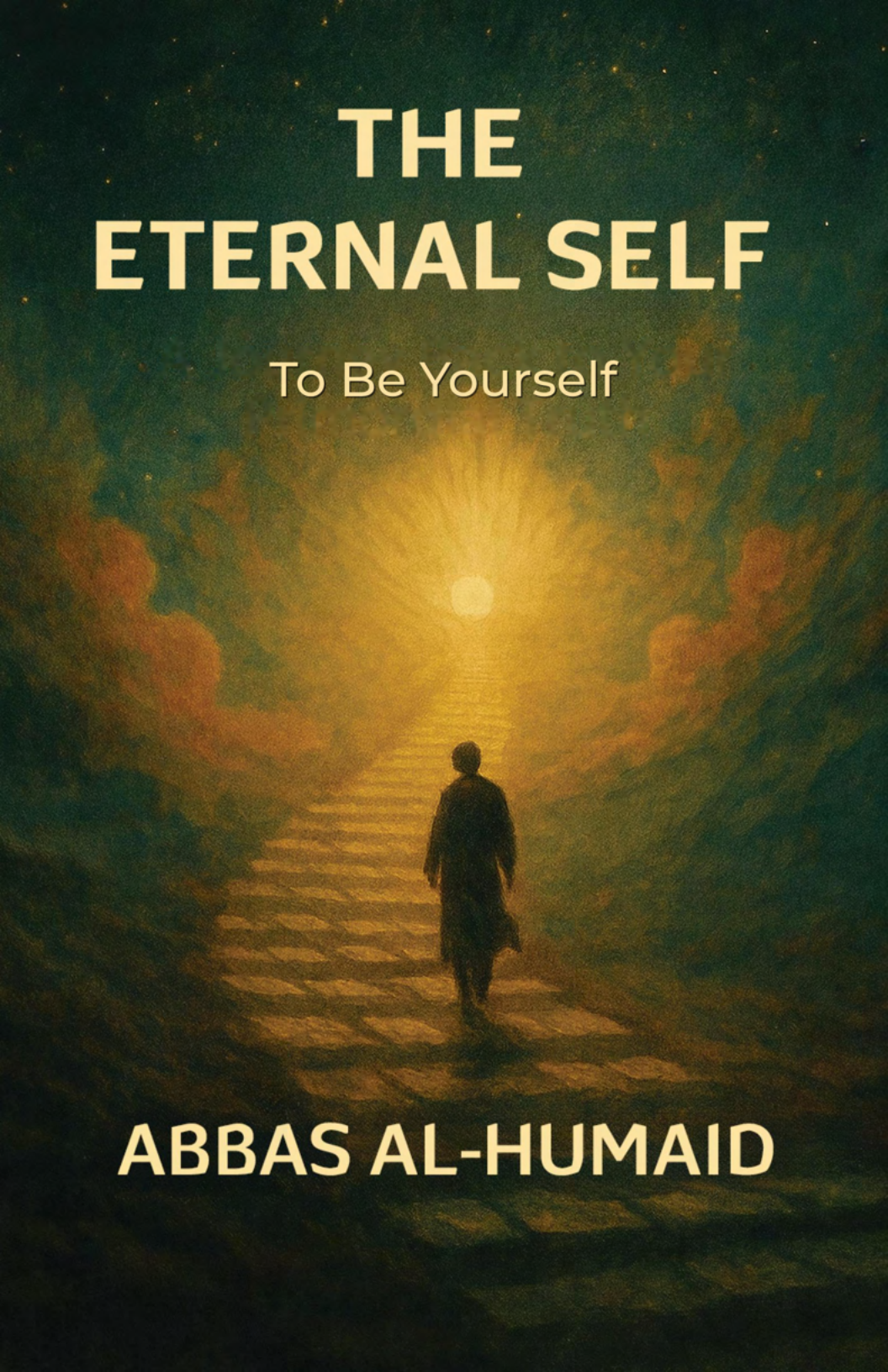


THE ETERNAL SELF

To Be Yourself

A person in a dark coat is seen from behind, walking up a wide, checkered staircase that leads towards a bright, glowing light source in the distance. The light creates a strong lens flare effect, illuminating the path and the surrounding dark, textured clouds. The overall atmosphere is one of hope and journey.

ABBAS AL-HUMAID

THE ETERNAL SELF

The Eternal Self

To Be Yourself

by

Abbas Al-Humaid

Contents

Copyright.....	3
Acknowledgments.....	4
Dedication.....	5
Introduction · Reclaiming the Station.....	6
Chapter One · You Are in the Second Womb....	11
Chapter Two · The Neglected Obligation.....	23
Chapter Three · Your Four Dimensions.....	41
Chapter Four · The Laws of Existence.....	56
Chapter Five · The Laws of Friction.....	81
Chapter Six · The Making of the Will.....	114
Chapter Seven · The Movement of the Essence	132
Chapter Eight · Divine Support.....	154
Conclusion · Living in the Presence.....	169

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Abbas Al-Humaid

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Dedication



To Fatima Al-Zahra, may God's peace be upon her...

To the spirit through which purity manifested in its purest form, and the heart that bore the light of prophethood in its silence and conduct.

To Fatima... of whom the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) said: "Fatima is a part of me; whoever harms her harms me."

To Fatima... for whom the Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him) stood and kissed her hand, not merely because she was his daughter, but because she was the closest person to his heart and soul.

To Al-Zahra... who reminds us that purity is not weakness, and that truthfulness is a path to God.

I dedicate this book to your pure station, not because you are in need of a dedication, but because the spirit sometimes needs to proclaim its gratitude to those who showed it the way... The way of return to the origin, to God.

Introduction ·

Reclaiming the Station



When we consider, with full conviction, that the Lord of the Worlds has told us He made the human His vicegerent (God's steward on earth) — chosen above the angels, the jinn, and every other creature — we find ourselves before a truth far greater than what we are used to seeing in ourselves: *“Indeed, I am placing upon the earth a vicegerent.”* (Qur’an 2:30)

Consider, too, the angels’ astonishment at this momentous choice, and the question that betrays how weighty the station granted to the human truly was: *“Will You place upon it one who will cause corruption therein and shed blood, while we glorify You with praise and sanctify You?”* (Qur’an 2:30) For all their purity and nearness, they saw in this new creature a capacity for corruption and for bloodshed — and still God chose him for the vicegerency. It is as though the human held a secret greater than anything that showed on the surface, a hidden readiness existence had not yet witnessed.

Pause, next, at the moment God commanded all the angels to prostrate before Adam, peace be upon him, once He had fashioned him and breathed into him of His spirit: *“So when I have fashioned him and breathed into him of My spirit, fall down before him in prostration.”* (Qur’an 15:29) Here the Qur’anic image of the human begins to take shape, and it is awe-inspiring: he is no mere body of clay, but a creature bearing a breath breathed into him by God — and with it a capacity for knowledge, awareness, will, transcendence, and ascent. Then the honoring takes yet another form, as the heavens and the earth and all they hold are placed in his service: *“And He has subjected to you whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth — all from Him.”* (Qur’an 45:13)

Yet the scene is not complete until we feel the weight of the Trust the human took up — the Trust the heavens, the earth, and the mountains shrank from, refusing to bear it, while the human shouldered it with all its burdens and all its responsibility: *“Indeed, We offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to bear it and feared it; but the human bore it.”* (Qur’an 33:72) And then the path’s final end, the destination God unveils in

His words: *"In a seat of truth, near a Sovereign, All-Powerful."* (Qur'an 54:55)

Only then do we grasp, fully, that we are no ordinary creatures, nor simply beings endowed with a sharper intellect than the rest. We are the creature chosen for the vicegerency, who bore the Trust, for whom all things were made to serve, to whom the door of nearness to God was thrown open. We carry within us possibilities and meanings we scarcely begin to fathom. Something of this showed when God taught Adam what the angels did not know, and they stood owning the limits of their own knowledge before what God had placed in the human: *"Glory be to You; we have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Indeed, it is You who are the All-Knowing, the All-Wise."* (Qur'an 2:32)

This, in brief, is the human as the Qur'an presents him. This is you, in the Book of God.

Now set the book aside a moment, and think about yesterday. You woke a little late and gulped your coffee in a rush, scrolling through email and messages as you went. You drove through the morning traffic while your mind ransacked the day's agenda before the day had even begun. You walked into the nine o'clock meeting not yet fully awake, then shuttled

between messages, action items, and quick calls until the whole day had become one unbroken chain of reactions. You ate lunch in front of a screen, sat through two more meetings in the afternoon, and left drained, unsure where all those hours had gone. Home again, you spent an hour before the television or the phone, then slept — ready to repeat the same day tomorrow.

Where, in all of that, is the vicegerent? Where is the bearer of the Trust the mountains shrank from? Where is the creature for whom the heavens and the earth were made to serve? How did the being fashioned for so magnificent a station become a person who burns through his days amid piling tasks, notifications, schedules, and a silent, ceaseless anxiety?

This gap — between what God has declared you to be and what you actually live day to day — is the real subject of this book. It did not open by accident, nor form on its own. Behind it lies a hidden design, at work from the very first moment: from that ancient vow Iblīs swore before he was cast from the Garden: *“I will surely make [things] alluring to them on the earth, and I will surely lead them all astray.”* (Qur’an 15:39) True to that vow, deception has not always come as outright disobedience. More

often it arrives disguised as “ordinary life” itself — as perpetual running, restless busyness, breathlessness without end. It whispers that peace lies just one more achievement away: one more promotion, a bigger number, a little more recognition. And the instant you reach what you took to be the goal, it nudges you toward the next thing, and the next, until life entire becomes a deferred chase that never arrives at enough. *“And Satan promises them nothing but delusion.” (Qur’an 17:64)*

Nor has he worked alone. In our age this temptation has found fertile soil in a vast economic and cultural order built on the primacy of production, profit, and efficiency,¹ until, little by little, the human was reduced to a “producer” and a “consumer.” As that order swelled, he ceased to be regarded as a spirit bearing meaning and became instead a unit of output within a larger machine. It was this that led Professor E. F. Schumacher, in *Small Is Beautiful*, to warn that the crisis of modern civilization is not, at root, an economic crisis but a spiritual one — the crisis of a human who has lost his bond with meaning, and who now treats

¹This reflects one influential intellectual foundation of the modern economic order, often traced to Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations* (1776).

nature and life as raw material to dominate and consume rather than a divine order he himself belongs to.

And these mental maps, for the most part, you did not choose. They were quietly fitted onto you until they came to seem self-evident. Each morning you put them on without noticing, and by them you measure yourself and everyone around you: who has accomplished most? who is most present? who is most successful? Without realizing it, you begin to appraise yourself by the worth the system assigns you, rather than the worth God declared for you from the start. And that, precisely, is what stands between you and any felt sense of the station you were created for.

This book is an attempt to draw a counter-map. It will not promise to lift your productivity by twenty percent, nor hand you a list of habits to make you more efficient, nor laws of attraction to deliver everything you desire. Such approaches, however they differ, mostly tend the surface — yet the deeper trouble of the modern human is not one of performance but of vision; not of time management but of meaning; not a crisis of tools but a crisis of the compass.

What I offer here is a strategic vision for life itself. Just as great institutions do not begin with operational detail before they have settled their vision and direction, the human too needs a compass by which to reorder his aims — not by the measures of the market alone, but in the light of his otherworldly origin and his true station. He needs a whole framework through which to understand himself, and by which to redefine success, priority, striving, relationships, and work, so that he moves through his days knowing where he is bound, and why.

A reader of my earlier book *No Limits (Lā Hudūd)* may meet here something of what he found there — the four dimensions, self-honesty, the journey to God. But the two books differ as a foundation differs from the building raised upon it. *No Limits* was a practical guide to application, walking you step by step through exercises and practices. *The Eternal Self* goes instead to the roots that practice stands on: why you are as you are, what these dimensions truly are, and how a quality is built into your being until you become an eternal self. This book lays the vision; the other translates it into conduct. So where you meet an idea you already know, you will not find it merely repeated — you will see it from a new depth, like someone returning to a familiar

house and entering this time through its original door.

Before we set out, let me be clear about what I promise and what I do not. I will not promise that your outward reality will change once you have read this book; your circumstances may change, and they may stay as they are, for that lies neither wholly in your hands nor in mine. But I promise something deeper than circumstance: that your angle of vision will shift, that your sight will widen, and that you will find answers to questions you may have carried for years without ever quite putting them into words. I promise that when you close the final page, you will know yourself better, and know your Lord better, and understand why a life that looks “ordinary” can still leave you so disoriented. I promise a soul more at peace — not because life will cease to test you, but because you will grasp why it confronts you, and how to hold steady when the things around you shake.

The journey ahead is laid out in eight interlocking chapters, each following the last like links in a single chain. The first resets the compass to the human’s otherworldly origin and puts the two most basic questions: Where did I

come from? And where am I going? The second takes up self-development as a neglected obligation rather than an optional luxury. The third enters the human's four dimensions — spirit, heart, intellect, and body — to show when a person stands upright within, and when he is divided against himself. The fourth turns to the laws of existence, asking why destiny, causality, and the play of opposites were built into life's design rather than being flaws within it. The fifth contemplates the laws of friction, and how pain and trial are a sculptor's chisel and not a punishment. The sixth arrives at the making of the will, where a person chooses who he will become by his will and his sincerity. The seventh takes up the movement of the essence, and how knowledge turns into a being from which good issues by nature. And the eighth reaches divine support: the map God sent down in revelation, and the companionship with which He accompanies those who journey to Him.

Read the book unhurriedly; let it keep you company for weeks, not days. Take a single chapter in installments, stop at the reflective pauses that close each one, answer their questions honestly before you move on, and keep a notebook for whatever gives you pause among the ideas and whatever you mean to act upon in

your day. When a passage speaks to you in particular, return to it twice, even three times. And if you are given to read it alongside someone you trust — a sibling, a spouse, a friend — the conversation will open horizons that might slip past you alone.

One last question before we begin: if this is your station in the Book of God, why do your days leave you feeling so small? With that question, we open the first chapter.

* * *

Chapter One • You Are in the Second Womb



In the Introduction you read who you are in the Book of God: a vicegerent for whom the heavens were made to serve, a bearer of a Trust the mountains refused, one promised a seat of truth near a Sovereign, All-Powerful. Then you looked at your day yesterday and saw nothing of that station — hurried coffee, back-to-back meetings, an evening dissolving in front of a screen. And you asked yourself: where did all that meaning go? Where is the flaw?

The flaw is not in you, but in your idea of where you are. The world you take to be your final homeland is, in truth, nothing but a workshop of becoming. You feel such constriction in it — for all its breadth, its pleasures, its opportunities — because your spirit was not created to settle here, only to pass through. It is wider than this world; and so, however far the world widens for you, you go on sensing in your depths that that something deep within you still remains unfinished.

Because this idea, stated so abstractly, can feel beyond easy reach, we need an image closer to instinct — one every person grasps without effort: the fetus in its mother's womb.

The Metaphor of the Fetus: The First Womb and the Second

Picture the fetus while it is still in the womb: a tiny being in a space no wider than a few centimeters, in total darkness, breathing through a cord and nourished by what reaches it from its mother. That is its entire world. Grant it the power to think, and it would conclude, with utter confidence, that the womb is everything — that the wall is the edge of the universe, that darkness is the nature of existence, that this fluid is the only possible form of life. Tell it that beyond the womb lies another world, with a sun that blazes, with colors and sounds and breaths and faces past counting, and the warmth of a hand that cradles it — and it would take you to be describing the impossible.

Yet everything growing in that fetus is growing in readiness for a world outside. The eyes that now see nothing were made for sunlight. The lungs that now breathe nothing were made for air. The hands that now grasp

nothing were made to grasp. The womb is no home; it is a station of formation. In every moment the fetus spends there, it is being readied for a world it knows nothing of — and to which it is, all the same, inevitably coming.

And this, quite literally, is your own condition.

You are now in a second womb. The first womb made your body; this one makes your self. The surface of the world may fool you into reckoning it a final homeland that holds everything within you, but it is far narrower than that. Weigh its true size for a moment: this earth, around which your whole life turns, is but a small planet circling a middling star, in one arm of the Milky Way. That galaxy alone holds nearly two hundred billion stars, many of them far larger than our sun. Astronomers put the number of galaxies in the observable universe at more than two trillion — and the observable universe is itself, by their reckoning, only a sliver of what exists. You sit now — with all your worries and dreams and your entire life — in the corner of a room, on one floor of a palace without limit.

