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Friendly Letters Part Two

While Zahra (with her husband Barrir) are abroad she exchanges letters with Asma. Through them, Asma becomes a real sister in religion to Zahra. Zahra's husband Barrir is a committed Muslim believer.

Letter n. 1

Dear Asma,

Assalamu Alaikum

I am sure that you spend a good deal of your time engaged in the worship of Allah the Almighty. As for me, I have grown a bit fat, due to the nice weather and good food. Yesterday we (I and Barrir) took a long walk but we, didn't get a bit tired.

We came across an orchard full of scented flowers and I picked a beautiful one. Barrir said to me, "I wonder if you heard the conversation between your flower and its neighbor. "I was surprised at his words and said, "No I have heard nothing."

Barrir said, "When you put out your hand to pick it, it laughed proudly and said to its neighbors, "Oh, stay in this spot forever. As for me, I shall be taken to have a rest in a magnificent vase on a wooden or marble table...perhaps I'll decorate the blouse of a beautiful lady or crown her blond hair!

I'll get rid of these roots that tie me to the earth and get free of these branches, which are supposed to provide me with water and sunlight. I no longer need wait for the gardener to water me, or look for shade to protect me from the sun's heat. Oh poor sister, now I pity you..."

I listened to him while he said, "Of course neither did you hear the answer. The flower's neighbour sadly murmured: "Oh I feel sad for you dear sister you are quite wrong. Those roots that tie you to the earth are a symbol of your life. These branches are to provide you with security and survival. You are quite misled by your supposed freedom. It will cause you to fade and die. Your petals will fall dry and be carried away by the wind. This will be the result of your supposed freedom. As for me I shall stay alive and fresh since I am still tied by my roots, which give me life."

Barrir then stopped talking, though I was very interested in his dialogue. I was very happy to have comprehended the significance of the two flowers...I feel happy whenever I learn more and increase my knowledge. I am sure you can also comprehend the significance of the two flowers.

My best wishes to you.

Zahra

Letter n. 2

Dear sister Zahra.

Assalamu Alaikum,

How I miss you dear sister. Your letters are a source of pleasure to me. They help me tolerate this boring time. I enjoyed reading your letter and your "flower's dialogue". Of course I understood the significance of the two flowers; they symbolize two girls. The first one is fooled by false propaganda and supposed freedom, and is the victim of ideologies that exploit her identity, the same as the flower carried from here to there as from vase to vase until it dies.

As for me, dear sister, I am often alone...I have recently been hurt by my nearest and dearest. A stone has been thrown at me, which has caused me to seek isolation...I am now busy reading a book about living creatures and their habits.

The book is very interesting and useful, and it stirred, in me a great sense of awe for the greatness of the Creator. It deals with: light-giving creatures and fire worms that live in the sea and fireflies that live in the farms and the bat and its strong sense of hearing.

This creature can hear ultra vocal waves, with a vibration rate of 500,000 per second, and other such scientific facts, which are all created by Allah the Almighty. So you see I do benefit from this isolation and have enough time for reading and writing.

I hope to hear from you soon.

Asma

Letter n. 3

Dear sister Asma,

Assalamu Alaikum,

I got your dear letter yesterday and was eager to read it... I sensed some feelings of distress in your

words... what do you mean by this isolation? You should have a social life that will benefit you as well as others. What is this stone thrown by your nearest and dearest? Anyway, haven't you ever seen the fruiting coffee tree, called a "Beauty Tree"? Its roots go deep into the earth; its branches grow high and green to provide a source of hope for the spectator. It bears white flowers in clusters, to decorate its branches. Such a tree is a source of pleasure to others. When someone throws a stone at it, it trembles gently and rains countless white flowers upon him.

A believer can resemble this worthy tree. He devotes his life to Allah. When he suffers injustice, he responds with good advice and gentle words, with prayers for the guidance of others. When a brother believer throws a stone at him, he wishes he could put in that hand a torch of light in place of the stone, and he is kind and loving. He wishes he could replace the stones with olive branches in order to spare the believers the difficulty of carrying stones.

A believer is all good and kind and loving. Hence you should tolerate the wrongs of your nearest and dearest. You should not isolate yourself from society. Isolation is nothing but a kind of cowardice. You must surely remember our talk about the impossibility of finding a perfect person who never gets angry at others who hurt him. Now can you try to be such a person?

With best wishes and heartfelt prayers.

Zahra

Letter n. 4

Dear sister Zahra,

Assalamu Alaikum,

I got your letter for which I was in real need, as it was a source of guiding light for me. Certainly women believers are expected to heal the wounds of each other and help each other. The Holy Qur'an says:

Muhammad. is the Apostle of Allah and those with him are firm of heart against the unbelievers, compassionate among themselves... (Al-Fath, 48:29)

Your letter has caused me to reconsider my decision of isolating myself... I confess that isolation is not a solution...I should keep on guiding others to Islamic instructions. Our religion is in need of illustration and Qur'anic explanations and prophetic Sunnah.

