

Themes 1: Our Youth In the Light of The Qur'an

[Our Youth in the Light of the Qur'an](#)

The issue of education is subject to many influences arising from the various dimensions of human perception – regardless of whether the forum of education is intellectual, emotional, or pertains to the general environment of the person. Therefore, it is natural that the word – which is the medium that communicates the idea from one human being to another – should be significant and dynamic enough to convey thought, spirit, and work.

Throughout the history of human communication, words have often been suggestive of things which are not immediately apparent from the language itself. This is because the word becomes associated with certain references which either widen the focus from or narrow it to the core meaning.

Hence, the word has been the divine medium of instruction, God having sent His prophets with sacred books, which He revealed to them. We see that the movement of human education is the long path of the word in human history, embracing every negative and positive effect in this history.

[Exhortation by Words](#)

In light of the above, let us continue in the same general framework with respect to words. The words of exhortation used in the Qur'an, wherein Luqman counsels his son, are designed to expand his horizons on matters of doctrine and life.

We notice that the exhortation concerns ideas which carry aspects related to the senses and the perceptions. Ideas are not mere abstractions to be contemplated purely for their intellectual content, but contain aspects grasped by sensory experience.

Combining Intellect and Emotions

Exhortation carries along with its ideational aspect, certain elements of human sentiment and feeling, so that the issue becomes one of combining the intellect and the emotions. In this manner it penetrates into the heart and mind of the person. For mixing the intellect with the emotions causes a state which grips and transforms the person. The various dimensions involved make a given concept something that tugs at the innermost core of the person.

This is what we observe in every exhortation where the intellectual aspect is in concert with the sensory and emotional facet. When applied to exhortation or nurturing, this method is probably the most effective in transforming a person. This is because the error committed by many in planting an idea is to focus on the purely cerebral aspect of their concept, rendering it much like a lifeless engineering formula which addresses the human intellect without in any way harnessing the other dimensions of the human perception.

On the other hand, there are those who deal only with the emotional aspect which does not spur a person to intellectual contemplation. This leaves a gap between the concept and faith. And so we find that many have an idea, but do not really believe in it, since the aspect of faith requires that an idea change itself into something sensory, and then is transformed into action based on perception.

Qur'anic Method of Exhortation

The value of the Qur'anic method is that it attempts to articulate life issues. Therefore, we see that it pushes the idea closer to the mind, in respect of what a person sees, hears, and touches. It implants the concept in the deepest and sincerest parts of the person's being, by process of fear, hope, hate, etc.

When we contemplate this, we find that the most successful and effective exhortation is that which is well planned, which is delivered by those who use the forcefulness of the intellect and emotion, and which uses all that appeals to cerebral and emotional faculties.

Exhortation by Example

A point which needs to be elaborated upon is that speech may form the greater part of exhortation, but that the two may in fact be far apart. There is the saying that he who does not have an exhorter within himself, cannot benefit from an exhorter. This means that a person can exhort himself by himself, in terms of his experience.

This is what Imam 'Ali spoke about in *Nahj al-Balagha*: "The best of what you experience is that which exhorts you." For your experience is what may teach you a lesson, concept, and contemplation of your current situation, with respect to what intellectual and sentimental aspects it possesses. On this basis, therefore, we find that one type of homily is when a person preaches by his actions before words.

In this fashion, we can put exhortation as an umbrella term, encompassing every means of intellectual or behavioural experience, or that which is related to the reactions of others. All this shows that there is a broad outline for the process of exhortation. Briefly, it is a functional method, different in its means of delivery, which puts the concept to the person and corrects what is corrupt in his life, straightens out what needs to be in his character, or opens up to horizons hitherto closed to him in his life.

Addressee's Role

Homiletic address is the purpose of the preacher, in that he presents his arguments to the best of his *efforts in* order to push the idea he intended to stress. As such, the person who accepts exhortation must have the ability, responsibility, and desire to do everything mentioned in this homily.

This is because exhortation is a response by words, by action, by example, by any means that reaches the intellect. A person who does not react to exhortation is no different from a corpse which has lost all the sense faculties. Loss of the sensory faculties may be a natural state in a dead person; it may be that a living person has frozen all sensation in his being.

God speaks about this repeatedly in the Qur'an:

"They have hearts with which they think not, they have eyes that see not, as they have ears that hear not" (al-A'raf, 7: 179).

This means that the human being may paralyse his sensory faculties and perception, emotions or ambitions in his personality, thus becoming as a living dead:

"It is the same whether you warn them or do not warn them: they do not believe" (al-Baqara, 2:6);

"God has placed a seal on their hearts and hearing, and in their sight a blindness" (al-Baqara, 2:7)

i.e., how can you incite a person to act on exhortation from within himself when he rejects good preaching?

Abrahamic Education

O my father! Do as you are commanded! (Al-Saffat, 37: 102)

These are the words uttered by Ismael as he was submitting to the divine will. Is it possible to emulate this submission and obedience?

When we study the personality of Abraham from his early rearing, we find a personality of human responsiveness to God. This typified his reaction to every truth in life. When we wish to study the noble Qur'an rhetorically, we find that Abraham was a man who challenged corrupt ideas, whether of non-

belief or of polytheism. His challenges emerged directly from the disquiet he felt when he learned about the people around him.

This is what we observe in him in his innermost thoughts, when reflecting upon the personality of those who worshipped the stars, moon, or sun. He expressed awe before the stars, the moon, and the sun in all their glory. Challenging the idea of worshipping them, however, he declared that they could not be gods, for God is present in every aspect of life.

In our view, this indicates how his function of guiding the community towards faith had caused a shock wave in the midst of the community. It is demonstrated by his act of breaking the idols and blaming the largest of these idols. His action was based on the principle of forcing them to admit that the idols could not speak:

"Certainly you know that they do not speak" (al Anbiya, 21:65).

In the course of his reaction, he debated their doctrine and ideology, and showed these to be baseless. This indicated where he stood with respect to his father, whom he dared in words which sometimes evince empathy, sometimes reflect harsh reality.

His attitude is equally reflected in his opposition to the tyrant of his time, when the latter declared, "I give life and I cause to die."

My Lord is He who gives life and causes to die . . . Abraham said: God causes the sun to rise from the east, then make it rise from the west. And so the one who disbelieved was confounded. (Al-Baqara, 2:258)

The Man of God

We may note – from the foregoing – the condition which makes Abraham a man of God, someone intensely aware of his responsibility that he should live for God and far from every other attachment, every difficulty, in order to find himself a servant of God. So much so that he felt it incumbent upon him to dedicate his entire life to God. This is what we infer from God's words,

"And God took Abraham as a friend" (al-Nisa', 4: 125).

God's friendship for Abraham was due to Abraham's friendship for God, being reciprocal in kind:

"He loves them and they love Him" (al Ma'ida, 5:54).

This relationship of worship is the highest connection that a mortal can have with his Lord. This expands and develops into friendship.

The friendship between Abraham and God, an inevitable result of active worship, led to the realization

that Abraham's presence depended on God. Concomitant with this is the knowledge, too, that the entire universe is dependent on God. This made Abraham perceive one of the ways towards God when he asked Him to bring the dead back to life:

Show me how You give life to the dead. [God] said: Do you not believe? [Abraham] said: Most certainly! But only that my heart be at ease. (Al-Baqarah, 2:260)

This shows that when Abraham spoke to his Lord, when he lived with Him, he perceived a life of spontaneity and inspiration, mixed with the observation of faith in worship, on the one hand, and love and obedience, on the other.