Then read God's words about a single Garden among the Gardens of the Hereafter: "*And a*

Garden as wide as the heavens and the earth, prepared for the God-conscious.” (Qur’an 3:133)

Weigh the phrase carefully: as wide as the heavens and the earth. This entire universe — its trillions of galaxies, its uncountable stars — is but a part of a single Garden, not the whole of it. If that is its width, what of its length? And what of the other Gardens beyond it? Then it dawns on you that the earth and all upon it are no more than a setting for preparation and shaping, and that the spirit within you — the spirit breathed into you by God — was never created to settle here, but to ripen here and then cross to its true home: *“This worldly life is nothing but diversion and play; and indeed, the Home of the Hereafter — that is the [true] life, if only they knew.” (Qur’an 29:64)*

Stay with the word al-ḥayawān (“the true life”) in the verse; it is the intensive form of “life.” It is as though the Qur’an were telling you: do not be deceived by the motion and clamor of this life, for real life has not yet begun. What you count as life is only a passing stage, closer to a brief play inside a great womb.

The Commander of the Faithful, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (peace be upon him), caught this same meaning in a single phrase when he described

the world:² “The world is an abode of passage, not an abode of permanence.” It is a crossing in which the self is shaped, not a lodging in which to seek residence. Whoever sees it for what it is neither demands of it what it does not hold, nor grieves over the passing of what was never meant to last.

The fetus, knowing nothing of the outer world, cannot understand why its organs formed at all. But you have been told. You know you are in a phase of formation, that a home has been prepared for you, and you have been shown something of its people and the terms of entry. Here your road parts from the fetus’s: it is formed without knowing, while you are formed and you know. It has no say in what it will become; you have a direct hand in shaping what you will be: *“By the soul and how He proportioned it, and inspired it [to know] its wickedness and its righteousness: he has succeeded who purifies it, and he has failed who corrupts it.”* (Qur’an 91:7-10)

Your bodily organs were completed in the first womb with no effort from you; your spiritual organs are completed in this one only by your

²Nahj al-Balāgha, among the short aphorisms (Ḥikma 133 in al-Sharīf al-Raḍī’s arrangement).

own striving. Patience, truthfulness, generosity, modesty, gratitude, contentment, excellence, nearness to God — these are your real organs, and they are built here. With them — or with their weakness, or their absence — you will emerge into real life. Time in this workshop is limited, and the moment of birth is coming, ready or not.

Why This World Is Not Enough for You

Why, once you reach what you took to be your goal, does the thrill die down so fast and the emptiness creep back?³ Why does wealth fail to satisfy you after you gain it, a position after you master it, an achievement after it is done? Why do your loveliest moments seem dimly unfinished, as if they halt just short of fullness? And why does that hidden sense return — however full your hand — that within you is a space nothing you own can reach?

³In the economics of happiness this phenomenon is known as the “income-happiness paradox,” proposed by Richard Easterlin in 1974: the higher-earning individuals within a society are more satisfied at a given moment, yet when societies grow richer over the long run their level of satisfaction does not rise to the same degree. It remains debated among researchers, and is cited here for diagnosis, not as proof. See: R. A. Easterlin et al., “*The Happiness-Income Paradox Revisited*,” PNAS, 2010.

The answer, at its simplest, is that what is within you is wider than what is around you.

Wider — not because you outrank the world, but because you were made for what is greater than it. The spirit within you, that divine breath, issues from a meaning without limit, and so a finite world can never content it. How should a spirit whose essence bears the trace of eternity rest in a brief span of time? How should a being made upon the meaning of permanence find completion in a world where all things perish? The trouble is not that the world is flawed or deficient; the world does its work superbly — it gladdens the body, stirs the emotions, occupies the mind, and opens for a person the doors of experience, striving, and discovery. And for all that, it cannot give your spirit what it asks, because what your spirit asks is not of the world's kind at all.

Imagine placing a fish in a glass of water instead of the ocean. The glass will sustain life: the water is there, the fish can breathe, the temperature suits it. And still one truth will not go away — this is not its home. Not because the glass is faulty, but because the fish is wider than the glass can hold. This is exactly what the world does to your spirit. It gives you what you need to

survive; it cannot give you what you need to be whole.

This is why you will find in the world no complete joy, just as you will find in it no complete grief. Joy drains away however fierce it burns, grief lightens however heavy it lies, and the wound heals however certain you were it never would. Not because you are always strong, but because the world is built never to grant completeness in anything. Had it given you complete happiness, you would have settled into it and forgotten what comes after; had it given you complete pain, you would have broken before you were ever formed. This too belongs to the wisdom — one more proof that the fish was not made for the glass.

From here you understand something about how people move through life. When you see them chasing wealth, position, fame, or pleasure, they are not really after these things in themselves, but after what they imagine these will carry to them: serenity. They suppose tranquility lives there. Then they arrive, and find it was never there at all. So they imagine the trouble is quantity, and they multiply. Then they imagine it is kind, and they switch. Then they imagine it is the partner, the city, the job, the

lifestyle, and they trade once more. Rarely does it cross anyone's mind that the trouble is not in the details at all, but in the location: *"And whoever turns away from My remembrance — indeed, he will have a constricted life."* (Qur'an 20:124)

Weigh the verse. God did not say "he will have poverty," nor "illness," nor "failure." He said: a constricted life. Constriction is not a lack of means but a tightness of soul in spite of their abundance — that you own everything on the surface of your life and still feel, within, a slow suffocation. This is precisely what so many who are "successful" by the world's reckoning endure: nothing missing from their hands, yet everything missing from their chests.

Of the one bound to Him, by contrast, God says: *"Those who believe and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of God. Truly, in the remembrance of God do hearts find rest."* (Qur'an 13:28)

Notice the decisive restriction: in the remembrance of God alone. It is as though the Qur'an seals off the road to every alternative and tells the human plainly: you will not find what you are seeking on any path but this. And remembrance here is not merely words on the

tongue, but a state of connection — to the Source your spirit first came from, to the boundless vastness that alone can slake a spirit created out of vastness.

You are not here to find complete rest, but to discover the road to it. You are not here to plug the void with just anything, but to learn where true fullness comes from. Just as you were not made to live a complete life in this world, but to realize you were made for another life in which the meaning of your existence is completed. The longer you hunt for your completion in the world, the longer your disorientation within it lasts; for the spirit is not satisfied by enjoyment but by meaning, not filled by possession but by connection, not put at rest by things but by certainty: *“And worldly life is nothing but the enjoyment of delusion.”* (Qur’an 57:20)

Stay with the word delusion (ghurūr). Delusion is not an outright lie; a lie tells you what is untrue. Delusion takes something true in itself and dresses it up as more than it is. The world is an enjoyment — and that is true. The illusion begins when you suppose it an enjoyment that suffices you, or one that endures, or one that is the end rather than the means. The

trouble is not that you enjoy the world, but that you believe its pleasure is your final home.

So everything you feel of lack is not a lack in you, but in the frame you live within. Everything you feel of constriction is not a weakness in your capacity, but a narrowness in a world never created to be your final homeland. And what you search for here and do not find is not lost — only deferred to the world you were created for.

So What Are You Doing Here?

A fair question forces itself forward: if the world is not your true homeland, why are you in it at all? Why this long passage through a temporary world, thick with shifting experiences, heavy trials, and losses whose wisdom escapes you? Why is a person not born straight into that wider world he belongs to?

The answer lies not in the shape of the world, but in your own.

You are not yet complete. And just as the fetus cannot live outside the womb until its organs are formed, the spirit cannot enter the other world until its “organs” are formed. But the organs you lack here are not of the body; they are inner meanings: patience, insight,

truthfulness, steadfastness, sincerity, mercy, nearness to God. Such things are not built by wishing, nor handed over ready-made all at once; they are drawn out of your depths through friction, choice, struggle, the mastering of the self, and the power to rise again after each fall. An arena, then, was indispensable. And the world is that arena: *“He who created death and life to test you [as to] which of you is best in deed.”* (Qur’an 67:2)

Notice how the verse pairs death and life, as two poles of the single system of opposites this universe is built upon: light and dark, lack and fullness, joy and pain, strength and weakness, giving and withholding. These opposites are no flaw in the world’s design but part of its work. Each pole presses against its counterpart, and from the friction, momentum and motion are born. That momentum is what spurs a person’s labor and carries him out of what he is into what he can become. Were life empty of opposites, it would stagnate — and were it to stagnate, your formation would halt.

Consider, too, the verb “to test you” (liyabluwakum). Testing (balā’), at its root, is not a pointless examination but a disclosure of what is already there. To test a thing is to reveal its

essence under pressure. God does not test you in order to learn; He is the All-Knowing before everything. He tests you so that you may learn what truly lives within you. What did your friction with life do inside you? What held? What collapsed? What was real in you, and what was only an illusion about yourself?

This is what the Companions (may God be pleased with them) lived when they were placed under the harshest pressure.⁴ Khabbāb ibn al-Aratt and the oppressed beside him came to the Prophet (may God's blessings be upon him and his family) as he reclined on a cloak in the shade of the Ka'ba, complaining of the torture they bore, and said: Will you not seek victory for us? He told them of those before them: a man would have a pit dug for him and be set in it, a saw would be brought down upon his head until he was split in two, his flesh and bones combed apart with iron — and none of it would turn him from his religion. None of that torment was a futile thing meant to destroy them; it was a pressure that drew out the metal of a self forged in secret, so that it held firm where others gave way.

⁴Narrated by al-Bukhārī in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Book of Virtues, hadith no. 3852.

Then weigh the verse's close: best in deed — not “most in deed.” The measure in God's balance is not quantity alone but quality: the sincerity of intention, the purity of motive, the steadiness of the heart, the choosing of what befits your spirit when you stand between two options. In this the verse all but sums up the entire design of the world: a world of opposites that spurs labor; labor that discloses a person's reality; and that reality is what he carries out of this workshop.

“O human being, you are laboring toward your Lord with [great] exertion and will meet Him.” (Qur'an 84:6) Stay with the word laboring (kādiḥ). It is a heavy word, for labor (kadḥ) is no passing effort but an exhausting striving that leaves its mark on the one who exerts it. The Qur'an does not say you are “passing” toward your Lord, but “laboring” toward Him. Every step you force forward against hardship, every resistance you put up to your own desire, every patience you endure, every choice you compel yourself to make — each carves something into you. There is no movement without a trace. Either you build a meaning within yourself, or you tear one down.

Your true mission in this world, then, is not what you suppose. It is not amassing wealth, nor winning status, nor stacking up achievements for the crowd to applaud. These may happen along your road, but they are not the road. The road runs deeper: that you be formed — that you come out of this workshop a different human than the one who entered, purer in soul, broader in chest, truer in heart, nearer to God. This is “the eternal self.” It is not inherited, not bought, not handed ready-made to anyone. It is made. And you, in the end, are its maker.

Think back over your day yesterday. The meeting you left upset — did it disclose patience in you, or incapacity? The word said to you in front of others — did you meet it with forbearance, or fragility? The brief call with your parents — did you build kindness in it, or put it off again? These events, passing details on the surface, are not passing at all. Each was a question put to you: what did it add to the self you will leave this world with? And what did it take away?

For the self you will stand before God with is not the self you were born with. You were born with an innate nature; you will meet God with a self you fashioned out of that nature. From here

you see that the world is no punishment you were flung into, nor a barrier set across your road to Paradise; it is the one place where the self that will enter Paradise — or be denied it — is made. Everyone who entered Paradise entered by what he built in his self here, not by what he once wished to become.

And so the essential questions of a life do not differ much from one person to the next: which qualities ought I to build? what awareness must I acquire? what meanings do I want to live for? and who is the “I” that will bear my face on the day I meet God? These are not idle musings for empty hours, but the great strategic questions of your whole life’s project. Whoever lives without them runs his days with no direction; whoever lives by them runs his life with insight.

Time: Your Raw Material

If the world is the workshop of your formation, time is its raw material — not mere seconds dropping from your lifespan, but moments in which what you will become takes shape. Time in the first womb made your body; time in this second womb makes your self. Every day that passes over you, light or heavy, is not an event that vanishes when it ends, but one

more step in building the self you will one day stand before God with.

But when a person forgets his true homeland, he falls into a deep illusion that colors his whole relationship with time: he supposes time works against him. He watches the years pass and feels them stripping something from him, that aging is a silent loss, that what goes never returns. He looks into the mirror each year with a little fear, at the calendar with a little dread, as though time were an adversary at his heels, a race he is afraid of losing. And this, in truth, is an illusion.

For time does not work against you; it works through you. It is not an enemy but a tool, not an adversary but a school. Every moment hands you a fresh chance to shape yourself; every experience widens your vision; every wound opens within you a door to a depth you would never have known but for the pain; every blessing reveals a new dimension of yourself. What leaves you is not lost — it settles into your awareness and becomes part of your maturity. What you move past does not vanish; it stays within you as experience, as insight, as a strength quieter and deeper than before.

It is for this that God swore by time itself — by al-‘aṣr: *“By time. Indeed, humankind is in loss*

— *except those who believe and do righteous deeds and enjoin one another to truth and enjoin one another to patience.*” (Qur’an 103:1-3)

Three short verses, yet they all but sum up the entire philosophy of time. God swears by time that the human is in perpetual loss — a loss with no exception in principle. Why? Because time, by its nature, depletes; every passing moment is subtracted from your limited balance. That is the first law of worldly life. The only escape from this inevitable loss is to convert the depletion into building: through faith, righteous deed, the mutual enjoining of truth, the mutual enjoining of patience. Whoever spent his time in these meanings turned his temporal loss into eternal gain. Whoever burned his lifespan on anything else, time kept taking from him and adding nothing real.

And if you want a sharper gauge for the worth of time, set your whole lifespan beside eternity. Mathematics itself tells you a startling truth: every finite number, however vast it looks, tends to zero against infinity. Fifty years, or eighty, or even a thousand — the result is one. The Qur’an drew this very meaning on the tongue of the people of the Hereafter: *“He will say, ‘How many years did you remain on earth?’*

They will say, 'We remained a day or part of a day; ask those who keep count.' He will say, 'You remained only a little, if only you had known.'"
(Qur'an 23:112-114)

The years of your life, which now seem to you long and drawn out, will shrink after death to "a day or part of a day." Not because they never were, but because they are in fact short against eternity. They seemed long only because you were inside them. Step outside, look back from there, and you will see them for what they were: a passing stage. This is why the measure of Sūrat al-ʿAṣr was decisive, not figurative; the time you squander, you squander not from an endless balance, but from one that was short to begin with.

So weigh your day with care. How many hours went to what drains you without building you — distraction, the mindless scroll of screens, the chewing-over of worry, fruitless argument, anxiety that yields nothing? And how many went to what truly adds to you? The question is harsh, but it is a Qurʾanic question, for the Qurʾan treats time as the most precious material in your hands.

Yet labor, in the Qurʾan's sense, is not confined to a prescribed act of worship or to

remembrance in seclusion. Every positive movement in your life, set in its right place on your existential map, is a labor toward God. Your professional work, your reading, your learning, a word that eases another's worry, the keeping of kinship ties, reflection on God's creation, the gaining of a new skill — even your sleep and rest, if by them you recover the energy to return to the arena — all of it can turn into labor: *“But seek, through that which God has given you, the Home of the Hereafter; and do not forget your share of the world.”* (Qur'an 28:77)

Notice the balance of the verse: it does not split the Home of the Hereafter from your share of the world, but joins them in a single movement. Then it follows at once with His words: *“And do good as God has done good to you.”* (Qur'an 28:77) It is as though the Qur'an reorders the whole picture — the Hereafter, the world, and doing good are not three rival roads, but different dimensions of one movement once its direction is set right.

So the true measure is not the type of activity you do, but its place on your map. Whoever made meeting God his goal turned his pursuit of provision into worship, his knowledge into a means of nearness, his rest into preparation, his

relationships into a door to maturity and excellence. Whoever made the world his goal may find even his remembrance turning into habit, his prayer into routine, his alms into a cold reckoning. The heart sets the direction of the movement, and the deed follows the heart.

So the real question at a day's end is not only "How much did I remember God?" but also "How many of my day's moments were on the right map?" An hour at your work with the intention of excellence may weigh heavier in the balance than an hour of worship through which your heart wandered. A quiet sitting with your family, by which you restore your spirit and mend your humanity, may be better than a seclusion in which a person consumes himself chewing over his worries.

Time, in the end, is your raw material. And with it you carve, day by day, the shape of the self you will become.

In Closing

We opened this chapter with a question the Introduction left hanging: if you hold in the Book of God that magnificent rank you saw, why do your days leave you with this much smallness, scatteredness, and suffocation? Now, having

walked the road together, the answer comes calmly clear.

You are not in your final homeland.

You are in a second womb — beyond compare wider than the first, but, like it, temporary. Just as the first womb was no permanent home for the fetus, the world is no permanent home for you. When you feel constriction in it despite its breadth, it is not that something in you is faulty, but that your spirit is wider than the frame you live within. And when the years wear you down, and you dread the mirror, and you feel time stealing you away, it is because you took it for an adversary — when it is, in truth, your raw material, the stuff with which you carve the self that will meet God.