Have you enjoyed reading during your travel? You haven't mentioned anything about such in your letters. Can I ask: why? Nice weather and beautiful quiet surroundings encourage one to read and write a lot. I have recently had such an experience when we went for a picnic on the riverbank. I was motivated to perform my duty, though it was a mere picnic with some relatives and friends. I sat under

the olive and rose trees, and watched the flowing river carrying dead leaves and petals along, with its fish and other water creatures useful for people. It seemed to me that it told the story of life with all its hopes and sufferings and its hardships and pleasures.

I felt in need of my pen and paper...I got them from my handbag and started writing. I was very satisfied with that occasion.

My prayers for you, dear sister.

Zahra

Letter n. 5

Dear sister Asma,

Assalamu Alaikum,

However beautiful nature is, it cannot make one forget one's dear friends...Hence I long to see you and the other sisters...In fact, I am counting the days till my return... You may notice a delay in my reply to your letter. This is because we made a short trip to a nearby place. We hired a small car to go, and the driver drove as if he were sailing! Barrir asked him to slow down a bit, but he didn't. Barrir then said to him, "If you don't care for our lives, at least you should care for your own car!"

The driver answered indifferently, "Why should I? It has been insured since the day I got it." Barrir turned towards me saying, "Did you hear him?

He is not concerned for his car because the insurance company will pay for any damage or loss. That's why he drives at such a high speed. Otherwise, he would not risk it. Can you take a lesson from this?" I said, "I think it is similar to the life of a human being and the Divine insurance that is expected for any loss as in the Qur'anic verse:

...this is because, there afflicts them not thirst or fatigue or hunger in Allah s way, nor do they tread a path which enrages the unbelievers, nor do they attain from the enemy what they attain, but a good work is written down to them on account of it, surely Allah does not waste the reward of the doers of good (At- Tawba, 9: 120)

Barrir said, "But there is a big difference between the two. The Insurance company won't make up for a loss except through efforts that take a long time and much money, while the Divine insurance is offered several fold and without an appeal. The Qur'anic verse says,

Whoever brings a good deed, he shall have tell like it... (Al-Anam, 6: 60)

Hence despite the losses that a believer suffers he is still the winner."

Barrir continued talking about the conditions of the Divine contract, which are genuinely good intention and straight forwardness. Then he explained the two requirements necessary to benefit from Allah's mercy. I was very interested and forgot all about the dangerous roads and the dreadful high speed.

The place was not comfortable so our stay was short. We returned and I was happy to see your letter waiting for me. How nice of you to ask me about my reading. You may rejoice to know that I am reading an interpretation of the Holy Qur'an. I am quite fascinated by the deep meaning of the holy verses. I am taking notes in a special notebook, which you will see when I return home, God willing.

Till then, may Allah keep you safe.

Zahra

Letter n. 6

Dear sister Zahra,

Assalamu Alaikum,

In fact, reading has to some extent spared me from boredom. Yesterday I visited our friend Dunia. There I met a host of guests for the first time. I felt uneasy and regretted being there doing nothing useful for our religion.

Then one of the guests asked about the meaning of the word Dunia (this world). Some showed interest in the name others rejected it. One said, "This word reminds me of a prison." I wondered why when the world is quite wide. She said challengingly, " It is a prison for the believers and a paradise for the disbelievers.

Therefore, if we are believers we are in a prison. If we are infidels, we won't get the eternal paradise." I said to her, "Listen to me sister. This narration refers relatively to prison and paradise. If all pleasure were within the reach of a believer's hand, what he enjoys in the other world is still greater. Hence this world to him is a prison. As for the infidel, whatever disasters he suffers in this world will be nothing compared to the horrible suffering in the other world, hence it is his paradise here, while what is awaiting him is unimaginable."

So you see I could benefit from that visit by explaining the prophetic narration to the guests. As for your letter, I was happy to get it after that delay. I enjoyed your conversation about the Divine insurance and Divine rewards. Such rewards make one smile despite tears. They cause the hopeless to catch sight of a ray of light in the utter darkness.

The Divine promise of rewards helps the believers to tolerate sufferings and hardships with patience. Hence life's bitterness is changed into sweetness; its hardships into mercy and compassion. Such Divine rewards should be the aim of every believer, otherwise life is quite hard and its passages are quite dark for one to tread. 'Oh God how narrow the roads are for one who does not seek your quidance.'

Our sisters, Zainab, Saliha and Inam, send their best wishes. Inam has rejected an official job. She prefers to take care of her family and perform her religious responsibilities.

Asma

Letter n. 7

Dear sister Asma.

Assalamu Alaikum,

I am always eager to get your letters... I feel quite happy on reading them... Yesterday we went for a walk. Our destination was a spring whose waterfall comes down a high mountain. We walked across the green fields and it was a bright day; the sky was a clear blue. We walked down the valley quite slowly; between the big rocks springs of clear water flowed musically along. We stopped to drink some water and splash it on our faces.

The naked rocks of the high mountains had deep lines cut across their surfaces. I tried to understand something about these high rocks and I said to Barrir, "Do you think these deep lines are quite ancient." He said, "Yes, they are quite old." I said, "How old are they? It must be quite difficult for the wind to cut such deep lines on the solid surfaces."