From this perspective, we find that Abraham lived Islam for God, and we are likely to understand from the Qur'an that he was the first to use the term *al-Islam*:

The milla of your father Abraham, who called you Muslims from before . . . (Al-Hajj, 22:78)

When his Lord told him: Submit [aslim], he said: I submit to the Lord of all the Worlds. And Abraham left a legacy to his children, as did Jacob, saying thus: O my children! God has chosen for you the religion, and die only as Muslims! (al-Baqarah, 2: 131-32)

It was Abraham who coined the word Islam ["submission to God"] after hearing it from God (Exalted). As a result of this, every Abrahamic prophethood – if this term can be used – took the name of Islam in its inclusive sense:

"Verily the religion with God is al-Islam" (al-Imran, 3: 19);

"And whoever follows other than Islam, it will not be accepted from him" (al-Imran, 3:85).

It is this comprehensive Islam which is carried in every prophethood; it is the line of tawhid.

Naturally, we may note that Abraham was a man who lived with God in his entire being and in all his actions. He worked to establish an instructional modus in his particular environment. This was so he could transmit to his descendants this realized, elevated Islam which he lived with God. He also worked towards transmitting this Islam to all of humankind. This is the message of the glorious verse:

"And Abraham left as a legacy to his children, as did Jacob, saying thus: O my children! God has chosen for you the religion, and die only as Muslims!"(al-Baqarah, 2: 132).

Islam as a Medium of Instruction

Islam then was a method of instruction which Abraham wanted his children to exemplify, religion being part of it. It would appear that this method of instruction insinuated itself as a practical application in the case of Ismael and as a policy in the case of Jacob.

When we read the words of God:

"We gave him tidings of a forbearing son" (al-Saffat, 37: 101)

we see that Abraham had hoped for a son after his trials, and God granted him a forbearing, mild-tempered son, who was responsive of heart, and did not reject or shirk any sign, however pressing or difficult the circumstances. The verse

"And when he reached the age when he could go forth with his father" (al-Saffat, 37: 102)

tells us that Ismael lived in close attachment to his father in the time that they had spent together. For any man blessed with a handsome son after enduring suffering, this was only natural. Abraham gave his entire heart and faith to his Lord, and he taught his son his spiritual contemplation, which reflected every aspect of thought, spirit, worship, and deed. Ismael's state was, therefore, transformed into one of Islam – meaning that he became a Muslim in an absolute sense, as was his father.

The Challenge to Affection and the Self

From this comes the experience which God (Exalted) wishes the father and the son to live in order to give example of Islam in its highest essence. This was realized in such a way that the affection of the father was severely tested when Abraham was called to sacrifice his son. He did not stand by and let others sacrifice his son. He had to subdue his own sense of affection, mercy, love, and any loving attachment – sentiments which reside in every father towards an only and beloved child.

On the other hand, Ismael's love for another human being was also challenged. The faith of both was challenged. And this dared them to respond to the subjection of one's affections for one's own child, the killing of one's feelings. They both succeeded in this, and this is what we note in God's words, for Abraham said to his son:

"O my son, I see in my sleep that I sacrifice you, so what do you think?..." (al-Saffat, 37: 102).

According to the Qur'anic text, Ismael did not stop once to think or reflect about this matter:

"...He said: O my father! Do as you are commanded; You will find me, God willing, among the forbearing!" (al-Saffat, 37: 102).

Fatherhood and Prophethood

The foregoing analysis tells us that Abraham succeeded in rearing his son to this degree of spiritual Islam, where a human being can subjugate his own feelings in deference to God's commands. We can equally perceive that Abraham did not behave as would many fathers whom God has blessed with a son after trial, by spoiling and giving such a son a twisted and abused freedom; so much so, the errors of the

child come to be seen as holy, his evil as good – in the light of the doting, blind affection which does not permit the father to endure the pain of such a child.

We understand that there was some readiness on the part of Ismael, and a sort of dedication from Abraham in his prophetic test. Abraham did not see his son through the lens of mortals' sentimentality; he saw him from a prophetic vantage point. A man like Abraham has to comport himself in life as a slave of God, absolutely dedicated to Him. It is not for me then to determine my fatherly or paternal feelings towards my child, or to make his filial relation to me a pretext for drowning myself in selfish feelings.

Rather, I must know that the son is a slave of Allah, and I must emphasize the worship of God. I have to realize that he is a member of the human community, and that I am obligated to make him a man, strengthened by the human trials of faith and uprightness.

Blending Humanness and Prophethood

Abraham was able to blend his human with his prophetic dimension. He did so from the perspective of fatherhood in relation to prophethood, for he focused his human sentiments on making his son truly elevated before God. He created a proximity between the boy and God to achieve the overwhelming abundance of divine mercy and paradise.

In respect of prophethood, he directed himself to being a prophet as much for his son as for all of humankind. Abraham did not do as would have many: making his message one for humankind at the expense of being distant and isolated from his own family and children, leaving them on their own.

Indeed, Abraham succeeded in rearing prophetic personalities after him. While building the House of God, he formed the personality of Ismael by letting him accompany him in that task:

"And when Abraham and Ishmael raised the foundations of the House" (al Baqara, 2: 127).

He caused Ismael to live in the spiritual atmosphere surrounding the construction of the House, an undertaking at once spiritual and physical. Isaac and Jacob were able to perceive things in this same light:

Were you not witnesses when Jacob was about to die, as he asked his children: What will you worship after me? They said: We worship your God, the God of your fathers, Abraham and Ismael and Isaac, the One God, and to Him do we submit. (Al-Baqara, 2: 133)

Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, lived this prophetic life under the aegis of Islam, and spoke to his children in exactly the same manner as Abraham had done to his.

We find in the Qur'an no details as to the method of instruction which Abraham followed with Ismael and Isaac, and which Isaac used with Jacob. In the spiritual environment which Abraham created for his

children and by which the response of these children was to be influenced, if we consider legacy as one facet and the example another, and if we follow the same spiritual path they lived, then all this plainly led to the efficacious results in the Islam of Ismael, Isaac, and Jacob.

Children of Prophets are Like Any Other Humans

Contrasting with the story of Abraham and Ismael is the Qur'an's story of Noah and his son. In the former, there is an invitation to sacrifice, in the latter an invitation to salvation. On the one hand, there is obedience and submission; on the other, rejection and rebellion. What can we learn from all this?

The children of prophets, Imams, and the 'ulama ["religious scholars"] are all human, like the rest of homo *sapiens*, molded as much by positive influences as by negative ones. They probably live, too, within the arena of conflict, where positive forces confront negative ones, that each may learn and experience internal conflict by wrestling with powerful external conflict.

On this basis, it is not a foregone conclusion that the child of a prophet will be righteous, or that the child of an Imam or a 'alim or an activist will be like the parent. The father forms part of the environment, and he is simply one of several factors which condition the personality of the child. The father may live a sort of existence that is unstable or weak, in the course of which he cannot exert any strong influence on his family which might offset opposing forces or pressures impinging on his own activities.

All this may constitute a problem for those who call to Islam, whether they be prophets, guardians, or 'ulama. This is because the pressure of belief and challenge in inviting others to Islam (*da'wa*) can engage man's full attention at the expense of his household. He is open to the entire world and closed to his family. This is the course required by this lifestyle; he distances himself from personal matters, on the view that his family is one of those "personal matters".

Influences of a Corrupt Community

One thing that deserves mention is that a corrupt community may take away a prophet's family from him without any resistance. This is because resistance (by the prophet) is directed against the greater community, and it may very well be that the force of the opposition represents enough material strength and challenge to undermine the basic elements of prophethood, as the mundane circumstances work themselves out.