This, at its simplest, is what we have tried to grasp: the world is a workshop, time is a tool, and you are the maker of the self you will emerge with. You were not created for this world as a final end; you came to it to be formed within it. No one can build your self for you, and no one bears the responsibility of shaping it in your stead — just as the moment that passes does not come round again.

And once this understanding settles in you, everything around you changes. You no longer look the same way at yourself, your work, your relationships, even your time. You begin to see all of it for what it truly is: material in your hands, while you stand inside a great workshop of becoming, with a single mission before you that you cannot escape — to be formed.

That mission is no secondary option a person picks up or sets down as he pleases; it is the deep obligation you were created for. So in the next chapter we turn to self-development as this neglected duty — why the Qur'an called it a struggle (*jihād*), and why Muslims, through many phases of their later history, let slip one of the gravest charges entrusted to them.

You are in a second womb. This is a fact. But, unlike the fetus, you know you are in it — and because you know, the choice has come into your hands. The fetus awaits birth without awareness; you prepare yourself for it. The fetus does not choose the shape of the organs it emerges with; you take part, every day, in shaping the self you will emerge with. The fetus does not know that beyond its womb is light; you have been told.

And to be told is a responsibility: *“So whoever wills may remember it. And they will not remember except that God wills.”* (Qur’an 74:55–56) God calls you, and the willing is your own — so begin.

A Pause for Reflection

Before you go on, linger over this chapter’s first idea: that you are in a second womb, where a self is being shaped that you will carry into what comes after. The fetus cannot ask what it is becoming; you can. So if the self you meet your Lord with is not a self disclosed on the day you are born, but a self built across every day you live — what did you build in it yesterday, and what did you tear down while you scarcely noticed?



A note to the reader: this is a foundational chapter, resting on three central ideas that everything to come will lean upon — “the second womb,” “opposites as the system of formation,” and “time as your raw material.” You may therefore feel it carries a higher density than the chapters that follow. There is no harm in reading it across two or three sittings, or in returning to

it after some days. Much of what comes later will sink its roots into what was understood here first.

Chapter Two • The Neglected Obligation



Once your awareness widens to the realities of place and time, and the world's clamor grows faint before the expanse of eternity, a question rises in you unlike any you have known. Not "Where am I?" nor "How long will I live?" nor "What awaits me?" — but one thing only: what ought I to do now with this knowledge?

For your realization that this world is a prelude, that your lifespan is a moment, that your feelings are passing, does not complete its meaning until it turns into action. Knowledge that does not change the direction of a life stays a passing idea, however deep it seems. And here, precisely, the neglected obligation begins.

No sooner does the reality of eternity unveil itself than you find yourself before two choices and no third: to carry on in the old motion of the world — a random motion that squanders your lifespan among appearances, preoccupations, and the chase after what shifts and vanishes — or to reconsider everything: your motives, your

desires, your goals, the questions that drive you from within.

Awareness alone does not change a person; what changes him is what he does with it. The moment of realization is not the end but the beginning. The moment you decide what to do with what you have come to know — that is the first site of real choice in your life.

Before we ask why this obligation has been hidden from the modern Muslim's awareness, we should ask first what the Qur'an even calls it. For the language the Qur'an uses to describe it does more than name it; it reveals its nature, its weight, and the place it holds in the whole human project.

Your Labor Toward Your Lord: An Obligation, Not a Description

Open the Qur'an to the words of God: "*O human being, you are laboring toward your Lord with [great] exertion and will meet Him.*" (Qur'an 84:6) At first reading you take it for a mere description of your condition: "the human labors in his life." But the verse runs far deeper than description; it is a declaration of your standing in this existence. God did not say you are walking toward your Lord, nor striving, nor

working, but: laboring (kādiḥ). And labor (kadḥ), in the tongue of the Arabs, is not just any striving, but the exhausting kind that leaves its mark on the one who exerts it — the striving you emerge from with the dust of battle on your spirit.

It is as though the verse were telling you: you have been set inside a design that lays exertion upon you, whether you will it or not. The question is not will you labor, but in which direction your labor will run.

Because the question is grave, the Qur'an comes to narrow the possibilities of the answer, and to show that the self cannot remain neutral: *"By the soul and how He proportioned it, and inspired it [to know] its wickedness and its righteousness: he has succeeded who purifies it, and he has failed who corrupts it."* (Qur'an 91:7-10)

Weigh the wording. God did not say "he has succeeded who purifies it, and the rest did nothing," but set two opposing movements before you: purification or corruption. Rising or burying. Ascent or descent. There is no neutral zone where the self simply stays as it is. Whoever does not lift his self by purification

pushes it — even in silence — toward erosion and extinction.

So the real question is not “shall I purify my self?” but “in which direction is my self moving now?” The self does not stand still. It is either moving toward God or away from Him.

Then a third verse completes the picture from another angle: *“He who created death and life to test you [as to] which of you is best in deed.”* (Qur’an 67:2) Notice that it did not say “most in deed,” but best in deed. The measure here is not abundance but quality; not the size of the movement, but its inner reality. A single bowing your heart witnessed may outweigh a thousand performed by the body alone. A small deed kept pure for God may sit heavier with Him than vast accomplishments driven by vanity or the love of display.

Gather these three verses, and you find the Qur’an is not speaking of three separate obligations but of a single reality seen from three angles: labor, purification, and excellence of deed. Labor is the movement; purification is the direction of that movement within the self; and excellence of deed is the quality with which it emerges into the world.

From here it becomes clear why the Prophet (peace be upon him) called this battle “the greater jihad (the inner struggle against the self).” It is related that he said to his Companions on returning from a military expedition: “We have returned from the lesser jihad to the greater jihad.” They asked: And what is the greater jihad? He said: “The struggle against the self.”

The paradox is profound. Outward war needs training, weapons, and courage before death — and still the Prophet (peace be upon him) called it “the lesser.” The war of the self, by contrast, has its enemy dwelling within you, its battlefield travelling with you in every moment, and it does not end until your life ends. In it you face no adversary outside you, but your own fear, vanity, appetite, laziness, and self-delusion. That is why it is longer, harder, and deeper in its effect.

Because this battle knows no pause, the Qur’an chose decisive language for it. It did not say “if you wish, you may labor,” but: you are laboring. It reads as a statement of fact, yet carries within it the force of a charge — a cosmic command God does not exempt you from. You are inside this labor from your first breath, and you remain in it until you meet Him. There is no

space off the road. Every moment that passes over you, you are moving in some direction within it, building — or weakening — something in your self.

For the same reason the Qur'an chose an exact word for the victor in this journey. It did not say "he has succeeded who purifies it," but: he has prospered (*qad aflaha*). And prospering (*falāḥ*) runs deeper than success. Success is a notion that shifts with people and ages; what one society counts as success another counts as failure, and the market's criteria turn over each decade. Prospering is the striking of the very end you were created for — not the end the world fashioned for you.

So a person may succeed in people's eyes while slowly losing himself, and may look ordinary in the world's eyes while standing, with God, among the prosperous. Success pleases people; true flourishing pleases God. And the distance between them is, at times, a whole lifetime.

How Was It Hidden From You?

If purification holds this rank — a declaration of your standing in the universe, a divide between prospering and ruin — how did it vanish

from the modern Muslim's awareness? Why do you hear dozens of sermons on the details and branches of worship, yet rarely one that sets purification at the heart of the religion? And why do so many people come out of seasons of worship with a tired body, while the self stayed as it was?

The answer is that two veils lie between the human and this obligation: an inner veil that breeds illusion within the self, and an outer veil that makes a person perform the religion without entering its meaning. We begin with the first, since every deviation on the outside usually begins from a flaw of vision on the inside.

The First Veil: When Evil Is Made to Look Beautiful to You

A person does not walk toward misguidance because he loves it as misguidance, nor chase falsehood because he knows it to be false. He deviates because things are shown to him out of their reality: he sees illusion in the shape of truth, sees shadow as light, sees what weakens him as though it would complete him. The real danger is not that you are deceived once, but that you come to live inside the deception until you lose the power to see it at all.

The Qur'an condensed this into a single verse that all but sums up a large part of human psychology: *"And Satan made their deeds seem fair to them and turned them away from the path, so they are not guided."* (Qur'an 27:24) Stay with the word made fair (zayyana). The matter does not begin with an outright lie, but with adornment — that things be shown to you out of their true proportion, so they look lovelier than they are, nearer to your heart than they deserve, worthier of being followed than they ought to be.

To feel the danger of this veil, picture a child raging and weeping because he lost a game on a screen, as though his whole fate hung on the outcome. You smile, because you see the scene from outside. But do you notice, in the same moment, that many of us do exactly this when we chase money, appearances, brands, or social standing, as though they were the final meaning of life?

We belittle the child's game because we stand outside it, and magnify our own because we live inside it. The deeper you are inside the game, the harder it grows to see that it is a game at all. So the Qur'an described the world with startling

frankness: *“Know that the life of this world is but play and amusement.”* (Qur’an 57:20)

The illusion peaks when it is no longer content to merely pull a person off the path, but persuades him that he is on the path to begin with: *“Say: Shall We inform you of the greatest losers in their deeds? Those whose effort is lost in the worldly life while they think they are doing well in work.”* (Qur’an 18:103–104)

Weigh the force of the phrase: the trouble was not merely that they strayed, but that they thought they were doing well. This is the most dangerous stage of the veil — when deviation, in a person’s own awareness, turns into a form of rightness, so that flight looks like courage, distortion like maturity, and busyness like progress.

This illusion belongs to no one group over another. A religious person may fall into it, supposing that sheer religious motion suffices to make the self; just as a person successful by the world’s criteria may fall into it, reckoning that what he gathers in his hand is what he will carry to God.

Because the illusion works from within, the self has a great hand in it. The commanding self

loves the image more than it loves the truth. It wants you to look stronger than you are, richer than you are, more accepted and admired than you are. So it magnifies whatever feeds its image and hides whatever exposes its weakness: *“And I do not absolve my own self. Indeed, the self is ever commanding to evil, except those upon whom my Lord has mercy.”* (Qur’an 12:53)

And from outside you, there is always someone watering this illusion and renewing it. Satan cannot compel you, but he can make fair. He makes appetite fair until it seems a necessity, makes wealth fair until it seems the measure of worth, makes appearances fair until they become the very measure of existence. With each small concession, a little dust gathers on the heart that its owner scarcely feels: *“No! Rather, the stain has covered their hearts of that which they used to earn.”* (Qur’an 83:14)

The stain (rān) does not come from a single sin, but from the piling-up of details that were never purified: heedlessness upon heedlessness, concession upon concession, until a person’s awareness slowly dims without his noticing.

So the first step in purification is not an abundance of deeds, but wiping the dust from the mirror of awareness. To stand honestly with

yourself and ask: does what I pursue truly raise me, or only adorn me? Is it a meaning, or merely a sign? A real value, or an image that needs an audience to believe it? The image falls when the light fades; the meaning remains — even after you have left the whole world behind.

The Second Veil: When Worship Is Performed but Not Lived

Mention purification, and a direct meaning springs to many minds: prayer, fasting, remembrance, charity, pilgrimage, reciting the Qur'an — as though purification meant piling up the acts, or doubling the religious effort, or polishing one's "devotional performance." But the deeper understanding shows that the acts of worship were never prescribed as ends standing on their own, but as means by which the self is re-engineered from within. Worship, in essence, is not a motion of the body but a reshaping of awareness.

Take prayer. It was not made obligatory to be a mechanical repetition the limbs run through several times a day, but a state of connection that returns your heart to its true center. Hence God said: *"And establish prayer for My remembrance."* (Qur'an 20:14)

He did not say merely “because it is an obligation,” but: for My remembrance — so that He be present in your awareness, not so that your limbs move alone. From here too come His words: *“Indeed, prayer prohibits immorality and wrongdoing.”* (Qur’an 29:45)

The prayer that reaches the heart leaves its mark on conduct; the one that stays at the body’s edge may be performed and change nothing in its owner. It is not necessarily void, but it has not yet attained its full existential function.

Fasting likewise. God says: *“Fasting is prescribed for you ... that you may become God-conscious.”* (Qur’an 2:183) He did not say “that you may go hungry,” but: that you may become God-conscious. For fasting is less a training in deprivation than a training in awareness — that you watch your desires from the outside and discover you are not compelled to answer everything the self craves. The fast that reveals nothing to you of the nature of your appetites, and reorders nothing in your relationship with them, stays a hunger with no transformation. But the fast that reshapes your relationship with yourself is the one that truly makes you.

Almsgiving (zakāt), too, is no mere transfer of money from one hand to another, but a process of inner release. God says: *“Take from their wealth a charity by which you purify them and cause them to grow.”* (Qur’an 9:103)

Weigh the expression: you purify them and cause them to grow. What is meant is not only meeting the need of the poor — great as that aim is — but the purifying of the giver himself: cleansing him of attachment, of the illusion of ownership, of the fear of loss. Almsgiving draws out not only the money, but something of the heart’s servitude to money. And every attachment that falls away opens a fresh place in the heart for light.

As for remembrance (dhikr), it was not prescribed as a verbal repetition, but as a change in the state of inner presence. God says: *“Truly, in the remembrance of God do hearts find rest.”* (Qur’an 13:28) The rest here springs not from the words alone but from the remembering — of the origin, the end, the direction. True remembrance is the heart’s return from scatteredness to the center, from the world to God. The tongue may open the door, but it is the heart that ought to step through.

From here you see that the acts of worship altogether — prayer, fasting, almsgiving, remembrance, pilgrimage — are not final ends but bridges. They are not rigid molds but tools of building, by which the self is reshaped. The human is not built by mere prayer, but by the light prayer admits into his heart; not by fasting alone, but by the inner freedom fasting grants him; not by giving alone, but by the release that takes place within him as he gives. Even pilgrimage, in essence, is not a geographical relocation but an experience that restores to a person the awareness that he is a passing guest, and that the world is not his final homeland.

This is why the Qur'an spoke with such clear decisiveness when it came to the sacrificial offering — one of the greatest outward rites of the pilgrimage:

"Their flesh will not reach God, nor their blood, but what reaches Him is the God-consciousness from you." (Qur'an 22:37) Weigh the restriction: it is not the flesh, nor the blood, nor the outward form of the rite that ascends to God, but the God-consciousness born within the heart during the worship. If this holds in one of the costliest and hardest acts of worship, it holds

for all the rest. The ruling is one, though the forms differ.

From here comes the hidden tragedy so many fall into: performing the rite without entering its meaning. They pray without being refined, fast without being changed, give without being freed. Not because the acts of worship are powerless, but because the inner door has not yet opened. They went through the motion, but never lived the transformation the motion was made for.

And this, precisely, divides what remains from what departs: *"As for the foam, it vanishes as scum; but what benefits people remains in the earth."* (Qur'an 13:17) The foam lies thick on the water's surface, but it disappears fast; what benefits remains. So too the worship that halts at the edge of form: it may be abundant and loud, yet it passes quickly, leaving no deep trace. The worship that reaches the heart endures, even if it was little.

Purification is the spirit that gives worship life, and worship is the vessel that carries purification. There is no purification without worship, and no living worship without purification. Worship is a body; purification is a spirit.

Why the Self-Help Shelf Did Not Fill the Gap

If the obligation of purification went missing from much of traditional religious discourse, it resurfaced — in a different guise — in another corner of the modern person's life: the self-help shelf. You walk into a bookstore and find whole shelves on building character, realizing potential, crafting the better version of yourself. You open your phone and clips pour over you from coaches and motivators promising success, inner peace, latent power, great transformation.

A natural question arises here: is this not, at bottom, an attempt to fill the void left by the absence of purification? Is it not a call to develop the self and raise it up?

The honest answer: yes... and no.

Yes, because the shelf holds genuinely useful things: time-management skills, the arts of communication, techniques for building habits, methods of discipline, the ability to handle emotions and goals. Many of these tools can serve the project of purification, once set on its correct map.

But the “no” weighs more. The gap left by the absence of purification was not a gap of skills, but a gap of direction. And direction is exactly what this shelf lacks across most of its offerings.

Consider the most famous lines repeated in this discourse: “You possess limitless power,” “the universe responds to what you believe,” “discover your inner greatness,” “you are the center of your reality.” Notice where the self sits in all of them: the self is hero, center, and end. The universe turns around it, existence answers to it, and the whole journey closes at its realization. Here surfaces the essential difference between Qur’anic purification and self-development in its prevailing Western form.

