتِي الْهُوَامِ، وَرَجْعُ الْحَيْنِ مِنَ الْمُوَلَهَاتِ، وَهَمْسِ الْأَقْدَامِ، وَمُنْفَسِحِ الثَّمَرَةِ مِنْ وَلَائِجِ غُلْفِ الْأَكْمَامِ،
وَمُنْقَمِعِ الْوُحُوشِ مِنْ غَيْرَانِ الْجِبَالِ وَأَوْدِيَّتِهَا، وَمُخْتَبَأِ الْبُعُوضِ بَيْنَ سُوقِ الْأَشْجَارِ وَأَلْحِيَّتِهَا، وَمَعْرِزِ الْأُورَاقِ مِنْ
الْأَفْتَانِ، وَمَحَطِّ الْأَمْشَاجِ مِنْ مَسَارِبِ الْأَصْلَابِ، وَنَاشِئَةِ الْغُيُومِ وَمَتَلَاكِحِهَا، وَدُرُورِ قَطْرِ السَّحَابِ فِي مُتَرَاجِمِهَا، وَمَا
تَسْقِي الْأَعَاصِيرُ بِذُيُولِهَا، وَتَعْفُو الْأَمْطَارُ بِسُيُولِهَا، وَعَوْمُ بَنَاتِ الْأَرْضِ فِي كُتُبَانِ الرِّمَالِ، وَمُسْتَقَرِّ ذَوَاتِ الْأَجْنِحَةِ بِذُرَا
،شَنَاخِيبِ الْجِبَالِ، وَتَغْرِيدِ ذَوَاتِ الْمَنْطِقِ فِي دِيَاغِيرِ الْأَوْكَارِ

And)He knows(whatever has been treasured by mother-of-pearls, and covered under the waves of oceans, all that which is concealed under the darkness of night and all that on which the light of day is shining, as well as all that on which sometimes darkness prevails and sometimes light shines, the trace of every footstep, the feel of every movement, the echo of every sound, the motion of every lip, the abode of every living being, the weight of every particle, the sobs of every sobbing heart, and whatever is there on the earth like fruits of trees or falling leaf, or the settling place of semen, or the congealing of blood or clot and the developing of life and embryo.

وَمَا أَوْعَتْهُ الْأَصْدَافُ، وَحَضَنْتْ عَلَيْهِ أَمْوَاجُ الْبَحَارِ، وَمَا غَشِيَتْهُ سُدُفَةُ لَيْلٍ، أَوْ ذَرَّ عَلَيْهِ شَارِقُ نَهَارٍ، وَمَا اعْتَقَبَتْ عَلَيْهِ أَطْبَاقُ الدِّيَاجِيرِ، وَسُبْحَاتُ النُّورِ، وَأَثَرُ كُلِّ خَطْوَةٍ، وَحِسَّ كُلِّ حَرَكَةٍ، وَرَجَعَ كُلُّ كَلِمَةٍ، وَتَحَرَّكَ كُلُّ شَفَةِ، وَمُسْتَقَرَّ كُلِّ نَسَمَةٍ، وَمِثْقَالِ كُلِّ ذَرَّةٍ، وَهَمَاهِمِ كُلِّ نَفْسٍ هَامَّةٍ، وَمَا عَلَيْهَا مِنْ ثَمَرِ شَجَرَةٍ، أَوْ سَاقِطِ وَرَقَةٍ، أَوْ قَرَارَةِ نُطْفَةٍ، أَوْ نُقَاعَةِ دَمٍ وَمُضْغَةٍ، أَوْ نَاشِئَةِ خَلْقٍ وَسَالَةِ

On all this He suffers no trouble, and no impediment hampers Him in the preservation of what he created nor any languor or grief hinders Him from the enforcement of commands and management of the creatures. His knowledge penetrates through them and they are within His counting. His justice extends to all of them and His bounty encompasses them despite their falling short of what is due to Him.

لَمْ تَلْحَقْهُ فِي ذَلِكَ كُفَّةٌ، وَلَا اعْتَرَضَتْهُ فِي حِفْظِ مَا ابْتَدَعَ مِنْ خَلْقِهِ عَارِضَةٌ، وَلَا اعْتَوَرَتْهُ فِي تَنْفِيزِ الْأُمُورِ وَتَدَابِيرِ الْمَخْلُوقِينَ مَالَكَةٌ وَلَا فَتْرَةٌ، بَلْ نَفَذَهُمْ عِلْمُهُ، وَأَحْصَاهُمْ عَدْدُهُ، وَوَسَّعَهُمْ عَدْلُهُ، وَغَمَّرَهُمْ فَضْلُهُ، مَعَ تَقْصِيرِهِمْ عَنْ كُنْهِ مَا هُوَ أَهْلُهُ.