Barrir said, "It is a long process, otherwise such lines would not have existed. One can easily put one's hand in this stream and find a space for it. But as soon as one draws back one's hand, no trace is left behind. The water will go on flowing filling the empty area on its way. This easy action is nothing significant. But if one tries to cut across a solid stone, certainly one will need great efforts and a substantial length of time.

One may fill the cuts with sweat or stain the stone with bleeding fingers. With firmness and determination, it may take days and nights to achieve one's aim. Then the result will be wonderful. Troubles and hardships are soon forgotten. Such an achievement produces great happiness and survives for a long time. The traces will stay to relate to future generations the story of a hard struggle. Hence, there is a big difference between an easy achievement without the least effort and the difficult one which survives the ages."

Barrir ceased talking and I thought of the effort and hard-work that produce good results, I recalled the Qur'anic verse:

...then as for the scum, it passes away as a worthless thing, and as for that which profits the

people it tarries in the earth... (Al-Ra'ad, 13:17)

Certainly, we are in need of making efforts to achieve good deeds that can survive for the benefit of people.

My best wishes.

Zahra

Letter n. 8

Dear sister Zahra,

Assalamu Alaikum,

I got your letter just in time. I was in real need of something that could give me rest and ease since I suffered a crucial stage of confused thoughts and sad feelings. I suffered days of pain, despair and bitterness and often wondered: How can one laugh, when others cry nearby! How can one smile in this miserable world! How can one seem happy while one hears the wailing of despair day and night!

Some will surely collapse...yet some may fight back and refuse to surrender. Such people, of course, need a weapon with which to confront the fatal attacks in life. They are ready to fight, but they lack the weapon, hence they may give in. While I was thinking of this matter I listened to a person reciting the Holy Qur'anic verse,

...no soul knows what is hidden for them of that which will refresh the eyes...(Al-Sajdah, 32:17)

I thought of this verse and found in it a source of light that removed all amazement and loss. I knew it was faith. Faith is the weapon of fortitude and the assurance of Allah's mercy in this world and the Hereafter. Faith can amend personal behavior; can change despair into hope, difficulty into ease and fear into security. All this can happen if one knows it is for the sake of Allah and within His sight.

Then I came to the conclusion that a believer should be optimistic as long as he is sure of Allah's help and content with what he gets or faces. I felt better and hopeful of relief... Your letter had a wonderful effect on me, the first sign of my optimistic theory. I hope you won't be disturbed by this letter. With faith I could overcome this kind of unease.

My prayers to Allah to keep you safe.

Asma

Letter n. 9

Dear sister Asma,

I hope you feel much better now since you have managed to rid yourself of all bitterness and pain and have tasted the sweetness of Faith and Patience. A believer should know that whatever he suffers is for the sake of Allah and within His watch.

Such knowledge will strengthen his firm stance and open new roads of hope for him. However difficult the path is, and he can keep on treading it. Allah the Almighty ordered the prophets: Moses and Haroun, to go to Pharoah. The Qur'anic verses relate:

Go both to Pharoah, surely he has become inordinate, then speak to him a gentle word, haply he may mind or fear. Both said: Our Lord, surely we fear that he may hasten to do evil to us as he may become inordinate. He said: Fear not, surely I am with you both. I do hear and see. (Taha, 20: 43-46)

With these Divine words Allah sent two of His worshippers to Pharaoh. These words indicate a serious situation with certain results. Pharaoh might hasten to do evil and increase his oppression, and the two Apostles feared this possibility. They were two of the oppressed masses to face the mightiest tyrant of that time.

A tyrant who claimed without the least right to be himself a god, and dared to ask the people to worship him. The two prophets were to face him and tell him to bear witness that: There is no Lord but

Allah the One, with no other partners. The two prophets were in need of a mighty power though they were strong enough to perform the mission. Hence they said, ... our Lord, surely we fear that he....

That mighty power was felt with the awareness that Allah was with them, hearing and seeing. Allah did not promise to fight for them, but just informed them that He was near them, hence they were ready to take all risks and rush into a difficult situation.

When the believer thinks he is striving along the road marked by Allah the Almighty, Who knows everything about that road and observes the performance of His creatures it becomes easy for him to carryon his way, despite the rough terrain. Allah does not provide man with an easy passage along a paved scented road. It is enough for a believer to know that Allah is with him, for him to feel happy and strong.

He then tastes happiness despite hardships. Every believer may face a lot of obstacles throughout his life's course, struggling for the sake of Allah. Sometimes he gives in and wonders: 'Why is all this, Oh my Lord? I am striving for Your sake, treading Your path...but...?'

Such a person should know that, it is not an easy task at all to get to the happy end. One, therefore, needs great spiritual determination and has to pass many stages.

Throughout his drive to achieve his aim, a person needs certainty (in Allah's help), persistence, fortitude and sincerity. He must be aware of such qualifications manifested in his life, and should prove himself worthy, of such qualifications with satisfaction.

One cannot achieve the apex of happiness without going through difficulties. However great the troubles are, one should consider them nothing compared to the sublime aim and worthy reward...those troubles indicate the expected good rewards. Finally, I am happy to tell you that we are coming home within a few days, Allah willing.

Zahra

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