For self-development, in most of its models, ends at the self. Purification sets out from the self... to transcend it toward God. Self-development asks a person to magnify himself, to hunt for his latent power, to make his self the center of his project. Purification reminds him that he is a servant laboring toward his Lord, and that his true worth comes not from inflating his self, but from knowing his correct place before his Creator.

And because the starting point differs, the whole road differs, and so does the fruit at the end.

And because the two frameworks resemble each other on the surface — both speak of “becoming better” — the matter blurs for many readers. A person takes the techniques and supposes he has taken the obligation itself. He memorizes the steps of habit-building, the laws of discipline, the methods of success, and imagines this is the labor the Qur’an speaks of.

But the pursuit of “better” inside a map that ends at the self usually ends in further inflation of the self. The pursuit of better inside a map that ends at God ends in further sincerity of the self toward Him, and its release from all besides Him.

This is why so many people come away from this shelf carrying more accomplishments... and still do not feel full.⁵ One succeeds in his work,

⁵This pattern is known in psychology as the “hedonic treadmill”: the human’s tendency to return to his prior level of satisfaction after a period following any gain or loss. In a classic study, Brickman and colleagues (1978) compared major lottery winners with people who had become paraplegic, and found that the happiness of both groups returned over time to near baseline. It is cited here for diagnosis, not as proof, and has been revisited and refined in later research. See: P. Brickman, D. Coates & R. Janoff-Bulman, *“Lottery Winners and Accident Victims: Is Happiness*

then meets an emptiness he cannot explain. He reaches a goal he waited years for, then the elation dissolves almost at once. He builds a successful image of himself, then caves inwardly the moment that image is shaken.

This is no failure in the techniques themselves, but a sign that the self was made for something deeper than merely developing itself. As you saw in the first chapter, you are in a second womb — and the fetus is not completed in the womb by inflating itself within it, but by emerging from it to the world it was created for.

Hence God says: *“Have you seen the one who takes his desire as his god, and God sends him astray upon knowledge?”* (Qur’an 45:23) Taking desire as a god need not mean a person abandons the whole religion; it can mean he makes his self the final reference for all he does, and makes its development and magnification the supreme aim of his life. The bearer of this pattern may well possess “knowledge”: he reads, learns, owns tools and skills and techniques. But the trouble is not always a lack of knowledge; it is a map that puts the self in a place that belongs to God alone. The misguidance here is the more dangerous for it — a misguidance dressed in the

Relative?” Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1978.

garb of awareness, not the misguidance of naïve ignorance.

In the end, a person finds himself swinging between two banks, each deficient: a bank offering him a rite without a spirit, so he loses the inner meaning of worship; and a bank offering him development without a direction, so he loses the final meaning of his existence. The first teaches him to act without understanding why; the second teaches him to advance without knowing where to.

The neglected obligation is what joins the two: a movement aware of its meaning, and a clear direction that knows where it is leading its bearer.

Where Do You Stand With Your Self?

Labor needs a direction, and purification without a map of the self can stay a vague general call: a person hears it, is stirred by it, then leaves it without knowing where he stands now, or where he should move next. So the necessary question was: where do you actually stand with your self? And in which direction are you walking?

The Qur'an does not present the self as a rigid theoretical concept, but as existential states a person passes through on his journey to God. In their broadest form these states are four: the commanding self, then the reproaching, then the inspired, then the tranquil. They are not academic classifications, but living stations the human shifts among as he is being formed.

The Commanding Self: A Starting Point, Not a Verdict of Guilt

This is the raw self at its beginnings — the self moved by the pull of immediate desire, the love of possession, the fear of loss, the search for whatever quickly eases pain. It is not evil by nature, but it is not yet refined. It is like raw material the hand of shaping has not yet touched: within it lies the capacity for ascent, but it is still captive to instinct, image, and impulse.

So it sees the world from a narrow angle: “me, now.” It does not see the future clearly, being captive to the moment, nor the deep truths, being busy with what shows on the surface. Hence God said: *“Indeed, the self is ever commanding to evil.”* (Qur'an 12:53)

Weigh the expression: He did not say the self “inclines” to evil at times, but that it “commands” it. Because its awareness, at this stage, reaches no further than what satisfies desire or wards off pain, even at the cost of life’s deeper meaning.

And yet this self is no curse, no final verdict upon a person. It is the natural starting point for everyone. From it the ascent begins; the road does not end at it.

The Reproaching Self: The Beginning of Awakening

Here the spirit begins to stir. A person starts to see the contradiction between what he does and what he knows he ought to be. He errs, then feels something in him refusing the error — not from fear for the image, but because truth has begun to enter his awareness. This reproach is not self-flagellation, but the first sign of life within the self.

So God swore by this self: *“And I swear by the self ever-reproaching.”* (Qur’an 75:2) It is as though the Qur’an points out that the moment of honest reproach is among a person’s most honorable moments — the moment he discovers he is not condemned to stay as he is, and that

within him waits another possibility, ready to be born.

The reproaching self knows the direction but has not yet grown firm in it. It is like someone who has come out of darkness into the first light of dawn: he sees the road at last, but still stumbles as he walks. It is, for that reason, a stage at once painful and beautiful — painful because it lays the flaws bare, beautiful because it is the first window the light enters by. Without it, the commanding self stays a closed room with no windows.

The Inspired Self: The Widening of Insight

At this stage the self begins to near its deeper reality. Awareness widens, insight clears, and a person begins to sense — of his own accord — what befits him and what does not, without needing long effort each time.

God says: *“By the soul and how He proportioned it, and inspired it [to know] its wickedness and its righteousness.”* (Qur’an 91:7-8) Inspiration here is not only theoretical knowledge, but an inner sensitivity toward the two roads: a road that puts out the light of the self, and a road that brightens it. So the inspired

self may err, but it does not drown easily. It may weaken, but it knows how to return. It begins to recoil from the ugly even where it had grown used to it, and to long for the beautiful even where it is costly.

Here the decisions clear, the vision steadies, and a person begins to feel within him a center firmer than the swings of the moment. It is a stage of intermittent clarity, but it paves the way for something deeper: tranquility.

The Tranquil Self: The Identity That Surrenders to God

This is the summit the whole journey heads toward. A self no longer run by inner chaos, nor toppled by the world's swings. Pain comes to it but does not uproot it. Blessings come to it but do not make it forget its direction. It has found its true homeland, knows where it heads, and the meaning of its existence has settled within it.

So God addressed it with an address unlike any other in the Qur'an: *"O tranquil self, return to your Lord, well-pleased and pleasing."* (Qur'an 89:27-28) Weigh the word: return. As though the whole journey were a return to the origin.

For the tranquil self does not wait for the world to complete it, having found its sufficiency in God. It is not terrified by the thought of death, no longer seeing it as a wall but as a door. And it does not run after what perishes, its gaze now fixed on what remains.

None embodied this sufficiency more eloquently than the Commander of the Faithful, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (peace be upon him).⁶ He wrote to his governor over Basra, ‘Uthmān ibn Ḥunayf, reminding him that the imam is a model in his asceticism before his authority: “Behold, your imam has contented himself, of his world, with his two worn garments, and of his food with two loaves. You are not able to do that — but aid me with scrupulousness and striving, with chastity and rectitude.” Notice how he did not ask them to match him in roughness of living, but to aid him with what is deeper: a scrupulousness that restrains, a striving that propels, a chastity that guards, a rectitude that sets straight. For true sufficiency is not the deprivation of the body, but the richness of a self that has found in God what it does not find in the world.

⁶Nahj al-Balāgha, from a letter of his (peace be upon him) to ‘Uthmān ibn Ḥunayf, his governor over Basra (Letter 45 in al-Sharīf al-Raḍī’s arrangement).

And tranquility here is not a passing feeling of serenity, but a complete identity a person carries with him to the other world.

But these four stations are not separate islands, nor steps climbed once and then settled into forever. They are overlapping waves a person passes through in a single day. He may begin his day with the commanding self, then the reproaching self wakes in him after an honest stand, then he touches something of inspiration in a hard decision, then he tastes a passing tranquility in a present prostration.

And with time, if he is sincere in his labor, the moments of clarity lengthen, the moments of heedlessness shorten, and his inner center strengthens little by little. Here the true meaning of the obligation of purification grows clear: it is no abolition of human nature, but an elevation of it; no war on the self, but a taking of its hand toward its possible completion.

Your First Project — and All Else Is a Branch of It

After all this, an inescapable practical question remains: if purification is the essence of your journey, where does it even fit in your crowded day? How do you practice it amid work,

family, commitments, appointments, fatigue, and responsibilities that barely leave a gap? Here the common mistake occurs.

For many treat purification as one more task that must compete with the rest inside the schedule — a new hour added to an already exhausted day. But purification did not come down to be squeezed into your schedule; it came to reorder the whole schedule.

Read your day calmly. You work for your provision, build your family, think about your future, tend your health, keep ties with relatives and friends, and try to run your life as best you can. These are the projects of your daily life, each demanding time and effort, each with its natural place.

But one project stays — for most people — absent amid the crowding: the forming of the self you will meet God with.

Ask yourself honestly: where does this project fall in your awareness? Only in the corner of the acts of worship? In a few counted minutes before sleep? In a passing thought that crosses you now and then? These are all lovely touches, but they do not suffice to make a human.

For the forming of the self is not an activity you practice for an hour and then close, but a framework that gives meaning to all the remaining hours. And when this understanding changes, the question itself changes. No longer “when do I purify my self?” but: “how do I make what I already do part of my purification?”

Here the Qur’anic answer comes with astonishing precision: *“But seek, through that which God has given you, the Home of the Hereafter; and do not forget your share of the world.”* (Qur’an 28:77) Weigh the words: through that which (fīmā).

God did not say: leave what He has given you and seek the Hereafter elsewhere. Nor: take the world and leave the Hereafter to the people of worship. He said: seek the Hereafter through what He has given you — from within your provision, your work, your family, your health, from within the very details of your life.

What is asked is not a second life added to your life, but a new intention that redirects the life you already live. And because the difference here is subtle, consider this simple scene: two men work in the same office, before the same screens, at the same tasks, for the same salary. The first sees in his work a job that preserves his

standing, his salary, his future. The second sees in the very same work an arena where he labors toward God. Every hour he spends before his screen, if his intention is upright, is a step on his road to his Lord, even with no visible remembrance or charity in his day. Mastery, truthfulness, excellence, the refusal to harm, the keeping of trust — all are fruits that grow from this upright intention, not conditions that precede it.

The outward work is one, but the two maps are wholly different. The first's hours pass gathering a balance for the world alone; the second's pass gathering both balances at once. So God says: *"Whoever desires the reward of this world — with God is the reward of this world and the Hereafter. And God is ever Hearing, Seeing."* (Qur'an 4:134)

Weigh the precision of the verse. The reward of the world is with God; He gives it to whoever desires it. But God is also able to combine for a person both the world and the Hereafter. The real difference is not in the size of the striving, but in what a person asks of his striving, and where he sets his heart.

So the verse ended with: and God is ever Hearing, Seeing — a reminder that the intention

is not lost, even when hidden from people, and at times from its bearer himself.

From here the true order of life grows clear. The center of your life is not your profession, nor your family, nor your health, nor even worship as a rite cut off from the rest of your day. The true center is your self, the self you will meet God with: *"He has prospered who purifies it, and he has failed who corrupts it."* (Qur'an 91:9-10)

And once this center settles in your awareness, the rest of things begin to turn around it in their right places. Your profession becomes an arena for labor, not merely a means to a salary. The family becomes a place where you learn mercy, patience, affection, and responsibility. Money turns from an end you chase into a trust you manage with awareness. Even rest and sleep take on a new meaning — not a flight from life, but a preparation for returning to the arena.

And then purification is no longer something you do at set times, but a way you live your whole life. You no longer hunt for extra time for it, because all your time has become able to enter its meaning. This is the true difference between a person who lives in the world only,

and a person who lives in the world... with his eye on God.

What Happens Within You When You Walk the Path?

After all that has passed in this chapter, the road may seem to you long and heavy. We have spoken of labor, purification, the veils, the direction, the map of the self, and the reordering of life from within. And it may cross your mind as you read: what does a person gain from all this striving? What actually happens when he sets out on this road?

The answer is that the first thing to change is not on the outside, but within. No sudden upheaval strikes the world around you, nor does life suddenly part to reveal an ideal reality. People are people, work is work, pressures do not vanish, losses do not cease. But something else begins, quietly, to take shape in your depths — something that gathers in silence until, in time, it becomes a new way of seeing the whole of life.

Consider what happens once you understand that your work is not merely a means to provision, but an arena of labor toward God. Outwardly, perhaps nothing changes: the same

office, the same colleagues, the same tasks, the same salary. But something in your chest changes. You are less drained by what does not please you, calmer toward what is delayed, more able to bear what used to throw you.

Not because you have turned superhuman, but because your inner center has begun to move from the world to God. Your attachment to results no longer eats at you as it did, for you have begun to see that you work, but it is God who runs affairs.

And when you understand that your family is not merely a space for rest or duty, but one of the arenas of your purification, a similar shift occurs. The word that used to provoke you becomes an opening for forbearance. The mistake that used to fray your nerves becomes a place for pardon and patience. Even the time you used to count a burden or a daily repetition begins to turn into a quiet planting in souls God has entrusted to you.

Money, too. Once you understand that it is a trust, not an identity, your fear of it and for it eases. Not because you came to hate money or threw away its value, but because you returned it to its right place. It is no longer a master

running your anxiety, but a tool in your hand that you use well and then leave with God.

All these small shifts are bound by one thing: stability. An inner stability that does not mean the absence of pain, nor the disappearance of losses, nor a life without turmoil, but means your center is no longer hung on what changes quickly. It has come to rest in a place deeper than the swings of the market, calmer than the swings of people, firmer than the swings of circumstance.

This is the meaning the Qur'an points to: *"Those who believe and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of God. Truly, in the remembrance of God do hearts find rest."* (Qur'an 13:28)

Notice: the Qur'an does not promise you here a standing victory, nor unbroken success, nor a life free of pain. It promises you tranquility.

So you may suffer... while at peace. You may lose... while at peace. You may stumble... while at peace. Because what governs your heart is no longer what happens to you, but the One who owns what happens to you.

But this is not the end of the journey, only its first threshold — the start of a longer

transformation whose tools and dimensions we will approach in the coming chapters. What ought to settle in your awareness now, before you leave this chapter, is that purification is not an ideal merely spoken of, but a road that genuinely yields its effect. Every step in it leaves something within you, and every sincere movement reshapes the self slowly, even before it reaches its great fruit in the Hereafter.

In Closing

We opened this chapter with a question the first chapter left hanging: if you have come to know the truth... with what do you begin?

Now, after this road, the answer is clear. Purification is not an extra item on the list of your life, but the framework that reorders the entire list. What the Qur'an calls "purification" is not a movement added to your life, but a movement that redirects your life from within.

We saw how this obligation was hidden behind two veils: an inner veil that breeds illusion within the self, and an outer veil that makes a person perform worship without entering its meaning. We saw, too, why the self-help shelf could not close the gap, for all the useful tools in it — because its map, in most

cases, ends at the self, while the map of purification sets out from the self... to arrive at God.

Then the Qur'an drew for us the map of the self on its journey: from the commanding, to the reproaching, to the inspired, to the tranquil. And it told us that the true center of life is not the profession, nor the family, nor accomplishment, nor even worship performed as a separate rite, but the self you will meet God with.

And once this center settles in a person's awareness, everything else begins to fall into order around it. Work takes its meaning, relationships theirs, money its place, time its value. And the fruit of the road begins to show in the world before the Hereafter: a tranquility that grows quietly in the chest and gives life a new shape, even before its circumstances change. Thus we will have returned this obligation to its natural place on your map.

And there remains the question that opens the door to what follows: if your self is your first project, what is this self even made of? What are the dimensions purification works within? And where does the true sculpting of the human begin? This is the gateway of the next chapter: Your Four Dimensions.

A Pause for Reflection

Before you fold this chapter, pause at its gravest question: if your self is your first project, and all else a branch of it, where does this project fall in the order of your actual day — not in your ideal ordering of it? And which of your projects, the ones you pour your hours into, serves the self you will meet your Lord with, and which runs apart from it as though you will never be asked about it?

A note to the reader: the first and second chapters together form the foundation the rest of the book stands on. In the first we set up three great ideas — “the second womb,” “the system of opposites,” and “time as your raw material.” In this one we set up three more: “purification as an obligation,” “the map of the self,” and “your self is your first project.”

What comes later builds on these six ideas together. So if you feel one of them has not yet settled in your awareness, give it longer, and return to it once more before you complete the road. For what comes after will build on what was built here.