O My God! Thou deservest handsome description and the highest esteem. If wish is directed towards Thee, Thou art the best to be wished for. If hope is reposed in Thee, Thou art the Most Honoured to be hoped from. O My God! Thou hast bestowed on me such power that I do not praise any one other than Thee, and I do not eulogise any one save Thee. I do not direct my praise towards others who are sources of disappointment and centres of misgivings. Thou hast kept away my tongue from the praises of human beings and eulogies of the created and the sustained. O My God! Every praiser has on whom he praises the right of reward and recompense. Certainly, I have turned to Thee with my eye at the treasures of Thy Mercy and stores of forgiveness.

اللَّهُمَّ أَنْتَ أَهْلُ الْوَصْفِ الْجَمِيلِ، وَالتَّعْدَادِ الْكَثِيرِ، إِنْ تَوَمَّلَ فَخَيْرٌ مَأْمُولٍ، وَإِنْ تُرَجَّ فَأكْرَمُ مَرْجُوٍّ.

اللَّهُمَّ وَقَدْ بَسَطْتُ لِي فِيمَا لَا أَمْدَحُ بِهِ غَيْرَكَ، وَلَا أَثْنِي بِهِ عَلَى أَحَدٍ سِوَاكَ، وَلَا أُوَجِّهُهُ إِلَى مَعَادِنِ الْخَيْبَةِ وَمَوَاضِعِ الرِّيبَةِ، وَعَدَلْتُ بِلِسَانِي عَنْ مَدَائِحِ الْأَدْمِيَّةِ، وَالنَّثَاءِ عَلَى الْمَرْبُوبِينَ الْمَخْلُوقِينَ.

اللَّهُمَّ وَلِكُلِّ مَثْنٍ عَلَى مَنْ أَثْنَى عَلَيْهِ مُثُوبَةٌ (1) مِنْ جَزَاءٍ، أَوْ عَارِفَةٍ مِنْ عَطَاءٍ؛ وَقَدْ رَجَوْتُكَ دَلِيلًا عَلَى ذَخَائِرِ الرَّحْمَةِ وَكُنُوزِ الْمَغْفِرَةِ.

O My God! Here stands one who has singled Thee with Oneness that is Thy due and has not regarded any one deserving of these praises and eulogies except Thee. My want towards Thee is such that nothing except Thy generosity can cure its destitution, nor provide for its need except Thy obligation and Thy generosity. So do grant us in this place Thy will and make us free from stretching hands to anyone

other than Thee.

"Certainly, Thou art powerful over every thing. " (Qur'an, 66:8).

اللَّهُمَّ وَهَذَا مَقَامُ مَنْ أَفْرَدَكَ بِالتَّوْحِيدِ الَّذِي هُوَ لَكَ، وَلَمْ يَرِ مُسْتَحَقًّا لِهَذِهِ الْمَحَامِدِ وَالْمَمَادِحِ غَيْرَكَ، وَبِي فَاقَةً إِلَيْكَ لَا يَجْبُرُ مَسْكَنَتَهَا إِلَّا فَضْلُكَ، وَلَا يَنْعَشُ مِنْ خَلْقِهَا إِلَّا مِنْكَ وَجُودُكَ، فَهَبْ لَنَا فِي هَذَا الْمَقَامِ رِضَاكَ، وَأَغْنِنَا عَنْ مَدِّ
!(الْأَيْدِي إِلَى مَنْ سِوَاكَ، (إِنَّكَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

Alternative Sources for Sermon 91

- (1) Mas'adah ibn Sadaqah, author of *Khutab Amir al-Mu'minin*;
- (2) Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, *al-'Iqd*, II, 406;
- (3) al-Saduq, *al-Tawhid*, 34;
- (4) al-Zamakhshari, *Rabi'*, I, *bab al-mala'ikah*;
- (5) Ibn al-'Athir, *al-Nihayah*, discusses its unusual (*gharib*) phrases in several places;
- (6) Ibn Tawus, *Faraj al-mahmum*, 56.

1. The name of this sermon is the Sermon of "al-Ashbah". "ashbah" is the plural of shabah which means skeleton, since it contains description of angels and other kinds of beings it has been named by this name.

The reason for being angry at the questioner was that his request was unconnected with the obligations of shari'ah and beyond limits of human capacity.