The prophet – no matter which one – when delivering his message in the face of this great obstacle, does not possess every medium. Only some media apply: with respect to personal charisma and ability. The world of prophethood is not the world of the unseen, but the world of human abilities, which may be connected with the unseen in some instances or respects, but not in the full sense suggested by such knowledge.

In this setting, the community may be transformed into a powerful force even on the household of a prophet, guardian, or scholar. This is because such a community possesses the influences of a deviant society which can entice a household, enough to destroy a prophetic message. Some prophets, scholars, and saints have even been tested through their spouses who take an opposite stance to the prophetic message, opposing the actions of the prophet. This is what the Qur'an tells us about the wives of Noah and Lot:

God sets forth as an example to the disbelievers the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot. They were under two of our righteous servants, but they betrayed them so that they [the husbands] availed them naught against God. It was said to them: Enter the fire with those who go therein. (Al-Tahrim, 66: 10)

Betrayal of the Message

We understand from the above that the falseness was not one of sexual honour and fidelity; but rather of betrayal of the message—betrayal of the trust of such a message.

Naturally, such a situation had a negative effect on the children of prophets, Imams, and scholars.

The above verses also show that the influence of the mother is great, and can be negative if, in both thought and conduct, she follows the trends and corruption of infidelity. The reason is that she brings her ideas into the household, where a prophet may be beset by her, much the same way he is beset in the community. He is unable to protect his home, since his own wife is a part of that home, and she may have such an effect from which he cannot rescue himself.

The Qur'an does not provide any biography of Noah's son, but we note that his father encouraged him to board with them, not to be from among the losers:

"Embark with us, and do not be with unbelievers" (Hud, 11:42).

It seems however, that the son was rebellious. He neither respected his father nor paid heed to his warnings. He did not believe in what his father was shown of the unseen, nor in his ability to face matters in a way no one else could. He said,

"I will go to a mountain which will protect me from the water" (Hud, 11:43).

Noah, at that moment losing all hope in his son, replied,

"On this day, there is no saving from God's command" (Hud, 11:43).

When Noah called upon his Lord, it was not in confrontation, but in supplication, for God (Exalted) promised to help his son:

"He said, "My Lord! My son is from my household and your promise is true! " God replied, "O Noah! He is not from your household, for his deeds are unrighteous" (Hud, 11:45-46).

Influence of the Mother

Why was the son of Noah not among the believers? By asking ourselves this question, we can, according to the Qur'anic text, relate the son to the mother. We find that the son was more under his mother's than his father's influence, for his father was alone. On the other hand, the mother was very much a part of the community, whether they were relatives or not. It is natural then for a child to live in this community and to function according to its conditioning, without his father being capable of most of his responsibility or of living with a minority of believers who can influence his son.

We can understand the difference between the case of Ismael and that of the son of Noah; Ismael lived in an environment where Abraham was able to remove his son from pressure. Hence, the boy lived in an environment where the negative influences of society exerted no pressure. At that time, his mother was also a righteous believer. In the one case, the boy's learning process was protected, in the other (son of Noah) it was not.

This is what Islam focuses on in the case of marriage – namely, that the believer should marry someone who is religiously observant. So much so that a person, according to a hadith, had once said to the Prophet, "Who should I marry?" The Prophet replied, "You must marry one who is religiously observant." This is the issue that concerns the spouse. Indeed "if there comes to you someone whose character and religion please you, marry him, for if you do not calamity and great evil will prevail in the earth."

Islam then focuses on the correctness of the household, that the wife should be a religious woman, and that the husband should be a man of religion. An Islamic nursery is primarily for the child, whose senses and perceptions are molded to such a degree that, in the face of corruption, he will resort to this primary conditioning as the basis.

However, when there are different forces in the household, where the father wants the child to incline towards faith, and the mother wants the child to incline towards non-belief, corruption, or vice versa, then the issue will normally be one which does affect the harmony of the two parents. We do not wish to hold that the elements of mother and father are everything. It must be emphasized that their role is tremendous, in addition to the other factors in this area.

In the light of this, it is possible for us to learn from the case of Noah that the father should not be confident that because he is righteous, his son shall be righteous as well. In fact, it is a duty of the father to be cautious about the lack of righteousness in his wife, for that could adversely affect his child. It is the duty of the father in this respect, not to believe that there are corrupting influences too powerful for him to fight.

People should also avoid using the corruption of a child as a mirror of the corruption of the parent, in the manner which some people claim, "Go and look after your son!" It is true that God charges a man with responsibility for his family and for himself, along with his relatives as well. But this does not mean that such responsibility is one hundred per cent. Rather, it is a responsibility proportional to the abilities that he possesses in this regard.

Truth Refutes Distortions

Is prophetic influence not negated, or its power undermined, whenever the house is torn from within?

This issue can leave adverse effects in the eyes of the public against those who call to God, even for a prophet, guardian, or believer. One may emphasize the negative aspect, namely, as follows:

This man cannot be truly serious about his call; his undertaking could be for ulterior motives – probably for recognition, position, or riches. We see this in what God has told us about the tribes of the prophets who told God that they wanted influence, as in the case of Pharaoh and Moses. The people said that were he serious, truthful, and believing in his call, the sign of his belief would have been to invite his people, to make them believe in him. This is exactly what people say to someone who calls to certain views and does not abide by them, "Were he serious, he would have exhorted himself and disciplined himself, and truly devoted himself to his cause."

This may create a bad influence in the general atmosphere. But in my view, regardless of whether one is an 'alim, or a da'i in any field, when he exudes confidence, allowing people to perceive the seriousness in his movements, noting that he does not abandon his children to corruption; nor does he assume any special air for them over others, or take a lax view in this regard then people realize the seriousness of his call.

The uncle of the Prophet, Abu Lahab, who opposed the Prophet, was unable to influence him because all the elements of prophethood were in the being of the Prophet, who was serious in his undertaking. His preference for non relatives (if they were Muslim) over his own kin made people see that his lack of influence on his own family was resulted from no lack of commitment. Rather, it was because of deep-seated elements present in the personality of Abu Lahab and other relatives. As a result, Abu Lahab left no negative influence on him.

I believe that if those who call to God were to concentrate on this facet of confidence in their sentiments regarding their children, and to convince the people that they do not stumble in submission to their personal sentiments regarding their children when the latter go astray, then any negative effect that this would have on their movement would effectively be nullified.

Temptation Versus Strength of Character

In Sura Yusuf, we find a youth who is pressed by a lady of rank resisting that temptation. How can we get our youths to understand Yusuf's resistance?

When we study the position of Yusuf, in his difficult trial, we find that it was far more difficult than any our youths normally undergo. This is because the atmosphere of incitement in which youths of today live has many sources, but there is the option of choice. For the most part, these incitements are not present in the inner longings of youths, in the sense of losing all decision in the matter or all freedom of action.

In the case of Yusuf, we find that he was a slave, bought by the husband of the woman with whom he resided night and day before that difficult element in the attractive personality of Yusuf was ever discussed. In the light of this, we find that Yusuf was not attracted to this woman in any normal sense, for it is nowhere mentioned that he was attracted by any aspect of her beauty, or any sexuality which, until then, had been suppressed in him. This means that Yusuf possessed the inner resistance against this temptation.