Chapter Three • Your Four Dimensions



We closed the previous chapter on a discovery simple in its wording, vast in its effect: your self is your first project, and all else draws its meaning from it. But whoever takes that discovery seriously soon stands before another question: of what is this self composed? A single dimension, or many? And if many, which of them leads and which follows? Where does the sculpting begin?

For when you look at yourself honestly, you do not find a single, harmonious being. You find a crowd. A voice pushing you toward your comfort, and a voice reproaching you for it. A voice that calculates profit and loss, and a voice that whispers the truth lies elsewhere than you reckon. A voice that demands ease now, and a voice that demands effort for tomorrow. Were you a single entity, you would not know this crowding.

This multiplicity is no flaw. It is the trace of different dimensions meeting in you, working

together, acting upon one another. What you take for conflict within you may be a multiplicity you have not yet recognized.

You are four, not one. Four distinct dimensions gathered in you within a single system: one that guides, one that receives, one that translates, one that executes. When they are in harmony, your life comes out in a single direction. When they fall into disorder, you come out torn — knowing with your intellect what your heart wants, wanting with your heart what your spirit cannot bear, driving your body toward what none of them asks for.

This chapter opens the map of these four dimensions. It does not lay out each in full — each has its own chapter to come — but gathers them before you in a single scene, showing how they relate, and how your movement through this world is shaped from them.

And when you leave this chapter, you will have come to know what the entity that carries you through life is made of. That alone is a great step — perhaps the first step in knowing yourself as you truly are.

The Spirit: What Cannot Be Grasped by Your Instruments

Begin from the depth. There is in you something unlike the rest of you. No scalpel touches it, no microscope detects it, no science bounds it, for it is not of the kind that is seen, touched, and measured. Something present before your body was complete, and remaining after this body returns to the dust. Something that does not age, nor sicken, nor tire of yearning for its origin, because it carries within it a memory older than this whole world. This something is the spirit.

The body is a vehicle for crossing this world, the intellect an instrument of understanding and analysis, the heart a window for feeling and reception — but the spirit is the essence by which all these dimensions live and are ordered toward a single direction. Gather the intelligence of the intellect, the strength of the body, a lifetime of experience, and the relationships of people, build from them a complete identity, and there would still remain within you something none of it explains: something searching for a meaning deeper than success, a serenity wider than pleasure, a permanence time does not defeat.

And because the spirit is of a different kind, the instruments of this world do not grasp it. So the Qur'an singled it out with a remark that gives you pause:

"And they ask you about the spirit. Say: The spirit is from the command of my Lord." (Qur'an 17:85)

Weigh the expression: He did not say "from the creation of my Lord," but from the command of my Lord. The difference is subtle and deep. Creation runs in time, bound by the laws of matter — it grows, changes, perishes; the command comes from a higher world, realized by a divine word not bounded by what we know of this existence. So the spirit was not described as the body was; rather it was said of it:

"And I breathed into him of My spirit." (Qur'an 15:29)

Pause at this attribution: of My spirit. It is an attribution of honor and ennoblement, not a sharing in essence, yet it lifts the human to a wondrous station — a being of clay carrying within him a breath that came from a higher world. The honor here is not the self's honor from itself, but the honor of what God deposited

in it out of grace and mercy. Strip that breath away, and nothing remains of the body but matter returning to the earth it came from.

And because the spirit came from a higher world, it never fully settles in this lower one. However much of the world you are given, a yearning that will not subside stays in it. It is drawn to beauty, to truth, to serenity, to meaning — not because it is deficient, but because it remembers. It remembers a home your eye did not see in this life, but which it witnessed before it, and it carries in its depths the echo of that first encounter.

And what the spirit remembers, the Qur'an calls the *fiṭra* (innate disposition). He said:

*"The innate disposition of God
upon which He created people."
(Qur'an 30:30)*

The *fiṭra* is not a passing moral leaning, nor an acquired religious instinct, but the spirit's first identity, prior to teaching, experience, and language itself. The spirit does not learn the oneness of God as the intellect learns a new idea; it remembers it. It does not learn the truth from outside; it recognizes it when it sees it. And when a person returns to God, he brings nothing

from outside himself, but draws out something deposited in him from the beginning.

This deposit is older than your own birth — older than the body, than memory, than language. It witnessed a moment your awareness does not recall, but whose echo your spirit still carries:

*“And [recall] when your Lord
took from the children of Adam,
from their loins, their descendants,
and made them testify over
themselves: ‘Am I not your Lord?’
They said: ‘Yes, we have testified.’”
(Qur’an 7:172)*

They said “yes” before they knew speech, for the spirit needed no proof; the truth stood before it unveiled. Then it descended into the world, and the clamor of life veiled the scene, but the echo of that “yes” did not die. It still stirs in you when your *fiṭra* recoils from injustice before the intellect can justify it, when you answer the truth before you analyze it, when a verse you suddenly hear shakes you and you feel it tells you nothing new but reminds you of something ancient.

And yet this *fiṭra*, for all its purity, can be covered over. Not erased — the breath is not

erased — but the dust of habits, the pressure of environment, and the clamor of expectations may pile upon it, until a person becomes like one peering into a dusty mirror: he sees the shadow of himself, not himself. So purification came — as you saw in the previous chapter — not to create a new *fiṭra*, but to wipe the dust from the first, and return to the spirit the clarity it had lost.

The more the spirit is purified, the nearer it draws to the light it came from; and the nearer it draws to that light, the nearer it comes to knowing itself and to the yearning that carries it to its Lord. So the spirit is not the lowest thing in you, but the highest. What comes after it — heart, intellect, body — are but the instruments that carry what it knows into life... or veil it from it.

The Heart: The Mirror of the Spirit

If the spirit is the light, the heart is the mirror. The spirit knows, and the heart receives. The spirit is from the world of command, and the heart is the bridge that carries what it knows into your awareness and your life. So only as much of the light of his spirit reaches a person as the clarity of his heart allows. A clear mirror

reflects the light in full, a dusty one reflects it faintly, a cracked one brings it out distorted. The mirror in itself neither adds to the light nor lessens it; it only shows it as it is, or hides it by what has clung to it.

The heart we speak of here is not the muscle that pumps the blood, but that hidden center from which life itself flows. If you want its place in the Qur'an's conception, read His words:

*“Indeed, in that is a reminder
for whoever has a heart.” (Qur'an
50:37)*

Weigh the expression: “for whoever has a heart,” as though there are humans without hearts. Not that the muscular pump is missing in them, but that the mirror no longer receives. So much dust has gathered on it that the light is veiled — the image remains, but the perception does not. The heart, in the Qur'an's balance, is not an organ you own but a state of reception: present when it is clear, absent when it is disabled.

The heart's position between the spirit and the intellect is a delicate one. The intellect knows things; the heart lives them. The intellect analyzes the truth; the heart tastes it. The

intellect may infer the existence of God by proofs and evidences, but the heart knows Him by serenity. So a person may know his Lord with his intellect — memorize His attributes and names, argue for them — and still something in him remains untasted. But if he knows Him with his heart, he bows in a prostration whose secret the intellect cannot explain.

From here the heart was a wondrous place in the human, for it is the only place where time meets eternity, the world meets the Hereafter, and the human meets God. Through it passes what the spirit knows; in it that knowledge is reflected onto your awareness; from it the whole journey begins. The great transformations in a person often begin in the heart, and only afterward does the intellect grasp them and put them into words. Not because the intellect is of little account, but because the heart is the place where meanings are born before they turn into ideas.

And because the heart is a mirror, it takes on the color of whatever passes over it. A word said to you at the wrong time may shut the heart for days; a sincere word may open in it a door long closed. A glance plants safety in it, another leaves a wound. The heart is moved by all that

enters it through the gates of the senses, and by all that rises within it of intention, idea, and desire. So its clarity does not stay fixed; it changes with time — not by waiting, but by responding.

Among the deepest things about the heart is that it is the most truthful thing in you. The intellect may convince you that you are well, while the heart knows you are not. The intellect may call something logical, while the heart feels it is not right. The intellect may speak to you of your success, while the heart knows your success has not yet reached your spirit. Because the heart is moved not by words but by reality. Every journey of awareness begins in it, and returns to it.

And because it is a mirror, it shifts between light and darkness. Light here is no vague metaphysical state, but a consistency between what the spirit knows, what the intellect decides, and what the body lives. Darkness, by contrast, is not absolute evil, but the absence of clarity. Things pile up in the heart that were never said, never understood, never forgiven, never mended, until it suffocates. Among the signs of light is that the heart softens; among the signs of darkness, that it hardens. Softness is not

weakness, but the power to receive the truth without breaking. Hardness is not strength, but the loss of the power to feel.

So the Qur'anic ruling came decisively:

*“For indeed, it is not the eyes
that go blind, but it is the hearts
within the breasts that go blind.”
(Qur'an 22:46)*

For true blindness is not the blindness of the eye. The eye sees the image; the heart sees the meaning. One who has lost his sight may lose the images, yet keep a heart that sees what the seeing do not. But one who has lost his heart may see everything, and not see a single meaning. So the true loss, in the Qur'an's balance, is the loss of the mirror, not the loss of the eye.

With this, the image of the heart is complete: a mirror between the spirit and awareness, receiving the light from above it and carrying it to what lies below. Its clarity is the first condition for the light reaching the intellect and the body. And working on it — cleaning it, softening it, guarding it from the dust of attachments — is the core of the purification that passed in the previous chapter. For the spirit

may carry the light in full, but it is the heart that decides: will that light reach your life... or stay veiled behind the mirror?

The Intellect: The Translator of the Heart

If the spirit is the light and the heart the mirror, the intellect is the translator. It does not create the meaning, but renders it into a language you can understand and live by. It does not know the road of itself, but reads its signs and turns them into thought and decision. The whole of a person's daily movement — his decisions, plans, choices, his reading of what happens to him — runs in the layer of the intellect, after the spirit has known and the heart has received. So the intellect looks, from outside, like the leader, though it is often the last to whom the decision arrives.

And because the intellect speaks in a loud voice, it sometimes deceives its owner. It analyzes, arranges, builds arguments, and persuades itself it has reached the truth by its own power. But reflect on the great moments of tranquility in your life, and you find they are not born in it. No one deduces serenity by deduction. Serenity passes through the heart before the

intellect frames it, so the intellect discovers it once it has settled, and grants it words. What the intellect does, in many cases, is not the making of the decision, but its phrasing.

So the Qur'an draws attention to all the instruments of knowledge, not the intellect alone:

*"Indeed, the hearing, the sight,
and the heart — about all those
one will be questioned." (Qur'an
17:36)*

Notice: the hearing, the sight, and the heart. The intellect did not come on its own. The heart (fu'ād) is named as the center of reception, and the senses as the gates. The intellect was present implicitly, the servant that translates what enters. So the responsibility falls not on the translator alone, but on what was admitted to it in the first place.

And because the intellect is a translator, it is shaped by what is left to it to translate. It is not born complete, but built from the outside in. A word heard in childhood may become a rule for judging the self and the world. A pain never understood may turn into an entire system for avoiding life. A passing praise may become a

measure of worth, a repeated blame a standing fear. Society plants its assumptions, the media its images, people their expectations, and the intellect gathers it all in silence, until a lens forms within it through which it sees the world.

Here the trouble begins. Because the intellect loves consistency, it clings to what it believed early. Once it adopts an idea, it begins hunting for what confirms it and weakening what contradicts it. It magnifies the agreeing signals and shrinks the opposing ones, until a person lives inside a “mental version” of reality, taking it for the complete truth, when it is one reading among many. This is what the Qur’an condenses in a deep word:

*“Say: Each works according to
his own disposition.” (Qur’an
17:84)*

Disposition (shākila) is no moral fault a person is blamed for, but the inner structure that formed in him: the way he learned to see, understand, and interpret. It is his own lens. But it is not a closed fate. What was built can be rebuilt. Every sincere idea, every moment of clarity, every deep reading, every awakening leaves a new trace in the disposition, so the lens

shifts by degrees. The intellect is no fixed rock, but clay reshaped by what enters it.

From here comes the danger of the intellect cut off from the spirit and the heart, for it falls into an ancient trap: taking what it sees and measures for the whole truth. Reflect on His words:

*“They know what is apparent of
the worldly life, but of the
Hereafter they are heedless.”
(Qur'an 30:7)*

He did not call them ignorant; He said: they know. But their knowledge was confined to the apparent, to a single layer of the scene. And the intellect content with the apparent is not weak, but reductive. It sees the universe as a machine, life as a coincidence, the human as matter, then colors every detail of its day with that vision, until it takes the apparent for the whole.

So the trouble is not in knowledge, but in its reduction. Knowledge discloses the how, not the why. It tells you how the stars move, not why. It studies the body, not the spirit. It analyzes the brain, not the conscience. And the intellect that makes the instruments of science its only lens

for existence loses everything the microscope does not capture.

And once the intellect receives from the heart, which receives from the spirit, its role is complete. It is no longer a separate master, but a bridge, carrying what the spirit knows and what the heart feels into a language that moves the body in reality. Here each layer returns to its natural place in the system.

Any disorder in this chain is reflected on the rest of it. An intellect that translates with no heart to receive may render its own illusion as certainty. Its owner may suppose he sees clearly, when he sees only the lens he made for himself. So the intellect's task is not to lead alone, but to stay joined to the light that came from above it.

The Body: Your Vehicle to God

If the spirit is from the command of your Lord, the heart a receiving mirror, and the intellect a translator, the body is what brings all this out into action. What the spirit knows, what the heart receives, what the intellect translates, stays inward unless a body moves. So the body — though it is the last of the human's layers — is the door through which all your knowledge comes out into the world. In it meanings turn to

words, intentions to deeds, love to giving, faith to prostration.

And yet the body — contrary to what many suppose — is not you. It is your vehicle. You ride it to cross this world; it carries you from place to place, eats, sleeps, tires, heals, then perishes. You, though, are something deeper than that. Your identity is not the body you inhabit, but the spirit that inhabits it. Whoever confuses the rider with the vehicle loses the journey from its very start.

So the verse gives you pause:

*“Who perfected everything He
created and began the creation of
the human from clay.” (Qur’an
32:7)*

Weigh the word “began.” The human began from clay, and did not end at it. The body is the beginning of formation, not its end. Whoever settled at the body settled at the beginning, like one who halts at a station on the road and takes it for his final destination.

And because the body is a vehicle, it was created to serve, not to lead. But many invert the system, making it the master, until their day revolves around its comfort, its appetites, its

demands. Then the whole chain turns over: the spirit follows the heart, the heart follows the intellect, and the intellect enslaves itself to justify what the body craves. So the entire journey comes to serve a vehicle that does not know the road.

And yet the body, for all its simplicity, is truthful by nature. It is not good at acting for long. What runs within shows upon it, whether you will it or not. The fear of the spirit becomes a tightness in the chest; the anger of the heart, a tension in the shoulders; the confusion of the intellect, sleeplessness at night; serenity, a spaciousness in the soul; joy, a lightness in the step. So the body is not a cover that hides you, but a mirror that exposes you. And the surest way to know a person's standing with himself is not in what he says of it, but in what his limbs do.

So the Qur'an draws attention to conduct as a mirror of the inner, not an independent decision:

*"Say: If you possessed the
treasuries of my Lord's mercy, you
would withhold them out of fear of
spending." (Qur'an 17:100)*

The hand here withholds, but the withholding is not the hand's decision — it is the heart's fear. The confident heart gives; the fearful heart clenches. The body does not act on its own, but conveys what is in it. Whoever wants to mend the fruit without working on the tree wearies himself for nothing.

It is related of the Prophet (peace be upon him) that he said:⁷ "Indeed, in the body there is a morsel of flesh: if it is sound, the whole body is sound, and if it is corrupt, the whole body is corrupt — indeed, it is the heart." This sentence reveals the entire law. The body does not move on its own, but by what passes to it. Its soundness is a fruit, its corruption a fruit, and working on it begins from the inside before the outside.

But none of this means the body is of little account. It is a trust. It was not created to be enslaved, nor to be degraded, but to serve the journey. You feed it what suffices it, rest it when it tires, preserve its strength, and grant it its right of sleep, nourishment, and movement — not because it is the end, but because it is the vehicle that carries you to your end. The body's

⁷Agreed upon; narrated by al-Bukhārī in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* (Book of Faith) and by Muslim (no. 1599) on the authority of al-Nu'mān ibn Bashīr.

right upon you is that you respect it, not that you worship it.

And once a person knows the place of his body in this way, something in his daily movement changes. His words gain weight, coming out of a calmer chest. His steps gain firmness, setting out from a decision rather than from turmoil. His prayer gains presence, for the body in it no longer works alone. Even his daily work gains a new meaning, no longer a bare motion but the translation of an intention and a direction.

Here the scene is complete: what was scattered within comes out, outwardly, as a single life.