2. Allah is the Guarantor of sustenance and Provider of livelihood as He says:

No creature is there crawling on the earth, but its provision rests on Allah...(Qur'an, 11:6)

But His being guarantor means that He has provided ways for everyone to live and earn livelihood, and has allowed every one equal shares in forests, mountains, rivers, mines and in the vast earth, and has given everyone the right to make use of them. His bounties are not confined to any single person, nor is the door of His sustenance closed to any one. Thus, Allah says:

All We do aid, these and (also) those out of the bounty of thy Lord; and the bounty of thy Lord is not confined. (Qur'an, 17:20)

If some one does not secure these things through languor or ease and sits effortless it is not possible that livelihood would reach his door. Allah has laid the table with multifarious feeds but to get them it is necessary to extend the hand. He has deposited pearls in the bottom of the sea but it requires diving to get them out. He has filled the mountains with rubies and precious stones but they cannot be had without digging the stones. The earth contains treasures of growth but benefit cannot be drawn from them without sowing of seed. Heaps of edibles lie scattered on all four sides of the earth but they cannot be collected without the trouble of travelling. Thus, Allah says:

... Traverse ye then its broad sides, and eat ye of His provision . . . (Qur'an, 67:15)

Allah's providing livelihood does not mean that no effort is needed in searching livelihood or no going out of the house is required for it, and that livelihood should itself find its way to the seeker. The meaning of His being the provider of livelihood is that He has given earth the property of growing, He has sent rain from clouds for germination, created fruits, vegetables and grains. All this is from Allah but securing them is connected with human effort. Whoever will strive will reap

the benefits of his efforts, and whoever abstains from strife would face the consequences of his idleness and laziness.

Accordingly Allah says: And that man shall have nothing but what he striveth for. (Qur'an, 53:39)

The order of universe hinges on the maxim "Sow and reap." It is wrong to expect germination without sowing, to hope for results without effort. Limbs and faculties have been given solely to be kept active. Thus, Allah addresses Mary and says: And shake towards thee the trunk of the palm-tree, it will drop on thee dates fresh (and) ripe. Then eat and drink and refresh the eye... (Qur'an, 19:25-26) Allah provided the means for Mary's livelihood. He did not however pluck the dates from the tree and put them in her lap. This was because so far as production of food goes it is His concern. So he made the tree green, put fruits on it and ripened the fruits. But when the stage arrived for plucking them He did not intervene. He just recalled to Mary her job namely that she should now move her hand and get her food.

Again, if His providing the livelihood means that whatever is given is given by Him and whatever is received from Him, then whatever a man would earn and eat, and in whatever manner he would obtain it would be permissible for him, whether he obtains it by theft, bribery, oppression or violence, because it would mean Allah's act and the food would be that given by Him, wherein he would have no free will, and where anything is out of the limits of free action there is no question of permissible or forbidden for it, nor is there any liability to account for it. But when it is not actually so and there is the question of permissible and forbidden then it should have bearing on human actions, so that it could be questioned whether it was secured in lawful or unlawful manner. Of course, where He has not bestowed the power of seeking the livelihood, there He has taken upon Himself the responsibility to provide the livelihood. Consequently, He has managed for the feeding of the embryo in the mother's womb, and it reaches him there according to its needs and requirements. But when this very young life enters the wide world and picks up energy to move its limbs, then it can't get its food from the source without moving his lips (for sucking).

3. In the management of the affairs of this world Allah has connected the sequence with the cause of human acts as a result of which the power of action in man does not remain idle, in the same way He had made these actions dependent on His own will, so man should not rely on his own power of action and forget the Creator. This is the issue of the will between two wills in the controversy of "free will or compulsion". Just as in the entire Universe nature's universal and sovereign law is in force, in the same way the production and distribution of food also is provided in a set manner under the dual force of Divine ordainment and human effort. And this is somewhere less and somewhere more depending on the proportion of human effort and the aim of Divine ordainment. Since He is the Creator of the means of livelihood, and the powers of seeking food have also been bestowed by Him, the paucity or plenty of livelihood has been attributed to Him because He has fixed different and separate measures for livelihood keeping in view the difference in efforts and actions and the good of the creatures. Somewhere there is poverty and somewhere affluence, somewhere distress and somewhere comfort, and some one is enjoying pleasure while some one else is suffering the hardships of want.

Qur'an says: ...amplifieth He their sustenance unto whomsoever He willeth and straiteneth; Verily He knoweth all things. (Qur'an, 42:12)

In sermon 23, Amir al-mu'minin has referred to this matter and said: The Divine command descends from the sky towards the earth with whatever is ordained for every one, whether less or more, just like rain drops.