Someone may state that Yusuf was a slave, and as such was unable to know his lady-owner, since the barriers of class status would have made this improbable. We note, however, that while these barriers may sometimes exist, they were not always accepted, especially by the woman, who was prepared to break those barriers.

Faith as a Barrier to Temptation

It is probable that the trial of Yusuf faced when the wife of the 'Aziz tried to seduce him makes it clear that his refusal to succumb was not as a result of any psychological barrier, but rather of a barrier of faith. Consequently, we observe the words of God:

"And she desired him, and he would have desired her, too, had he not seen the clear sign of his Lord" (Yusuf, 12:24).

These words are usually said to signify Yusuf longed to lie with her. However, the explanation to which we incline is enticement without feeling. This is exactly as when a man is enticed by food and his body reacts when he is hungry. This attraction did not last long. It is a natural reaction, not one of calculated innate desire—had he not seen the clear sign of his Lord and was his faith not awakened?

Infallibility does not mean lack of attraction to unlawful food, drink, or desires. Rather, it means not indulging in such unlawful things, for the instinctive, natural attraction in these cases are not transformed into action.

The chapter (sura) explains itself further when it puts Yusuf with the women who said,

"This is not a mortal but a noble angel!" (Yusuf, 12:31).

By then, Yusuf had perceived his strength beginning to weaken, impelling him in a way that he could not ignore, for he had used up all his power to resist the temptations of this woman. This is why he said:

"If You do not turn away their snares from me, I should yearn unto them" (Yusuf, 12:33).

Fortitude of Character

From the foregoing, we know that what saved Yusuf from his predicament was the dimension of his strong faith. This we may see and understand when we examine his life with his father, a time during which God was reflected upon.

Yusuf had lofty spiritual aspirations, and so we see that Jacob, in his affection and sentiments for him, was able to raise him and to mold him into a strong human being with fortitude in his character. Perhaps this is the reason why he loved his child so much, rather than any of the boy's physical beauty. For when we study the attitude of Jacob towards his children, we find his pride and joy in them to have been because they were Muslims.

From this we understand that Jacob found in Yusuf a boy who was unique in his faith in God and in harmony with prophetic conduct. This so affected his other sons that it produced jealousy, which caused them to conspire to rid themselves of Yusuf

The Apostolic Spirit

Perhaps what indicates to us the apostolic spirit which permeated Yusuf's being is that from the time his brothers plotted against him to the time he was imprisoned, he underwent no instruction in the faith, learned no apostleship or piety from anyone. Instead, he endured the schooling of evil, encountering it at home and in the society he lived in.

When we reflect upon his life in jail, we find that he entered it to call to the way of God, the Glorious:

"O my two fellow prisoners! Are many different lords better, or is God the One, the Irresistible?" (Yusuf, 12:39).

This indicates that Yusuf possessed the apostolic mentality, which must not only permeate the apostle himself but also influence those around him. The apostolic spirit in which Yusuf comported himself in his own right and in his community is what made him take his stand.

This is what we must emphasize about the necessary steps in an upbringing that is spiritual, full of faith, and effective. I would almost say that a dynamic personality can be more effective in teaching a believer the power of resistance and self-protection from the influences of others than a believing man who is

little concerned about faith or his community.

Yusuf was certainly a dynamic person in the apostolic path, and I presume that his effective Islamic upbringing – where the facets of contemplation of spirituality, action, and the call to God were so vital – was what made him take the strong position he did. He perceived within himself that his duty was to guide the people among whom he lived, rather than be influenced

by them. It was this sterling spirit that enabled him to achieve his strong resistance.

The Fortitude of a Woman

Up to this point, the discourse has been about the strength of character in a man like Yusuf. What about the fortitude of a woman or her role in strengthening character?

When discussing Yusuf, we did not deal with his fortitude as a man, but only as a believing, apostolic human being calling towards God and struggling in His cause. Thus, this discourse may just as well be directed to a believing Muslim woman, whose heart is open to Islam. For it is absolutely essential that there be an atmosphere of proper training and righteousness. And for proper method, appropriate setting, and dynamic mentality – with the intention of establishing the power to resist temptation in a believing woman, no less than in a man – one must realize that the humanness of a person is not the product of instinct. It is that towards which this person's training guides him.

This agrees with what 'Ali, *Amir al-mu'minin*, had taught in his letter to Ibn Abbas: "You should not regard the attainment of pleasure and the satisfaction of the desire for revenge as the best that this world can offer. Rather, it should be the destruction of evil and the revival of truth. Your pleasure should be in that which you send forth; your grief that which you leave behind; your desire that which is after death."

From this, we may conclude emphatically that one should not follow the path of natural inclination, but rather that of training and education. This does not mean that instinct is to be totally denied, but that we should let it take the direction in which God guides it, and that we should confine it to bounds which Allah has prescribed for it. We must see ourselves in our role as Muslims, doers, and callers to the path of God, working in His path to save humankind from the chaos of instincts, instead of adding to such chaos by letting our own instincts go unchecked.

The Problem of Envy

In Surat Yusuf, there is another point for reflection. Yusuf's brothers had plotted against him, although they all lived under the same shelter of the Prophet Jacob. How can we explain their stance against their brother?

Perhaps the problem for many people, whether they are the children of prophets, Imams, or 'ulama, or

true believers who live in a special spiritual environment, is that they live the aspect of faith as some specific personal trait. Under this condition, their faith is devoid of many deep-rooted, active motivational dimensions, quite unlike the situation where their faith constitutes the prime motive, pervading their innermost being.

Therefore, as far as they are concerned, religion is obviously restricted to worship, or imitative spirituality.

Morality, however, is an aspect which requires certain self-discipline and self control in the battle against the animal instincts that rage between the two elements in the psyche – that of the believer [mu'min] and that of base self. Their moral and ethical being might not be lived with any deep-rooted conviction, their instruction in these matters being an integral part of their personalities.

The Era of the Imams

We may find several negative traits associated with the moral values of many people described above, as seen from the examples of the era of the Imams. History tells us about the stance of Banu al-Hasan regarding the Imams from Banu al-Husayn, from which we can perceive a condition that may be likened to envy or some such vice. We also see that some of the children of the Imams betrayed Imam al-Kazim to Harun al-Rashid, just as they did Ja'far b. al-Hadi.

There are some situations where inner workings do not correspond to the positive responses, but in some cases may reflect negative attitudes. This is because human beings lose many of their values in certain situations. Likewise the case with the children of Jacob, for they lived with selfishness regarding Yusuf and his brother, whose mother was not theirs. It is possible, too, that the problem was a conflict between the two mothers, on one hand, and between them and their two brothers, on the other hand. The others brothers became envious of Yusuf whom Jacob preferred not for emotional reasons, but because Yusuf's righteousness was so much better than his brothers. This was an issue that caused them to become envious and to contemplate their attack on him in the manner it transpired.

If there is one question that must be raised, it is that these "prophets" – it is not confirmed that they were and the Qur'an apparently does not present them as such – probably reformed after the events unfolded and their selfish motives which had influenced them were obliterated.

The Issue on the Aspect of Dawa

We would like to present information on this subject relating to the situation in which we live. We will, therefore, focus on work which *'ulama*, believing fathers, and those who guide to the path of Allah should embark upon. They should not succumb to the atmosphere of faith in which the believers now live, whether inside or outside the home.

It may appear to them that the presence of Muslim boys and girls outside, in the broader Islamic context, reflecting an environment of faith is enough to qualify for an upbringing which possesses all the elements that will ensure they will take the right path. Rather, there must be concerted attempts to innovate the method of instruction and the education of ethics and morals. This should point to different approaches and perspectives.