The body is no veil on the road to God, but the bridge by which you cross to Him — not a severance from the journey, but its vehicle. What you do with it, and through it, is what gives what is within you a visible form. The body, by this understanding, is no longer a burden upon the spirit, but a partner in its journey, a vehicle that carries it to the One who created it.

Harmony: When the Dimensions Work as One

The image of the human was not completed when we took him apart into dimensions, but when we put him back together. Taking apart is a method of understanding, not an end. To truly know yourself, do not look at the four dimensions as separate parts, but as overlapping layers, each receiving from what is above it and passing to what is below.

Imagine the system as a flow descending from top to bottom. The spirit at the summit, turned toward its Lord, carrying the light of the fiṭra and the memory of the covenant. The heart below it, receiving what it carries. The intellect below the heart, translating what reaches it into an understood meaning. The body at the bottom, bringing all of it out into action. The light descends from the world of command, crosses the four layers, then appears as a life. This is the human when he works as he was created to.

But the system does not always hold its natural direction. When harmony holds, the layers fall into a single line, and the meaning descends from the spirit to the body undistorted on the way. The heart receives what the spirit

knows, the intellect understands what passes to it, the body executes what has become upright in awareness. In that moment there is no longer a distance between you and yourself. You do what you know, and know what you do.

And when harmony breaks, the layers come loose. You know with your intellect what your heart wants, your heart demands what your spirit cannot rest in, and you drive your body toward what none of them asks. Each dimension works alone, each in its own direction. Movement comes out, but with no center. You sleep and wake tired. You reach a goal and its elation does not last. You gather, and find within you no one to receive what you gathered — because the body moved, but the meaning it moved for never reached the spirit. And movement without arrival is fatigue without fruit.

Disorder takes many forms. The most common is that the intellect grows independent of what is above it. It raises its voice, marshals its evidences, decides, and drives the body to execute, with nothing descending to it from the heart or the spirit. This is an intellect rendering its own illusion as certainty: its owner reckons he sees, while he walks in darkness.

Another form is that the heart grows independent of what is above it, receiving from the world directly, taking on its colors, then passing to the intellect what has colored it, and the intellect re-translates the distorted image as truth. The body, too, may grow independent, working by the drive of bare appetite, becoming a leader after it was created a vehicle.

The Qur'an gathers all this harmony under a single name: the sound heart.

*"The Day when neither wealth
nor children will avail, except one
who comes to God with a sound
heart." (Qur'an 26:88-89)*

Soundness here is not freedom from disease, but consistency in the system: a heart that receives from the spirit unveiled, passes to the intellect undistorted, and surrenders to the body without contradiction. And when you come to God with a sound heart, you come to Him not with a clever intellect alone, nor with a body that labored long, nor with feelings that lived alone, but with a human whose direction is whole.

And because this soundness does not happen by chance, it is a project — a lifelong project in which each dimension is refined, then

reconnected to what is above it and below it. The purification of the spirit lights the heart. The clarity of the heart lights the intellect. The soundness of the intellect guides the body. Each layer serves what is below it, and draws its light from what is above it.

This is the balance that carries the self toward the station that passed in the previous chapter: the tranquil self. For tranquility is not a feeling that enters from outside, but a harmony that rises from within. When the dimensions work as one, the clamor quiets, the direction comes upright, and you find yourself nearer to the One who created you.



The Measure of Striving Within the Limits of What Is Given

But the image of the human is not completed by knowing his dimensions alone, for these very dimensions are not distributed among people in a single form. Though the origin is one, the capacities, energies, and starting points are not equal.

Before we leave this chapter, another measure remains worth settling in your

awareness. When we said the human is a system of four dimensions, we did not say those dimensions are equal among people. The spirit, as the divine breath, is a shared origin whose essence does not differ from one human to another. What is besides it is not so.

The body differs in strength and weakness, in health and ailment, in capacity and endurance.⁸ The intellect differs in its structure, the speed of its processing, its way of understanding the world. The heart differs in its emotional capacity, in what experiences have lodged in it of tranquility or anxiety, strength or fragility, and in its power to endure or its swiftness to break. These differences a person does not make in the first place; some he inherits, and some are shaped by his environment, his experiences, and what surrounded him from his earliest beginnings.

This means, too, that people do not begin the journey from the same point. Among them is one

⁸Twin and adoption studies estimate that between thirty and sixty percent of the differences between people in personality and temperament traits is attributable to genetic factors, with the remainder shaped by environment and experience. This diagnoses the difference in starting points; it does not negate responsibility for striving. See: R. A. Power & M. Pluess, *Heritability Estimates of the Big Five Personality Traits Based on Common Genetic Variants*, Translational Psychiatry, 2015.

who begins with a calmer heart, one who begins with a more troubled intellect, one who enters life carrying wounds he did not choose, or circumstances he did not make, or an environment that shaped part of his disposition before he owned his awareness. So do not read one human's journey by the measure of another's, and it is not just that the burdened striver be set on the same scale as one whose road began eased.

From here a deep face of divine justice becomes clear. The true distinction between people rests not on the size of capacities, nor on the form of apparent results, but on the striving within the limits of what a person was given of ability, circumstance, and capacity. Worth, in God's balance, springs not from the form of what you reached, but from the sincerity of what you expended to reach it. A human of limited capacities may expend an existential effort greater than another granted wider ability and easier circumstances, even if its trace looks, to the eye, the smaller.

So the Qur'an placed the measure not in what you possessed, but in what you strove for:

*"And that the human will have
nothing but what he strives for,*

*and that his striving will be seen.”
(Qur'an 53:39-40)*

And it affirms this measure in the scene of the reckoning:

*“Indeed, the Hour is coming — I
almost keep it hidden — so that
every soul may be recompensed for
what it strives for.” (Qur'an 20:15)*

With this understanding, the difference of people in their capacities is no longer an entry to arrogance, nor to shallow comparisons, but an entry to a deeper understanding of responsibility. The question that separates people is not: what were you given? but: what did you do with what you were given?

Here the role of the will emerges — not as an abstract psychological force, but as the place where what a person was given turns into what he makes of himself. For the will is the bridge between capacity and striving, between what a person was born with and what he chose. Later chapters will give this concept its due, but it deserves to settle in your awareness from now: capacity without will stays a possibility, and striving without will stays a motion.

But the difference of capacities does not abolish responsibility, just as the disparity of starting points does not exempt from choice. In a world where circumstances are not equal, striving remains the place where what a person was given meets what he makes of himself.

From here a deeper reality becomes clear. The difference of capacities, the disparity of starting points, the divergence of results — none is a flaw in the system of existence, but part of its structure. Life was not built upon sameness, nor designed as an arena of formal equality. It was created for movement, for friction, for the difference that discloses, and for the opposites that form. And the human does not mature outside this system, but within it. So he is not asked to abolish the opposites, but to learn how to ascend within them.



In Closing

We began this chapter with a simple question: of what is your self composed? And now, having crossed the four dimensions, the picture is clear. You are no simple being of a single layer, but a system of overlapping dimensions: a spirit from the command of your

Lord, carrying your fiṭra and the memory of your covenant; a heart that receives what the spirit conveys, taking on the color of its clarity or its dust; an intellect that translates what the heart receives into an understood meaning, working by the disposition built in it over time; and a body that brings out what the translation has completed into action — a trust you carry on the road, not an identity that sums up your reality.

These dimensions are not severed parts, but a system that works together. The light descends from above, passes through each layer, then comes out as motion. When they are in harmony, you do what you know and know what you do, and find no distance between you and yourself. When they fall into disorder, the layers come loose, so movement comes out with no center, work with no meaning, fatigue with no fruit. The Qur'an names the state of this harmony the sound heart, and makes it what avails on the Day when neither wealth nor children avail.

And because soundness among the dimensions does not happen by chance, it is a lifelong project. By this ordering the self descends, little by little, toward the station of the tranquil self that passed in the previous chapter — tranquility being not a passing feeling, but a

state of inner consistency between what you know, what you want, what you think, and what you do.

Thus you return to what you began in the previous chapter: your self is your first project. But you now know of what this project is composed, how its layers work, and why it is not completed except by their harmony.

From this moment, the question changes. You no longer ask “who am I?” but: “which dimension has overcome the rest of me? And which dimension have I neglected until its voice grew weak?”

And there remains the question that opens the door to what follows: now that you know your four dimensions, what are the forces that work upon them from outside? What are the laws that push them into motion, disclose their sincerity, test their soundness? This is what the next chapter opens: The Laws of Existence.

* * *

A Pause for Reflection

Before you fold this chapter, look at your four dimensions as they are in you today, not as you wish them to be: which has overpowered the

rest, so that it now dictates to you? An intellect that analyzes everything until it put out your heart? A heart led by impulse with no insight? A body turned master after it was created a vehicle? A spirit so covered with dust its voice has nearly faded? And which of these dimensions waits for you to return it to its place before you close this page?



A note to the reader: what we presented here is an introduction to the four dimensions, not their full detail. Each deserves a chapter that gives it its due, and those chapters will come after “The Laws of Existence,” which illuminates the forces that work upon you from outside before we enter the detail of each dimension within you. So if a question about a particular dimension — spirit, heart, intellect, or body — gives you pause in this chapter, do not hasten the answer. The questions that sprout now prepare the soil for what is to come.

Chapter Four • The Laws of Existence



Part One: Introduction

We closed the previous chapter on a discovery simple in its phrasing, deep in its effect: your four dimensions — spirit, heart, intellect, and body — work as a single system descending from above to below. That is what runs within you.

But you do not live within yourself alone. There is a world around you, pushing and pulling, easing some matters and hardening others, granting what you did not ask and withholding what you did. And amid all this you wonder: is what happens to me chance? Is there even a system that governs this universe, or is it a chaos driven by unseen forces?

The question is not only philosophical but practical, for your view of what happens to you decides how you respond to it. One who sees the universe as chaos lives in perpetual anxiety, because everything could collapse at any

moment. One who sees it as an order working by laws understands his place within it, and so is at ease, moves with awareness, and chooses his battles.

The universe does not work by mood, but by laws (sunan).

The sunan — in the language of the Qur'an — are the fixed divine laws by which this existence runs. They are not merely physical rules, but an integrated system spanning the motion of the planets, the growth of cells, the forming of embryos, the rise and fall of nations, and your own experiences in your day. Laws that favor no one, that do not lapse for a single moment, that do not change from one person to another.

*“You will never find any change
in the way of God, and you will
never find any alteration in the
way of God.” (Qur'an 35:43)*

Weigh the two emphases: “you will never find any change,” “you will never find any alteration.” This is decisiveness in a statement, not a hint or a possibility. The Qur'an repeats the idea in many places, so it may settle in a person's awareness: the universe rests upon order, not upon mood, nor emotion, nor favoritism.

And because the order is precise, everything in it has its measure and its wisdom:

“Indeed, We created everything according to a measure.” (Qur’an 54:49)

Nothing in you is excess, and nothing is lacking. Every atom of your existence, every event in your day, every one of your circumstances, falls within this order. Truly reflect on this, and something would change in the way you receive life.

But the human, for the most part, does not see the laws. He sees the surface of events and judges by it: success here, failure there, luck that struck me, luck that passed me by. Then he builds upon that surface whole feelings — reproach, complaint, comparison, anxiety — all springing from a reduced view of what happens.

Let us set down a definition we agree on before going further:

A divine law (sunna): “a fixed cosmic law that God wove into existence, running upon all beings with justice and without favoritism, that does not change and does not alter.”

This definition carries three features worth a pause:

Fixity: the law does not change with the change of persons or times. The law of causes today is the law of causes a thousand years ago, and so it will remain.

Generality: the law favors no one. It runs upon the believer and the non-believer, the rich and the poor, those we know and those we do not.

Wisdom: the law is no blind operation. It is laid down with knowledge and subtlety, even when its wisdom is at times hidden from us.

But if the universe works by a precise order, why do you sometimes feel that life is “against you”?

This feeling is real; do not deny it. It comes when a project you labored over for years collapses, or when you lose someone you loved, or when you open your phone in the morning to news that upends your day. You lift your gaze to the sky and ask in your silence: why me? why now? what did I do to deserve this?

The answer is not in the event, but in the angle you view it from.

You look at the event from inside it, in its moment. You see what you lost and not what is being built. You see the wall and not the door behind it. You see the fall and not that you were sliding toward something worse had you kept walking. The laws, meanwhile, work on a scale far wider than the angle of your sight — in time, in consequences, in what situations disclose about you, in what is mended within you after something outside you breaks.

From here springs the paradox: your life runs by a perfect order, yet you feel it as chaos. Not because the order is missing, but because your angle is narrow. So the first step toward tranquility is not that what happens to you change, but that your view of what happens change.

In this chapter we will uncover the features of this order in five steps.

We open first with the law of causality, which affirms that everything in this universe happens by a cause — not by chance, nor in vain. Then to the law of capacities, where you discover that your qualities are no additions to you from outside, but your very self. Then, in the law of the single will, we understand how God's outpouring is one, descending upon all, while the

vessels receive it in differing measures. In the law of mutual repulsion we see how God set the opposites to preserve balance by them. And finally we uncover the illusion of evil, and see why evil is no existence standing on its own, but an absence of light.

And when you leave this chapter, you will have come to know not only the laws, but your place within them. And the place — as you saw in the third chapter — is half the answer.

Part Two: The Law of Causality

Reflect on your ordinary day. You wake at a set time because you set the alarm. You sip your coffee and feel alert because the caffeine took effect. You drive safely because you keep the rules of the road. You open your phone and it responds because you charged it yesterday. All of this passes without your questioning it, because in your prior awareness sits a silent rule you scarcely feel: everything happens by a cause.

Try to defy that rule for a moment, and you find yourself before situations you cannot accept. Tell someone his car set off with no one touching it, and he objects. Say a house burned with no cause, and he demands an investigation. The

mind is fashioned to seek the cause, because the cause is the essence of the order.

This reality, which the mind sets out from spontaneously in daily life, scholars call the law of causality:

The law of causality: “every contingent existent in the universe has a cause that brought it into being, and this law never lapses.”

And because the law is foundational in existence, the Qur’an does not argue over it, but builds upon it. You saw in the introduction His words, Indeed, We created everything according to a measure — everything, with no exception. All in existence, around you and within you and befalling you, has a measure and an equation, springs from a cause and yields an effect. There is no chance in the universe, no randomness in your life. What you take for chance is simply a cause you did not see.

So why does it matter that you understand this?

Because much of your distress in life springs from forgetting it. Events happen, you react, and you forget that behind them lies a chain. You look at a man who succeeded and say “luck.” At another who failed and say “circumstance.” At

yourself when you suffer and say “why me?” — as though events descended from a random sky, choosing whom they will.

The truth is they do not descend at random. Every result in your life has a cause — or a chain of causes — some in your hands, some outside them. You cannot change all the causes, but you can change some. And the difference between a person who understands causality and one who forgets it is this: the first focuses on what he can change, while the second drains himself complaining of what he cannot.

But does causality abolish the will of God?

A fair question, and the matter is often confused here. If everything has a cause, then where is God? Did He make the universe and leave it to run on its own, like a clock once it is wound?

No. God is the One who brought the law of causality into being, and the One who keeps it standing in every moment. The causes do not work by themselves, but by His permission; they are His means in the governance of the universe. When He wills to perform an act, He performs it through the causes, not in their absence.

This understanding guards you from two common errors. The first: to see the universe as a machine severed from God, working on its own. The second: to expect God to do things for you without causes, so you abandon striving and content yourself with supplication. The correct view: the causes exist and are real, and God exists and governs. You take to the causes because this is your law; you rely upon God because He is the Causer of causes. As ‘Alī (peace be upon him) said: “God has refused to let matters run except through their causes.”

But the cause is not always clear.

This too belongs to the understanding. You see the near cause: the rain falls, so the crop grows. But you do not see the distant cause: what made the rain fall on this particular day, on this particular land, in this particular measure? The chain of causes runs out beyond what you can encompass. So when something befalls you whose cause you do not grasp, the flaw is not in the absence of a cause, but in the limits of your sight.

Reflect on what Imam ‘Alī (peace be upon him) says — condensing wisdom into two words:⁹

⁹Nahj al-Balāgha, among the short aphorisms; its fuller wording: “I knew God, glory be to Him, by the dissolution of

“I knew God by the undoing of my firm intentions.” That is, he would often resolve upon something with full certainty, then find the resolve dissolving, unfulfilled — and understood from that that behind his resolve was a greater resolve, and that the final cause is not his will, but the will of God running through the causes.

So what does this mean for your day?

Three practical things.

First: when something you dislike befalls you, do not rush to judge “why.” Seek the causes first — in yourself, your surroundings, your prior decisions. Begin from what is in your hand, not from what is above it.