So just as there is a fixed process and manner for the benevolence of rain namely that vapours rise from the sea with the store of water, spread over in the sky in the shape of dark clouds and then ooze the water by drops till they form themselves in regular lines. They irrigate plains as well as high lands thoroughly and proceed onwards to collect in the low areas, so that the thirsty may drink it, animals may use it and dry lands may be watered from it. In the same way Allah has provided all the means of livelihood but His bounty follows a particular mode in which there is never a jot of deviation. Thus Allah says: And there is not a thing but with Us are its treasures, and We do not send it down but in a known measure. (Qur'an, 15:21)

If man's greed and avarice exceeds its bounds, then just as excess of rain ruins crops instead of growing and bringing them up, so the abundance of the article of livelihood and necessities of life would make man oblivious of Allah and rouse him to revolt and unruliness. Consequently, Allah says: And should Allah amplify the sustenance unto his servants, they would certainly rebel in the earth, but He sendeth it down by measure as he willeth; Verily of His servants, He is All-aware, All-seeing. (Qur'an, 42:27)

If He lessens the food then just as stoppage of rain makes the land arid and kills the animals, in the same way, by closure

of the means of livelihood, human society would be destroyed and so there would remain no means of living and livelihood. Allah accordingly says: Or who is that who can provide you with sustenance should He withhold His sustenance?... (Qur'an, 67:21)

Consequently, Allah, the Wise, the Omniscient, has put the organisation for livelihood on moderate and proportionate lines, and in order to emphasise the importance of livelihood and sustenance and to keep them correlated with each other has introduced differences in the distribution of livelihood. Sometimes, this difference and unequal distribution owes itself to the difference of human effort and sometimes it is the consequence of overall arrangement of the affairs of the Universe and Divine acts of wisdom and objectives. This is because, if by poverty and want He has tested the poor in endurance and patience, in affluence and wealth there is severe test of the rich by way of thanks-giving and gratifying the rights of others, namely whether the rich person gratifies the claims of the poor and the distressed, and whether he takes care of the destitute or not. Again, where there is wealth there would also be dangers of all sorts. Sometimes there would be danger to the wealth and property and sometimes fear of poverty and want.

Consequently, there would be many persons who would be more satisfied and happy for lack of wealth. For them this destitution and want would be far better than the wealth which might snatch away their comfort and peace. Moreover sometimes this very wealth which one holds dearer than life becomes the cause of loss of one's life. Further, it has also been seen that so long as wealth was lacking character was above reproach, life was unblemished, but the moment property and wealth changed into plenty the conduct worsened, character became faulty and there appeared the vice of drink, crowd of beauties and gathering of singing and music. In such a case the absence of wealth was a blessing. However, being ignorant of Allah's objectives, man cries out and being affected by transitory distress begins complaining but does not realise from how many vices which could have accrued owing to wealth he has remained aloof. Therefore, if wealth produces conveniences, poverty serves as a guard for the character.

4. The eloquence with which Amir al-mu'minin has thrown light on Allah's attributes of knowledge and the sublime words in which he has pictured the all-engrossing quality of His knowledge cannot but impress the mind of the most die-hard opponent. Thus, Ibn Abi'l-Hadid has written:

If Aristotle, who believed that Allah is only aware of the universe and not of its particulars, had heard this speech, his heart too would have inclined, his hair would have stood on end and his thinking would have undergone a dramatic change. Do you not see the brightness, force, vehemence, sublimity, glory, seriousness and ripeness of this speech? Besides these qualities, there is sweetness, colourfulness, delicacy and smoothness in it. I have not found any utterance similar to it. Of course, if there is any utterance matching it, that can be the word of Allah only. And there is no wonder in it, because he is an off-shoot of the same tree (of the Prophet Ibrahim, who set up the Unity of Allah), a distributory of the same river and a reflection of the same light. (Sharh Nahjul Balaghah, vol.7, pp. 23-24)

Those who regard Allah to possess only over-all knowledge argue that since details undergo changes, to believe Him to have knowledge of the changing details would necessitate changes in His knowledge but since knowledge is the same as His Being, His Being would have to be regarded as the object of change the result of which would be that He would have to be taken as having come into existence. In this way He would lose the attribute of being from ever. This is a very deceptive fallacy because changes in the object of knowledge can lead to changes in the knower only when it is assumed that the knower does not already possess knowledge of these changes. But since all the forms of change and alteration are crystal clear before Him there is no reason that with the changes in the objects of knowledge He too should be regarded changeable, although really this change is confined to the object of knowledge and does not affect knowledge in itself.

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