We feel that a variety of approaches, renewal, and opportunities for implementation of the doctrine of faith in this area would be a stark contrast to the routine that normally causes concepts to stagnate in the mind of the believer, and thus become ineffective. For, like anything to which people have become accustomed, there is need for dynamism, which makes an issue effective in the life of the person.

Envy Does not Produce Working Results

We should be able to deduce from Surat Yusuf the milieu of upbringing where envy produced in envious minds results in enmity towards whoever is envied. We see that when Yusuf's brothers experienced envy towards Yusuf and his brother, and plotted to kill him or to lose him, the outcome was that Yusuf looked after them, adopted them, and cared for them in a most elevated and lofty spirit. He had this spirit when God caused him to be reunited with his parents and his brothers after a long absence and severe complications.

His brothers discovered that he had a broad vision when he assessed things and that he harboured no vengefulness after reaching this lofty position. He did not seek to harm them or seek any retribution. Instead, he took them close to him, keeping them in exile according to the apostolic spirit which he possessed, asking God (Exalted) to unite his brothers with himself in the best manner possible.

Whoever then prefers to be jealous of a good person who is a doer and a facilitator, whether he is a relative or not, should recall that the desired positive results can still be attained. He should examine himself in the light of the spirituality of this man from the outset, without resorting to inimical measures in any way. We see that the brothers of Yusuf, had they opened up to Yusuf and his brother, and engaged them in discourse, would have found that the element of spirituality in Yusuf's personality was abundant. So abundant was this element that it was enough to ward off most of their negative feelings, because of the preference Jacob had for Yusuf and his brother.

Every believer must understand that envy does not yield any functional result of the kind they would like to see afflict the person of whom they are jealous. This is especially true when the sense of faith awakens inside, and they realize that the entire matter is with God (Exalted). For it is God who changes the situation and, as such, the person of whom they are envious cannot be affected negatively by their feelings. Moreover, their enmity towards the person can never result in anything which God does not will, for nothing can take place without His permission and desire, even indirectly.

The Envious Person Must Take a Position of Contemplation

These persons need to reflect on an issue and to realize that God (Exalted) can perhaps bestow on them what He has bestowed on person of whom they are envious, without taking anything away from them. This is because God's bounty is without limit; it is sufficient for them and the person of whom they are envious. God's storehouses are never depleted, and this is what is termed "rapture", whereby a person feels that his Lord will give him as much or even more than He has given others.

Consequently, I think that the story of Yusuf serves as a living example, when we reflect on it from beginning to end. When we study the life of Yusuf, we must reflect on his reaction towards his brothers and on how God paved the way for this weak human, who was pawned and exposed to death; how God paved his way to becoming a judge in Egypt. This is what Yusuf was referring to when he said:

"My Lord, You have given me kingdom, and taught me the interpretation of sayings. You are my Guardian in this world and the hereafter; make me die as a Muslim and join me with the righteous" (Yusuf, 12: 101).

For Yusuf showed he was aware that all of this was due to God's bounty for him.

From this, the person afflicted by envy should think, when plotting against another, that God (Exalted) will raise the standard of the sincere so high that the envious person will wish that the other person had remained in his original position. A person holding such a grudge will not be spared the rising agitation of viewing this great blessing that God confers on the target of his envy.

Those who work in the path of God, whether they are *'ulama* or believers with these negative traits, must open themselves to the dynamics of faith in God in their life, so that they may realize that "jealousy consumes faith just as fire eats wood."

Spiritual Weakness

There are those who believe that the conduct of Yusuf's brothers was due to a lack of proper understanding. Others assume that their shortcomings was the result of spiritual emptiness.

Spirituality is the main factor in this issue; whether there is complete or only partial understanding, the aspect of intellectual contemplation is not sufficient to motivate the life of human beings to act properly. This is because motivation stems from a human being's spirituality, which allows him to endure deprivation in important areas of life, and to assume the moral obligations which God has imposed on him.

I, therefore, assume that the aspect of spirituality is the basis. From this perspective, the aspect of imitative religion for the person living in a complete religious atmosphere makes religion "the roof of the house," as it were. As such, there are many scholars who, when people draw their attention to these

negative traits of conduct, will pounce on these people, saying, "You are trying to teach us, when we are the ones who write the books, the ones who preach, the ones who guide!"

It is as if they were saying, "These things are our specialty, and thus we understand better than you do." The fact of the matter, however, is that they may well understand better, but sadly they may not be better in their spiritual contemplation in respect of function than those they criticize

Friendship in Its Proper Settings

For the believing youth, it is absolutely necessary for a human being who is a believer to select the atmosphere in which to nurture well his faith. It is as if he were looking after a seedling which, if planted in an inhospitable environment, would not mature naturally even if he were to use every artificial means to encourage its growth, increase its size and length.

All these would not give it spirit or life. As such, we find that the plants that grow organically differ in their characteristics from those that are grown through artificial means in artificial environments. Likewise, it is essential that a believing person nurture his faith in a natural atmosphere.

From this starting point, our Islamic focus is on the believing man who marries a religious woman, and on the girl who marries someone whose religion and character are pleasing. The marriage union represents a nursery for the rearing of the faith of the spouses in their private life. In this vein, Islam repudiates a marriage which "produces dung," according to the *hadith*: "Stay away from the production of dung. . . and the people said, 'What is the production of dung?' [The Prophet] replied, 'A beautiful woman in the hothouse of evil.'"

This is because the hothouse of evil can have a negative effect on the natural nurturing of faith of this woman. Her morals would then reflect the environment in which she was brought up, exactly as a shoot takes all its nourishment from the filth in its surroundings by which it is reared.

This is where a positive role can be played by the companion and the friend who exemplify the emotional attachments which bind one human to another. We know that emotions more than thought affect life, for thought is achieved by that which convinces, and it is difficult to convince anyone of your ideas without presenting the grounds for accepting your views. Emotion, on the other hand, may grab the feelings and sensitivities of a person in such a manner that he becomes heedless in his thinking. The emotions may even overcome the intellect and influence another person so overcome by the first that he is drawn into the same pattern of thinking.

Role of Sentiment in Relations

We observe that many youths are influenced by groups with different outlooks on thought and faith. This is due to the influence of feelings, whether these sentiments stem from relations with women,

companions, friendship, or the like. Many people belonging to such groups may find—when they inquire further—that their affiliation is the result of feelings they developed during their relationship with a companion or friend.

A believer, therefore, must choose a friend at his level of faith, with whom he can develop and improve. Therefore, he must not befriend an ignoramus, who will lead him astray and cause him to perceive ignorance as a natural state in its own right, the hub of his friend's life revolves. He must avoid befriending the foolish, who cannot see things in a balanced way; as stated in some sayings, "*He misleads you when he wants to benefit you.*"

He must not befriend the sinful who draw him into sin; the natural impact of friendship may cause one to admire another's habits, values, views, and actions. He must not make a non-believer his friend, insofar as this relationship makes him completely receptive to the latter's ideas, which are not viewed in any critical light.

Instead, he must choose an intelligent, contemplative, believing friend who has profound faith and whose outlook is in harmony with his regarding life. This way, he will not face the problem of conflict between functioning in the path he has chosen for himself and the confusing influences of his friend.