Second: do not ask God to abolish the laws for you. Ask Him to ease the causes for you, to open doors for you, to turn other causes away from you. This is a more mature understanding of supplication, which we will return to.

Third: when you do not understand why what happened happened, know that the cause exists even if it is hidden from you. Its absence from

resolves, the undoing of knots, and the breaking of determinations.” It is also narrated by al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq in al-Khiṣāl with his chain from Imam al-Ṣādiq, from his forefathers (peace be upon them), from the Commander of the Faithful (peace be upon him).

your sight does not mean its absence from existence. And that spares you a long stretch of anxiety.

And once this idea settles in you, your relationship with events changes. You no longer see them as random raids from an obscure fate, but as fruits of causes — some you made, some others made, some the hand of God made. In every case there is a logic behind them, even where you do not grasp it now.

This understanding opens a new door: if everything is by a measure, then what is your place, specifically, in this measuring out? Why these particular qualities, and not others? Why do you possess what you possess, and lack what you lack?

These questions have an answer. That is what we will open in the next part.

Part Three: Your Capacities Are Your Existence

There is a question that visits the human in his hour of weakness, or as he stands long before the mirror, or when he looks at his childhood peers and finds they have reached what he has not, so it assaults him like an

accusation with a complaint folded inside: why was I created like this? Why am I not taller, sharper of mind, more resourceful, more handsome of face? Why was I born in this house and not another, in this time and not another, in this town and not a more spacious one? Why do I have the limits I have, while another has wider ones? On its surface the question seems addressed to God, seeking an answer from Him; in reality it is addressed to our own misunderstanding of the nature of existence itself.

In hidden folds of our conception, we imagine that the human is created first as a bare, abstract self stripped of qualities, and then qualities are cast upon him from outside — this one takes a measure of beauty, that one a measure of intelligence, a third receives what the first two did not — and fortunes differ among people like cards dealt in a game where some win and some lose. This hidden picture is what makes the question “why am I like this?” look legitimate on its surface, balanced in phrasing, just in its raising. But in its depth it rests upon an illusion with no footing in the reality of existence.

For the existential truth runs deeper than it first appears: your qualities are not something added to your self; your qualities are your very self. There is no wall between you and what is in you, making you an abstract being on one side and the qualities attached beings on another. The features of your face, for instance, are your face itself — not something added to it, but its boundaries and descriptions. The body is its own extension, size, and mass; nothing else. And so are you. Your features, your dispositions, your limits, your aptitudes, your inclinations, your strengths and weaknesses — all of them together are “you.” Remove a single one, or swap it for another, and “you” would no longer remain as you are; an entirely different person would appear.

Reflect slowly on the origin of your existence. You did not descend upon the world all at once, waiting for qualities to be added; from the first moment you were the result of a chain of precise causes whose details none knows but the One who measured them. A single sperm cell out of hundreds of millions, chosen by the balance of decree over its brothers. A single egg out of hundreds your mother’s ovaries released across years of her life. A particular moment in time — delayed by one second, or advanced by one, and

the one entering the scene would have been a human other than you. A whole biological environment, with its pressure, temperature, and genes, all conspiring to shape you, not another. Had a single element in this long chain changed, another human would have come out into the world, perhaps bearing your name — but he is not you.

And what we have established is not particular to you, but a rule running through everything in this existence. Every created thing in the universe — from the atom to the galaxy, from the stone to the human — has a cause that brought it into being, and that cause is what determined its qualities in the very act of bringing it into being. There is no separation between the bringing-into-being and the qualities. The law governing all this is the law of causality, or what is called cause and effect: a strict system God embedded in the constitution of existence, setting for everything a cause it arises from, and for every cause its natural effects. Reflect: if a stone fell on an egg and did not break it, the stone would not be a stone, and the egg would not be an egg. The stone breaks the egg because breaking is what makes the stone a stone in its true qualities, and the egg breaks because breaking is what makes the egg

an egg within its natural limits. Thus beings interact according to the qualities they bear, and this very interaction is what produces the laws that govern the universe.

Here a hidden phrase of the utmost depth is disclosed to you. The laws and divine ways we spoke of — by which the universe runs — are not, in reality, independent entities standing on their own, imposed upon beings from outside. They are a reflection of the interaction of the qualities of the beings themselves: derived from their behavior, not imposed upon them. Gravity is no law written in a cosmic book that forced masses to attract; it is a description of what masses do by their nature. Water descends from high to low not because a law compels it, but because that is what the nature of water and the nature of gravity require in their interaction. Fire burns not because a “law” commands it, but because that is what makes fire fire.

The meaning opening from this understanding is deep. The laws are not constraints, but descriptions of the capacities of things. They tell you how existence interacts, not how it punishes you. They reveal your limits as a human, not the limits of God as a Lord. And because the laws, on this understanding, reflect

the qualities of beings, they shift as the capacities shift. They do not break, but they answer to whatever new force enters the equation. This is what later opens for us the place of supplication in the universe — we will return to it in the next chapter.

And here it may rush to the onlooker's imagination that this means God created the universe, then left it to revolve by its laws without intervention, so that — to his mind — it is all one whether the Deity is present or absent. This is a naïve understanding that must be broken early. For God did not create each creature by a will independent of the other creatures — as though He chooses for every plant its color, every human his height, every planet its orbit, one by one. Far exalted is God above that. He created the whole universe by a single, simple divine will — the continuous outpouring of existence — and then the creatures took shape with their different qualities by the law of causality He deposited in their constitution.

*“And Our command is but one,
like the twinkling of an eye.”
(Qur'an 54:50)*

Created according to a measure, and by a single command. These are two keys to understanding the engineering of the whole universe.

Pause briefly at “according to a measure” (bi-qadar), for the word holds four meanings at once, none separable from the rest: a weighed measure with no excess or lack; a weight that places everything in balance with the rest of the system; a cause from which every quality necessarily arises; and an equation by which things proceed according to a rule that does not err. Four meanings in a single word — and the Qur’an is not extravagant with words. When it chooses “according to a measure” over a bare “We created it,” it means to reassure you that your creation was no arbitrary decision, but a weighed composition that produced you exactly as you are, with no excess and no lack.

And lest the meaning stay vague, reflect on this example: if a father took his young son to a surgeon who altered the features of his face entirely, would the son, grown up, have the right to ask, “why did God make me with these features?” Of course not. His question would turn — self-evidently — to his father and the surgeon, not to God. The direct cause of the

shape of his face is the operation, not the direct divine will. By the same logic, on a greater and more sublime level, the features you were born with were composed from a chain of strict biological causes: genes inherited from your parents, a particular egg, a particular moment, a particular environment. God did not choose them for you directly, one by one. And yet God is the One who poured out existence, who deposited in the causes their capacity, and were it not for His continuous outpouring the causes themselves would not stand, doing what they do. So the attribution of the act to its near causes, and its attribution to God, glory be to Him, gather at once, without contradiction.

And after this understanding a second question may visit you, gnawing at the chest: very well — I have grasped that my qualities are the result of a chain of causes, and that God poured out existence in one continuous outpouring. But could God not have made my causes wider, so that I entered the world more beautiful, more intelligent, stronger than I am? The answer to this uncovers a hidden illusion that was dwelling inside it: that you imagine you existed before your birth, and that God chose for you what He chose from among other options. But you did not exist. There was no “you” prior

to the sum of your qualities, standing waiting for the judge's verdict. Your qualities are the condition by which you found your very self in this universe. Had those causes differed, the one who came of them would not have been you, but an entirely different person, entering the scene in your place, recording his name in the book of existence where your name would have been.

So if someone asked you, in a rare hour of frailty: "Do you wish God had not created you at all? That you were a nothingness with no name, no trace, no awareness?" — you would not hesitate in the answer. Existence in itself is good. Awareness in itself is a blessing. The mere fact that you are reading these words now, that in your chest is a heart that beats, in your head a mind that reflects, on your tongue speech that is uttered — all of it is pure grace, which you did not earn by prior striving nor gain by preceding work. For you were not there to strive or work before your existence. And God, exalted in His generosity, poured out existence upon all that can exist, and did not deprive a creature of its right to the universe on the pretext of a deficiency in it; for existence — however capacities differ within it — is in itself a good against which nothingness weighs nothing.

And what we have reached calls for a principle that should not slip from you at any moment of this understanding: that this composition which formed you, with all its sites of strength and weakness, is no merit of yours over yourself, nor an achievement you attribute to your self, but a pure grace from God, who poured out existence upon you in this very form and made you run in this course and no other. Nothing in you is something you strove for before you were. All of it is a gift that preceded your very existence. Whoever grasps this rightly comes out of himself with sincere humility, not affected pride, and enters his life with a gratitude that precedes all striving.

And at this point a question that long troubled the human quiets in his chest. That ancient question that visits him in his hours of weakness — “why am I not someone else?” — turns into a new insight: I was deprived of nothing; I was composed by a particular measure to play my own role in this existence, not another’s. I have my journey to walk, my share of awareness to grow. I have my balance, for which I am held to account — for God does not look at who reached where, but at who walked how far within the limits of what he has.

*“And that the human will have
nothing but what he strives for,
and that his striving will be seen.”
(Qur’an 53:39-40)*

Nothing in me is excess to be rid of, and nothing lacking to grieve over. Everything is weighed by the balance of decree that does not err, does not forget, and does not wrong by the weight of an atom.

And from this very point our gaze moves to the next question. If your qualities are your self, and your composition is weighed by its own balance, then what descends upon you from outside you? How does God work within the system of causes He established? And why does what people receive of His outpouring vary, though the source is one? This is what the second law reveals.

Part Four: One Gift, and Different Vessels

When you understand that your qualities are your self, another question creeps into the chest: if everything in the universe runs by its precise causes, did God create the universe and then leave it to run on its own? Did He launch the

project and then withdraw from it? Has His presence in existence become a founding presence only, not a living, continuous one? The question looks logical on its surface, but in its depth it extends an ancient creed that sees the Deity as a maker at the beginning, absent in the continuation — a god who launched the world and then withdrew, leaving it to revolve by its laws with no presence.

This conception, for all its apparent simplicity, was among the gravest errors of philosophical thought across the ages. And the Qur'an confronted it directly — not as a mere philosophical error, but as a deviation in understanding the relationship between God and existence:

“And the Jews said, ‘God’s hand is fettered.’ Fettered are their hands, and cursed are they for what they said. Rather, both His hands are outstretched; He spends however He wills.” (Qur’an 5:64)

Weigh the Qur'anic reply: “Rather, both His hands are outstretched.” Open hands, not folded. A continuous giving, not an interrupted one. The meaning is that the divine outpouring descends in every instant, not once and then ceases. God

is not the clockmaker who vanishes once he has made his clock. He is present in every atom of existence, holding it lest it cease, sustaining upon it an outpouring that does not break off.

Because He — glory be to Him — is not outside the universe, but the very subsistence of the universe. He does not stand at a distance from it, but carries it in every instant. So the Qur'an does not describe Him only as Creator, but as the Self-Subsisting (al-Qayyūm) — the One subsisting by Himself, sustaining all besides Himself, from whose subsistence everything draws its subsistence:

*“O people, you are the ones in
need of God, while God is the Free
of need, the Praiseworthy.”*

(Qur'an 35:15)

And the need here is not the need of money, but the need of existence. Your very existence does not subsist by itself, nor do your qualities continue, nor do your causes work, except by a renewed sustenance that does not break off. Just as light does not appear in the room except so long as the sun is pouring it forth outside, your existence does not continue except by a continuous outpouring coming to you from outside yourself.

This understanding opens another truth that should settle in your awareness. The causes and means by which the laws run do not themselves possess existence to pour forth upon others. The stone that breaks the egg, the fire that burns the wood, the sun that grows the crop, the human who affects another — none of these causes is the source of the act. They are mediators, not sources.

God — glory be to Him — is alone the source of the outpouring. The causes, by their motion and by the capacity and existence God poured upon them, only make their effects receptive to the divine outpouring, according to the qualities they acquired from their own causes. Fire does not create heat in the wood out of nothing, but makes the wood receptive to the heat God pours forth. The sun does not create light in the universe out of itself, but makes the universe receptive to a light poured forth in every instant.

Whoever grasps this grasps why reliance upon God does not contradict taking to the causes. Taking to the causes is the preparing of the capacity to receive the outpouring; reliance is the realization that the outpouring itself is not from the causes, but from the Source the causes draw their existence from.

This great truth, which the philosophers of the earth might take centuries to explain, the Qur'an condenses into a single word:

*"God is the Light of the heavens
and the earth." (Qur'an 24:35)*

A light that holds things in existence, granting them their appearance and their continuance. Not only a metaphorical light, but the light of existence by which things come to be — the outpouring renewed in every instant, like an existential pulse coursing through every atom.

But this understanding opens a new question: if the divine sustenance is one, and the outpouring upon all is one, why do the results differ? Why does one human take a wide share and another a narrow measure? Why do talents, opportunities, energies, and circumstances vary, though the source is one?

Here comes the Qur'anic parable that discloses the engineering of decree, perhaps among the most precise things the Qur'an has drawn in this regard:

*"He sends down water from the
sky, and the valleys flow according
to their measure." (Qur'an 13:17)*

Reflect on the scene. The water is one. The sky is one. The outpouring is one. But the valleys differ.

A wide valley filled until it overflowed its banks.

A narrow valley that could hold only a little, so it flowed scantily.

A rocky valley that held nothing, so the water ran over it leaving no trace.

Is the problem in the rain? Not at all. The rain fell with the same justice upon all. The difference was not in the giving, but in the capacity. Not in the gift, but in the vessel.

This is the rule by which the universe runs at every one of its levels. God's light, His guidance, His good, His opportunities, descend upon all. The measure each human receives is set by the extent of his capacity: by his constitution, his experience, his environment, his awareness, his choices, and the inner breadth of his heart. This is the law of decree: a single divine outpouring, and different capacities within it.

God prevents no one. He does not allot His good to one people and deprive another. The outpouring flows, continuous, reaching all. But

souls vary in their reception. Some are wide like a valley that drinks rivers. Some are narrow like a valley that holds only a little. And some are rocky, needing breaking and polishing before they can receive the water.

This capacity is composed of many elements. Some is inherited from before your existence — genes, temperament, innate dispositions. Some is acquired from your environment — upbringing, education, companionship, the experiences you passed through. And some is formed by your choice — labor, reflection, the striving to know yourself, openness to what widens you. All these together make your valley, which receives, according to its measure, what descends from the sky.

And here comes the great glad tidings. Your valley is no inevitable fate, but a course you can widen. You cannot change everything in you — some of it is part of your self — but you can change much. You can break the rocks that keep your valley from holding water. You can widen its banks by learning, good companionship, reflection, and the striving to purify yourself. You can turn a rocky valley into one where crops grow.

And the greatest thing that widens your valley — as the prophets (peace be upon them) taught us — is to ask God to widen it. Ask the Sender of the rain to prepare the valley before it descends. This is the secret of the supplication that precedes the giving.

And because the common question, “why is so-and-so more than I am?” springs, for the most part, from a misunderstanding of this law, once it is understood the question turns into another: “how do I widen my valley?”

The first is a question of regret. The second is a question of striving. Between them lies the difference between a lifetime wasted in comparison, and a lifetime in which something grows.

And once you grasp this rule, your view of what is around you changes. What you possess is no longer “luck” God granted you, nor what another possesses “favoritism” He granted him. Each of you receives from a single outpouring, according to his capacity. And each of you bears a responsibility for widening his valley. God will not ask you on the Day of Resurrection how much you possessed, but how you widened what you possessed.

And the withholding of the outpouring from you, at particular hours, is not cruelty, but may be mercy. For the soul, were it to receive all it asks at every instant, would transgress and swell. Withholding is at times a training in patience, an alert to a flaw in the vessel, or a span of preparation before the valley is ready to receive what is wider. Just as a large seed is not planted in narrow soil, a great gift does not descend into an unprepared vessel.

And from this law another door opens: if the outpouring is one and the vessels differ, how do the opposing forces arise in the universe? Why does everything appear stretched between two poles? And why does the universe not settle upon a single state? This is what the following law reveals.

Part Five: The System of Opposites

Reflect on a universe with no opposition — one running entirely on a single straight line. All light with no darkness, all joy with no sorrow, all ease with no hardship, all life with no death. Can you imagine it? At first glance it seems a paradise every weary soul on earth craves. But look long into it, and you find something strange: that universe does not move. Nothing pushes

anything. Nothing grows. Nothing forms. Everything is in total stillness, more like an image hung on a wall, in which no life runs, no soul wakes, no meaning is completed.