Cautioning Against Evil Friends

The gist of the idea then is that a person exercises influences, both positive and negative, on the perceptions of his companion. This relates the issue of friendship to the way a person conducts himself in different circumstances. We note these in the words of God, when He relates some images of the Resurrection; these images are as a direct result of the trials of human beings in life experiences. That day the wrongdoer will bite his hands, and God shall say,

"O! Would that I had taken the path with the Messenger! Woe to me! Would that I had never taken this one as a friend! He did lead me astray from the Reminder after it had come to me. And Satan is but a traitor to humankind!" (Furqan, 25:27-29)

By studying this example which God (Exalted) gives to us, we see that a human being lives this grief and sorrow in his life as a consequence of having followed a distorted lifestyle. This is due to being influenced by his friendships with those who wish only evil for him. They exploit his compassion, which he acquired after reaching a stage that pushed him far away from God's mercy.

A Qur'anic Example

As an example, there is a general topic which the Qur'an speaks of regarding those who follow and those who are followed—this being in the form of suggestions to anyone living in the sphere of the arrogant or the oppressed.

Perhaps we could derive from this a meaning that is comprehensive for the followers, even from the point of view of feelings—such as a husband who follows his wife out of affection, or a wife who follows her husband for the same reason, or a friend who follows his buddy. Those who are followed will clear themselves of those who followed: they will see the penalty and all relations between them would be severed. And those who followed will say:

"If a return were possible for us, we would disown them as they have disowned us. Thus will God show them their own deeds as anguish for them. And they will not escape the fire" (al-Baqara, 2: 167).

We can see that the Qur'an emphasizes that the followers also bear responsibility, even where there are material or emotional pressures which cause them to follow their twisted trail. For God draws the attention of humankind to the fact that they must benefit from this trial, and extricate themselves from the situations they find themselves in—wherever they are pressured. We construe this from another verse:

"As for those whom the angels cause to die while they wrong themselves, they [the angels] shall say: What was your situation? They said: We were oppressed in the land The angels said: Was the earth not wide enough for you to emigrate (elsewhere) in it? The abode of those is the hellfire. What a horrible ending!" (al-Nisa, 4:97)

When God cast upon these oppressed people the responsibility for their own deviance, along with the arrogant and their wrong ways, He wanted for them to distance themselves from the perverse environment, that they might be relieved of pressures. This is implicit proof that a person should not place himself in a situation where there is the pressure of sentiment and the material things which may cause him to be negatively influenced. And when he finds himself in such an atmosphere, he must flee, freeing himself from it.

These educational guidelines, which are generally the Qur'an's point of departure, relate to the influence of one human over another. A person must retain his senses in order to avoid others overcoming his mind. He must extricate himself from pressure situations, and he must function on the basis of the unadulterated form of his faith.

Friends in the Hereafter

There is the verse:

"Friends on that day will be enemies to one another, except those who guard (against evil)" (al-Zukhruf, 43:67).

From the previous discussion, we equally understand that the friendship built on everyday life incidents in this world will merit the charge of responsibility in the hereafter. Those friends who used to gather together in the world to waste time and to be idle, for deceit, perversion, or sin, etc., will face an

inevitable result, each person assuming responsibility for having guided the other astray. And it is normal that friendship should then change to enmity; each person who was so overcome by the influence of friendship as to deviate from the right path will discover that his friend was actually an enemy in the guise of a friend.

But the pious who assisted each other in piety and godliness, mindful of God and exhorting truth and patience, will normally maintain their friendship; for it was positive in this world, their path clear which led to the good of this world as well as the hereafter.

The Rights of Friends

In sayings about social relations, we have "A Friend in need" and "In travel you know your brothers." What are the rights which one friend has over another?

The meaning here is that friendship is based on a sort of oneness of sentiment between two friends. When people speak of friendship, they speak of fidelity and sacrifice. It is probable that the saying "A friend in time of need" or "You know your friends while on travel" relates to the difficulties which help display the sterling qualities of a person. When we reflect on friendship and what it encompasses in terms of sentiments towards the aspect of faith, we see that Islam exhorts the believer to open himself up to his believing brother, sharing with him his distress, overcoming his difficulties, answering his needs, aiding him in all his affairs, protecting him in body, property, and honor.

The believing person, in a brotherhood of faith strengthened by the bonds of friendship, recognizes his friend in times of hardship and travail, and in all times of difficulty in his life.

The Injunction of Prayer

The words of God in the Noble Qur'an are:

"So worship Me and establish prayer for My Remembrance" (Ta Ha, 20: 14).

How is this command to be effected? In other words, is the command the outcome of the hoped for results of the prayer?

The expression here is not to be taken in any literal, lexical sense; it implies every action performed to achieve the goal of making one's family obey God (Exalted). This is based on the view that prayer represents a distinctive, reified aspect of worship of God and dedication to Him. Hence, every person must do all that is necessary in this area, and if words are of no avail, then we may have to resort to action—encouraging attraction, threat; creating the appropriate environment; warning about inappropriate places; or any of the normal human methods.

The expression implies functioning in this sense through every means possible; it is to be expected that

any approach used by a person to convince another—by deed or word—will not be one hundred percent effective on its own. No matter how ingenious this person may be, or how dedicated to the idea he propounds, there is always a unique facet intrinsic to the person whom we would like to guide, a mindset in reaction to words or movements, or to the environment, with every assessment of a weak point and strength in his positive and negative traits.

Responsibilities of Those Whose Call is to Islam

Islam directs everyone who calls to Islam—the preacher, the guide—thus: "You must give of everything you have in order to guide another, to change that person's line of thinking, and to correct his way. When you do this, you will have fulfilled your obligations in this respect." In the words of God:

"O you who believe! Save yourselves and your families from fire whose fuel is human beings and stones, over which are angels, stern and severe They do not disobey God in that which they are ordered, but do as they are commanded" (al-Tahrim, 66:6).

In the interpretation of this verse, a question was put forward to one of the *Imams*. It was asked, "How do we save them?" He said, "Commanding them and prohibiting them." It was said, "We command and we prohibit, but they do not obey us." He said, "If you have commanded and prohibited them, you have fulfilled your duties."

The Imam, in his answer with respect to the verse did not intend the command and the prohibition to have a superficial meaning. In fact, he meant them as two things achievable by word, deed, or environment. Therefore, do what you can do to fulfill your obligation and prohibit what is forbidden. When you have availed yourself of every approach, then there is no further obligation on you.

This is what God (Exalted) was speaking about to His Prophet, guiding him, when He said:

"Indeed you are only a warner, and to every people a guide" (al-R'ad, 13:7).

"Remind them for you are only a reminder. You are not the supervisor of their affairs" (al-Ghashiyah, 88:21).

"Will you then compel people until they become believers?" (Yunus, 10:99).

Your obligation is to ensure that you do all within your power to deal with the issue, and when you have done this nothing more is required of you.

On the basis of the above, we say "ordering" implies that functional aspect which a person puts into practice by every means at his disposal, directly or indirectly, with the full realization that his influence must be effective in a normal manner. Acting on these influences would then be the responsibility of the other person.

Being Good to Parents

In the words of God:

"And if they strive to force you to associate in worship with Me that concerning which you have no knowledge, obey them not, but be a companion to them with kindness and justice" (Luqman, 31: 15).

How is it possible for a believing son to build the bonds of companionship through good conduct and justice with a father or parents who are not believers?

When we study the Islamic approach to the relationship with parents, we do not find that God (Exalted) has charged anyone with obeying his parents. This is because the bond that connects parent to child is a good [ihsan] that flows from the parent to the child; it is not a state which requires a conduct towards the parent which extinguishes the child's entire being, in deference to the parent's desire.

Thus, the reaction towards this good on the part of the parents is that the child should be good towards his parents; not that he must always obey them. We observe in the Noble Qur'an, that God addresses this topic in Surat al-Isra', with the words,

"And God has decreed that you should not worship any but He, and that you be good to your parents" (Isra', 17:23).

In doing so, He referred to the relation of worship between the worshipper and his Lord, between the created and the Creator, the slave to his Master, a being to the One who caused him to be. These bonds require worship and submission, since your presence stems from the fact that he wants it so. Therefore, it is necessary that your actions and your very presence be in accordance with His wants.

The Noteworthy Duties of Parents

On the other hand, the matter is different for the parents, for they are the means by which you are here. And God (Exalted) is the one who put the secret of life in the sperm. He is the one who brought into being all the factors for the development of this sperm which become a clinging mass, then blood, then bones; then clothes these bones with flesh; then makes them into a different form of creation.

And when the child is born, it is God who puts the milk in the mother's breasts. The role of the parents is then that of an intermediary; it is not their desire which caused your being. On this premise then, their status is that of anyone who is good towards you, and from here we go to the verse that states:

"Is the reward of good anything but good?" (al-Rahman, 55:60).

From this, we see that that your relationship towards your parents is one of goodness, an example of

which God (Exalted) has said:

"Whether one, or both of them, attain old age in this life, say not a word of contempt to them, nor repel them. Address them rather in words of honour." (Isra', 17:23).

Here God establishes the manner by which a person can endure every character flaw that the parents may experience when they become old, when they become testy, when the parents become a burden on the child. This is why God has revealed to the son that his position towards his parents should be one of humility, but not of degrading his humanness or self-worth. It is exactly how a person gives in to his little child.

In the context of God's discourse on the struggles which the mother endures, we find that He tells us this in His words:

"His mother bore him in agony upon agony" (Luqman, 31:14),

"His mother bore him in pain, and gave birth to him in pain" (al Ahqaf, 46:15).

Thus the child struggles on their behalf and they struggle on his behalf.

Responsibilities Towards the Parents

We understand therefore that the relationship is one of doing good—i.e., that they did what was best and that now the son must conduct himself in kind. In this context, when the two parents are non-believers, or sinners, the child must maintain the view that:

"And if they strive to force you to associate in worship with Me that concerning which you have no knowledge, obey them not" (Luqman, 31:15; Ankabut, 29:8).

This is because it is not permissible to follow a person in non-belief, even when such a person happens to be one's own mother or father.

But their non-belief, polytheism, and sin must not remove you from the human relations which God has enjoined on you. One facet of this companionship is revealed by:

"Say not a word of contempt to them, nor repel them" (Isra', 17:23).

It may be that in some situations to spend on them, to yield to them, to smile and kiss them, to look after them, to care for them medically, etc. in the caring of a human being in the course of life and with feelings of compassion.

Transforming Love to Guidance

In the shadow of this, it is possible for the believer to plan the transformation of this condition to a method of guidance for his parents, as we see in the story related from Imam al-Sadiq, where a Christian came to him and converted to Islam. The man then said to the *Imam*, "I have a mother who is Christian; how should I behave towards her when I have become a Muslim and she still remains in non-belief?" Imam al-Sadiq replied, "See how you used to treat her when you were still Christian, and then go and improve on that."

The man went and did as the Imam had counseled him, caring ever more for her in all her ordinary needs. She was astonished at this conduct from him. She said to him, "What is all this? You used to be good to me, but you have added in your goodness towards me; what has changed you?" The son said to her, "I have converted to Islam, and the leader of this religion has taught me to do thus." She said, "Is he a prophet?" He said, "No, the offspring of a prophet." She said, "These are the morals of prophets, O my son! Explain your religion to me!" And so he explained Islam to her, and she entered the religion.

From this narration, we may infer that the Muslim child, in offering all his compassion and love, his solicitude towards his non-believing or sinful parents, can clearly put light into his conduct and feelings that transform to bring about openness to the path of righteousness.

Pleasing the Parents ... Is There a Limit

In the light of the foregoing, how do we explain the hadith "*Pleasing God is pleasing the parents?*"

We sometimes hear this adage, and I do not know whether it is a *hadith* or not. But it is another way of saying that God wants the person to please his parents. The purpose of pleasing the parents, however, must be obedience to God (Exalted) wherever the parents bring on no predicament—for example, ordering their child to do something against his best interests, detrimental, or leading him away from situations where he can show obedience to God (as in commendable deeds). For God does not wish that anyone should be in such a position of control over another, causing him problems in his religion—by leaving that which is commendable or committing the abominable, etc.

From here, we understand that pleasing God is pleasing the parents—i.e., pleasing them in the sphere of parental relations where God has decreed the rights of parents over the child. And so, it is essential that the child conduct himself there at the divine level; for God (Exalted) will not be pleased until the parents are pleased. This is because if the child were to stray from the divine path, and to rebuke his parents, thereby failing to act towards them in a goodly manner, then he has deviated from the path of God (Exalted).

Harmonizing Words and Deeds

"O you who believe! Why do you say that which you do not do? It is most hateful to God that you should say that which you do not do" (al-Saff, 61:2-3).

Is the prohibition in this verse an absolute one with respect to the words which are not accompanied by deed, or does it refer to the intention of a speech which is unaccompanied by action?

The verse means that harmony between word and deed is mandatory; or between faith (on the assumption that words are profession of faith) and the actual conduct—which the imam makes obligatory on the believing person. This holds in areas which necessitate harmony with faith. It is as if God were saying: "You people profess faith. But you do not conduct yourselves in a manner which such faith makes obligatory on you, in terms of action which [should] make you struggle in the path of God (Exalted). Rather your faith is an abstract intellectual concept which does not translate into action. And God (Exalted) does not like those who declare their affiliation with Him, His path, and religion, but do not obey him.

However, if the matter were such that the person utters a word for a practical purpose in order to safeguard Islamic objectives—to protect his Islamic position or the safety of an Islamic region, uttering words which he does not believe or saying something to which he does not lend credence—then this does not come under the umbrella of the verse. Why? Because if we understand that it is incumbent on you to balance between faith and action, in that words are professions of faith, then someone who makes a declaration in which he does not believe, or takes a stance he does not believe in, has not distanced himself from the locus of faith, for his statement was made on grounds that the nature of faith compelled him to do so.

God (Exalted) wishes for the believing person to conduct himself under conditions of duress in a manner that protects his higher goal. Here, the issue of the word that is contrary to the deed differs according to the scenario to which the word is applied. Is it a scenario with which God wishes the person to associate, or does God want that person to utter the words merely for self preservation, although these words do not reflect that person's actual beliefs?

Social Ostracism

Were the "Companions of the Cave" fleeing certain conditions or had they chosen ostracism for a time?

When we meditate on the youths of the Cave, we find that there are two possibilities in the issue. The first is that the situation was one where pressure had become so dangerous that they feared the tyrants would oppress them for their religion, forcing them to commit acts of infidelity [*kufr*]; that they would have to endure this atmosphere so long that they could no longer stand it.

We have previously considered the words of God regarding the oppressed who sinned and whom the angels took away in death. We saw how God (Exalted) wanted them to emigrate and to flee with their religion so that they would not come under pressure, wronging themselves in the process. Is it not possible that this was the issue of the people of the Cave?

The second possibility is that they may have wanted to take time for themselves in order to prepare for some new undertaking, hiding from the oppression, and then re-emerging in a new situation. There are few situations like this. God wanted to make their situation a lesson for the believers who came afterwards, and to show that He rescues His servants in different ways and modes, according to His wisdom.

Worship in its Broad Understanding

"And I have not created the Jinn or Humankind except to serve [Me]" (al Dhariyat, 51:56).

What is this worship for which He has created us? The word "worship" means absolute submission. In other words, God (Exalted) commanded the *jinn* and humankind only to submit to Him in all that He wished for them, and that their wants be subordinate to His wishes. Their movements have to accord with His commands and prohibitions. Their entire life in this world should be structured upon what God wants from them in respect of the responsibility of the viceregency of human beings on this earth.

In the light of the foregoing, we find that "worship" covers everything covered by the commands and prohibitions of God (Exalted). The term includes everything that comes under the rubric of that which is done for God's pleasure and love in this life. This is what we understand from the narrative which state: "Worship is seventy parts, the best of which is seeking that which is lawful" ; "The best worship is virtue"; "The servant of God can be no more than virtuous in thought and in chastity"—the *hadiths* speak of the pursuit of knowledge as worship. Indeed "to reflect for an hour is better than to worship for a year"; a reflection is a form of worship which is better than a year's worship—namely, prayer without contemplation.

Comprehending God's Desires

In this manner, we may affirm that the worship of God, which God requires of both *jinn* and man, is a life goal which consists of the realization of God's desires for the universe. We may construe this from the words of God regarding the wisdom of sending the prophets and the revelation of the scriptures:

"We sent Our messengers with clear proofs and revealed unto them the Book and the Balance, that humankind may conduct itself with righteousness" (al-Hadid, 57:25).

This tells us that the purpose behind sending the messengers was to let humankind stand for justice. For this reason, the messengers were sent to the human race to explain clearly what God wanted from us—

namely, to conduct ourselves with righteousness and justice.

Achieving Justice in the Universe

It is possible to state that standing in righteousness and achieving justice in the universe is one form of functional worship to which God wants His servants to apply themselves. For the verse (mentioned earlier) does not give the well-known *vox populi* meaning of worship, i.e., that God made the *jinn* and humankind perform the prayer or fast, for worship transcends those. As we know, the jurists state that any action by a worshipper intended for the pleasure of God and nearness to Him is considered worship.

The Qur'anic Youth

"We need Qur'anic Youth ...a Qur'anic generation..."

How can we bring this about?

When you use the phrases "Qur'anic generation" and "Qur'anic youth", you refer to the concepts of the Qur'an which one desires to reflect on with respect to the actions of youth, whether these are doctrinal concepts, notions of worship, ethical concepts, or basic action concepts. For this, we require that the youth open themselves to the Qur'an through contemplative study, in such a manner that there are Qur'anic directives based on motivational, reflective study, not barren directives based on imitation which seek a literal understanding of the text.

Our youth who live in the path of Islam, and that of propagation of the religion, are able to live anew the trials experienced by the active youths of the first era of the Islamic Call—the time of the revelation of the Qur'an. They do this from the perspective that the Qur'an was the divine, active element which motivated the outlook and deeds of youth; enough to face the task of the call to God with all its attendant responsibilities and to face the entire world.

The issue then is that the generation of Muslims make the understanding of the Qur'an part of their cerebral makeup, emotionally and through actions, in their sphere of activities, so that the Messenger of God could become an example for them in this endeavor. We saw that one of Prophet's wives described his morals thus: "His character was the Qur'an." Our character then should be the Qur'an, so that it will be possible for the people to see in our lives and conduct, the functional embodiment of it.

Addendum on Narrations (1)

On Longing

Imam 'Ali said:

- "Longing is the ruin of the intellect." "Base desires are lethal poisons."

- "The sweetness of lust is spoiled into the baseness of humiliation."
- "Heaven welcomes calamities, and Hell welcomes base desires."
- "Depravity is commensurate with the level of delight."

The Messenger of God said:

- "It is possible that an hour of lust gains long lasting grief."

Imam 'Ali said:

- "God will grant a legacy of abasement unto those who delighted in disobeying Him."
- "Lust is a god worshipped, the intellect a praiseworthy friend."
- "If you bow to your lust, it will make you deaf and blind, and spoil your hereafter."
- "The first part of lust is happiness, its last part is destruction."
- "Tame your lusts for they are loose; if you submit to them, they will pull you to the greatest depths."

Imam al-Sadiq said:

- "Beware of your lusts as much as your enemies, for there is nothing more inimical to men than those who follow their lusts and speak emptily."

Imam 'Ali said:

- "Ridding the soul of its base desires is the greatest jihad."

[On Getting Together \("Hanging Out"\)](#)

The Messenger of God said:

- "The totality of evil is comparable to the mate of evil."

Jesus was asked by his disciples:

- "O spirit of God, whom do we take as friends then?" He said: "He who, when you see him, makes you remember God, and his logic helps you in your work, and his works make you long for the hereafter."

Imam 'Ali said:

- "A good friend is a blessing; an evil companion is an affliction."

Imam Zayn al-Abidin said:

- "Sitting with the righteous is an invitation to propriety. Luqman said to his son: "O my son, sit with the scholars, and touch knees, for surely God enlivens the hearts with the light of wisdom, the same way that the earth is enlivened by the torrents from the sky."

Imam 'Ali said:

- "Sitting with the scholars brings joy."

The Messenger of God said:

- "Befriend the pious, for if you do good, they will praise you, and if you err, they will not be harsh with you."

Imam 'Ali said:

- "Sit with the poor, you will receive more thanks."

The noble Prophet said:

- "Ask the scholars, address the sages, and sit with the poor."

From 'Ali:

- "The company of the people of lust is the abandonment of faith and a nursery for the devil."

He also said:

- "Eschew the evil ones, and sit with the good ones."

On Shyness or Shame

The Messenger of God said:

- "Shyness comes only with good."

And he said:

- "Shyness is from the ways of Islam."

And he said:

- "God loves the shy, moderate person, and detests the lewd, demanding, forward boor."

Imam 'Ali said:

- "Shyness is a way to everything beautiful."

And he said:

- "He who takes shyness as a garment has his faults hidden from view."

And he said:

- "Shyness lowers the eyes."

And he said:

- "The best garment in this world is that of shyness."

The noble Prophet said:

- "Lewdness is only what disgraces; shyness is only what beautifies."

And he said:

- "Were shyness a person, he would be righteous."

Imam al-Kazim said:

- "Shyness is from faith, faith from heaven, lewdness from loathsomeness, and loathsomeness from the hellfire."

On Social Relations

The Messenger of God said:

- "Someone who follows the religion of his friend, observe carefully whom you befriend."

Imam 'Ali said:

- "Grant your blood and property to your brother, justice and objectivity to your enemy, and your good deeds and participation to the general public."

He also said:

- "Love your friend only so much, for perhaps one day he will be someone you hate; hate your enemy only so much, for perhaps one day he will be someone you love."
- "Deal with your brothers by being good to them, and cover their sins with forgiveness."
- "To show love to people is the height of intelligence."
- "Affection emphasizes love."

- "Excellence in social relations eternalizes love."
- "Never send your friend away with a farewell that expels him from your friendship, but strive to show him a friendship to which he is certain to return."
- "The heart is structured on social relations with wise people."
- "Companionship with those who are virtuous gives life to the heart."
- Social relationships uncover the hidden aspects of character.

Imam 'Ali counselled his son Hasan thus:

- "Love for your brother what you love for yourself, and hate for him what you hate for yourself."

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/world-our-youth-sayyid-muhammad-husayn-fadlallah/themes-1-our-youth-li ght-quran#comment-0>