This simple reflection reveals a truth lost in the clamor of complaining about contradictions: the opposites are no flaw that crept into the engineering of the universe, but the structure by which the universe itself stands upright. Without them there would be no life running, no motion arising, no awareness forming, no meaning manifesting. The opposites, then, are not a tax we pay against our will, but a mechanism of formation the Creator intended in the very design of existence.

Opposites Are a Structure, Not a Flaw

We mostly look at what pains us in life — illness, loss, failure, brokenness — as the opposite of what we deserve. We dream of a life free of these opposites, running entirely on one side of the balance. And we ask in our chests: why did God create these opposites at all? Why did He not make life all ease with no hardship, all light with no darkness? What is the wisdom in a universe stretched between two poles, each

pulling toward the other, so that it never settles on one state?

The answer comes not from outside the Qur'an, but from its core. For God, glory be to Him, attributed the opposites to Himself with an explicit attribution, leaving no room to imagine them accidental to His system or alien to it.

*“And of all things We created
pairs, that you may remember.”
(Qur'an 51:49)*

Everything. No exception. All that is in the universe is created upon duality.

*“And that it is He who makes
[one] laugh and weep, and that it is
He who causes death and gives
life.” (Qur'an 53:43-44)*

Laughter and weeping, death and life — the Qur'an attributes them to God Himself, not to opposing forces. Both are of His doing, both within His design, both with their function in the structure of existence.

And because balance is a comprehensive cosmic law, God raised the heaven upon its foundation:

*“And the heaven He raised, and
He set up the balance.” (Qur’an
55:7)*

The balance is not only a moral law, but the very structure of existence — by which forces meet without annihilating one another, and by which the universe stands upright on the edge of a tension that keeps its motion without breaking it.

And this tension runs through everything alive.¹⁰ Were there no tension between two poles in your body, not a single muscle would move. The heart beats because it contracts then expands, and each is the opposite of the other — without that opposition the heart would stop. The lungs work because they inhale then exhale, and each is the opposite of the other — without that opposition the breath would be extinguished. Even your very atoms, of which every cell of your body is composed, stand upon an opposition between opposing forces. Without

¹⁰Scientists call this inner equilibrium in the living organism “homeostasis.” Walter Cannon defined it in 1926 as a state of balance between opposing forces that preserves the constancy of the body’s internal environment despite changes around it; so the body’s temperature, blood pressure, and the composition of its fluids remain within a narrow range by virtue of this organized mutual repulsion. It is cited here for diagnosis, not as proof. See: W. B. Cannon, *The Wisdom of the Body* (1932).

it, the atom would collapse, the body would collapse, and the whole universe would collapse in the blink of an eye.

Opposites as a Mechanism for Moving the Human

But the deeper question is not the existence of the opposites in the universe, but their wisdom — why God chose the universe to be this way and not another. The Qur'an answers in precise words, joining in a single verse the great cosmic opposites and their human purpose:

*“He who created death and life
to test you [as to] which of you is
best in deed.” (Qur'an 67:2)*

Pause at the verse. God did not create life alone, nor death alone, but created them together, and bound this double creation to a single purpose: to test you as to which of you is best in deed. This is no coincidence of phrasing, but the nucleus of the divine project for human existence. The opposites are set there for your sake, so that you may be tested by them, and thus be formed.

And the Qur'an repeats this structure elsewhere, so it may settle in a person's awareness.

*"And made the darknesses and
the light." (Qur'an 6:1)*

The darknesses and the light — both made, both intended.

*"And We test you with evil and
with good as a trial, and to Us you
will be returned." (Qur'an 21:35)*

Evil and good are both instruments of trial and distinction, by which the human knows himself, and by which he builds what he chooses to be.

And because the opposites create between the human and his self a momentum and a motion, the human does not settle in one pole, but moves spontaneously between the two — drawn to this, pushed by that, seeking ease and meeting hardship, fleeing pain and colliding with meaning. So his life turns from stillness into a continuous labor toward an end he will inevitably meet — and we will pause at the detail of this labor in the next law — a labor that brings

the human out of the darkness of his stillness into the light of his completion:

“God is the ally of those who believe; He brings them out of the darknesses into the light.” (Qur’an 2:257)

This is no passing metaphor. It is the summary of the whole system of opposites: that God designed the universe with its opposites so that every darkness is an entrance into a light, every constriction an exit into spaciousness, every pain a door to a meaning.

The opposites, then, are no scene we suffer and wait to pass. They are the cosmic mechanism of propulsion God set so the human may move by it from where he is to where he ought to be.

The Opposites Within You

And do not suppose the opposites run only in the universe around you, while you stand severed from them, watching from afar. You yourself are an arena of continuous opposition. Within you are light and shadow, mercy and anger, certainty and doubt, will and laziness, courage and fear, generosity and stinginess,

truthfulness and lying. Without this inner opposition, you would not know yourself at all. Were you all light, you would not discover your light; were you all darkness, you would not crave the light. The human knows himself in the gap of the opposition between his poles, and there he chooses, and there he is formed.

And this double inspiration within you is no defect in your constitution, but an explicit existential merit.

*“By the soul and how He
proportioned it, and inspired it [to
know] its wickedness and its
righteousness.” (Qur’an 91:7-8)*

Wickedness and righteousness — both are inspired in you. Not because God wills your misguidance, but because a righteousness that knows no wickedness as its alternative is not righteousness, but an imposed habit; and a truthfulness that cannot be a lie is not a virtue, but the absence of choice. You are formed in the distance of choice between the two poles, not in one pole purely pre-given.

And your four dimensions — spirit, heart, intellect, and body — which you came to know in the third chapter, each bears its own opposites.

The spirit between drawing near and turning away. The heart between mercy and hardness. The intellect between certainty and doubt. The body between strength and weakness. Your task is not to abolish any of these opposites, but to manage them with your awareness, so that from them rises your inner consistency, not your turmoil.

A Dialectic, Not a War of Annihilation

And here is a delicate point that should not slip from you. The opposition in the universe is no war of annihilation that ends with the elimination of one of the two poles, but a dialectic by which each pole guards the other from transgression. The difference between annihilation and dialectic is essential. Annihilation ends with one pole's victory over the other, and when the victor is left alone in the field, existence is corrupted. The dialectic, by contrast, keeps both poles standing, each repelling the other from its transgression, so the balance holds upright.

And the Qur'an condenses this in a single phrase:

*“And were it not for God’s
repelling people, some by means of*

*others, the earth would have been
corrupted.” (Qur’an 2:251)*

Do not read it only politically; read it cosmically. Were light to transgress to the point of abolishing shadow, the details of things would not appear, and eyes would be scorched. Were life to transgress to the point of abolishing death, generations would pile upon one another until the planet suffocated. Were justice to transgress with no test, the human would lose his worth; were strength to transgress with no weakness, the human would not know humility.

So when you ask God to lift from you the opposite of what you love — to grant you health with no illness, profit with no loss, joy with no sorrow — you are in truth asking Him to abolish the dialectic by which your existence stands upright. And the divine wisdom in governing the universe does not fulfill this naïve request, but preserves the dialectic by which the human grows. The difference between the naïve request and the mature supplication is that the first asks for the abolition of the opposite, while the second asks for the ability to manage it with wisdom.

And do not confuse your feeling of pain with contentment with the decree. The relationship

between the sensation of pain and submission to God is vertical, not horizontal — that is, you can be pained by the trial while content with it at the same time, because contentment is in one layer, and the sensation in a layer beneath it. The matter is not like tasting the sourness and the sweetness of a lemon at once as you drink it — that would be a surface contradiction. It is more like feeling exhaustion and fatigue while you play ball with your friends, or swim. You enjoy it, and yet it pains you. And the two are together; neither abolishes the other.

From Darkness into Light

And once it settles in your awareness that the opposites are a cosmic mechanism of propulsion, your understanding of what runs in your life changes radically. What pains you is no longer an enemy you ask God to remove. And what you love is no longer an absolute blessing — some of it may turn into a curse were it to transgress and abolish its opposite. You look at illness and see a propulsion against the slackness of health, at poverty and see a propulsion against the gluttony of wealth, at failure and see a propulsion against the vanity of success, at sorrow and see a propulsion against the levity of joy.

And this understanding does not serve you within alone, but opens before you a wider practical meaning. From the darknesses into the light. The darknesses God brings you out of are not only sensory darkness, but every kind of injustice and corruption: ignorance, poverty, psychological illness, physical illness, servitude to people, servitude to things, servitude to illusions. Each of these darknesses has its corresponding light, and every exit from a darkness is an entrance into its light. And the dialectic between the darkness and its light is not in an abstract space, but in your own life, day by day.

And because ignorance is a darkness, every question you ask sincerely opens in you a new light. Because poverty is a darkness, every honest striving toward sufficiency breaks in you a constriction. Because psychological illness is a darkness, every reflection on your true metal returns you to your peace. Because servitude to people is a darkness, every step toward your freedom in the servitude of God alone strikes off one of the people's shackles. These are no optimistic metaphors, but real tracks in which the law of opposites runs through your life.

And the universe, on this understanding, is not your enemy, nor even a neutral arena where you play alone. It is an arena designed for you, with its opposites, to bring you out from where you are to where you ought to be — to test you as to which of you is best in deed.

But the opposites do not change you by their mere existence around you. They change you when you rub against them, when they touch you and you touch them, when there enters between you and them that contact which strips from you what is not of you, and keeps what is you. And this leads us to the next law: how does the dialectic between the opposites sculpt your essence?

The Law of Friction: Opposites Sculpt by Contact

But these opposites do not work in you by their mere existence in the universe around you — only when you rub against them, when they touch you and you touch them, opening before you the arena of choice in which you build yourself. For friction does not strip a cover off a ready, buried essence, but lets you — by your will, your sincerity, and the clarity of your intellect — acquire your existential qualities, and

ascend with your self degree after degree. You are not born patient nor truthful, but become so when you choose patience in the place of panic, and truthfulness in the place of falseness. The *fiṭra* alone is given in you; the firmly-rooted quality is made. So God made trial an arena of building, not a punishment:

*“Do people think that they will
be left to say, ‘We believe,’ and not
be tested? We did test those before
them, so God will surely make
evident those who are truthful, and
He will surely make evident the
liars.” (Qur’an 29:2-3)*

For trial draws out of you a truthfulness you make by your choice, not a truthfulness stored away, waiting to be disclosed. This is a law standing on its own, deserving a whole chapter — which is what the next chapter opens: “The Laws of Friction,” where we see how toil, trial, and pain are tools of building, not punishment.

So if you have understood that the universe is a system, and the opposites a structure within it, one last question remains, raised by the reflective reader: if the universe is a precise system, why does it appear to hold all this evil?

What is its reality in this design? This is what the final law of this chapter reveals.

Part Six: The Illusion of Evil

After all we have seen in this chapter — the system of laws, the causality of causes, your capacities which are your self, the single outpouring upon the different vessels, the opposites that preserve balance, the friction that sculpts the essence — one question remains knocking at the chest of the reflective reader, restless until it finds an answer: if the universe is this precise, governed with this exactness, why does it appear to hold all this evil? Why illness, injustice, loss, and disaster? Where is the justice in all this?

On its surface the question is just and rightly raised. But it rests upon a hidden assumption that ought to be uncovered before answering: the assumption that there is in the universe something called “evil,” standing on its own, contending with good, corrupting what God builds. The existential truth is far deeper:

In the universe there is no evil standing on its own. What we call evil is, for the most part, no independent existence, but a deficiency in vision, or the absence of a good that was possible.

Evil Is Not an Existence, but an Absence

Reflect on darkness. Is it a thing standing on its own? Can you bring a vessel filled with darkness and carry it from one room to another? No. Darkness is no thing, but the absence of light. You need not create it; put out the light, and it appears. Reflect on cold. Is it a thing standing on its own? No. It is only the absence of heat. It does not descend upon the body from outside, but appears in it when the heat leaves. Reflect on ignorance. Is it a standing entity? No. It is the absence of knowledge. The mind is not filled with it; it appears when the mind is empty of knowledge.

Likewise — in many cases — what we call “evil.” Illness is no standing existence, but the absence of health, a disorder in the system by which the body stands upright. Injustice is no standing existence, but the absence of justice where it ought to have been. Cruelty is no standing existence, but the absence of mercy in a heart that ought to have carried it. Whenever you reflect on what is called evil, you find it — in its depth — the absence of a good that was possible, not the presence of an independent thing competing with good.

So when you ask, “why did God create evil?” you ask a question corrupt in its phrasing. God did not create evil, for evil is no thing to be created. It is an absence that results from the system of laws itself: when a good fails to be in its place — by a human’s free choice, or by friction between opposites, or by a deficiency in capacity — what we call evil appears. But in itself it is no existence competing with God, only the shadow of a good that could have been.

The Deficiency of Vision: The Narrow Lens

And because much of what we call evil is only the absence of a good, much of it is — in truth — a disguised good, which we do not see as good because our lens is deficient. Reflect on the child who sees school as an evil, because it keeps him from play and binds him to discipline. Is it truly an evil? No. It is the essence of good. But he sees it as evil because his lens does not see what his father sees. Were he to settle for what he wants, he would fall into a greater evil: ignorance. The evil he flees now is, in truth, the door that protects him from a greater evil years later.

And you, in many of your trials, are like that child before his school. You see the pain in its moment, and not the wisdom it builds. You see the door that closed, and not the doors that will open. You see the fall, and not that you were sliding toward something worse had you kept walking. The illness you hate may be a purification for a soul about to rot with the vanity of health. The poverty you see as cruelty may be a protection from a transgression that would have destroyed you. The loss that tears your heart may be a deliberate emptying, so that God may fill the heart with what is purer and more lasting.

So God said:

*“Does He who created not
know? And He is the Subtle, the
Aware.” (Qur’an 67:14)*

Weigh the phrasing. “Does He who created not know?” — a rhetorical question that shakes your confidence in your narrow judgment of events. “And He is the Subtle, the Aware” — two attributes together: the Subtle who knows the hidden depths of your self, and the Aware who knows the hidden depths of your destiny. So pain comes not from ignorance, nor from cruelty, but from a knowledge that knows what we do not,

and a subtlety that works in the depth where our sight does not reach.

What Is Truly Evil, and Whence Does It Come?

But we should not slip into a naïve optimism. Is every evil in life a disguised good? Is there no true evil at all? This is not what we are saying. There are true evils in the universe, befalling the human and harming him. But their source — for the most part — is not God, but human choices. The injustice of people toward one another, their corruption in the earth, their deviation from justice — all are true evils, issuing from the misuse of the freedom God granted the human.

So the Qur'an did not attribute these evils to God, but to the human himself.

*“Corruption has appeared on
land and sea because of what the
hands of people have earned.”
(Qur'an 30:41)*

*“Whatever misfortune befalls
you is because of what your hands
have earned.” (Qur'an 42:30)*

The true evil in the universe — its source, for the most part, is the hand of the human, not the decree of God. God gave the human freedom of choice so that he might be a human, not an angel fashioned upon good alone. But the price of this freedom is that some will choose evil, harming themselves and others.

And even this evil resulting from human choice does not depart from the system of laws. It runs within it, not outside it. And God, by His wisdom, placed in the universe the law of mutual repulsion we saw in the third law, so that the force of good repels the force of evil, and the world balances on this edge, without either transgressing a transgression that corrupts the whole of existence.

*“And were it not for God’s
repelling people, some by means of
others, the earth would have been
corrupted.” (Qur’an 2:251)*

A Vision That Is Freed

And once these three truths settle in your awareness — that evil, in many of its places, is an absence and not an existence; that much of it is a disguised good owing to the deficiency of your vision; and that what is truly evil has its

source in human choices, not divine decree — something in you is freed from a weight it was carrying. You no longer see the universe as a cruel machine, nor look at God as an obscure creator, nor carry in your chest that hidden reproach that wraps around the heart whenever something you dislike happens.

It is as though you stand before an immense painting, its width greater than your sight, its length longer than your time. You see one centimeter of it, then judge the rest. Were you to see the whole, you would understand that what you reckoned cruelty was the essence of mercy, that what you reckoned evil was the essence of good, that what you reckoned futility was governance. But your lens is narrow, your sight limited, and what you see is only a small part of a wisdom that transcends you. So you are at ease — not because you understood everything, but because you understood that there is One who understands, even when you do not.

Chapter Conclusion: From Understanding the Universe to Walking Within It

And here we have reached the end of this chapter. We understood that the universe runs

by laws that favor no one; that everything in it is by a measure; that your self is weighed by a balance particular to you; that the divine outpouring is one upon different vessels; that the opposites are the system of formation and no flaw within it; that these opposites only sculpt your essence when you rub against them — a law the next chapter opens; and that what we call evil is, for the most part, no competing existence, but the absence of a good or a deficiency of vision.

All of this is theoretical understanding. But the question awaiting you now is not theoretical, but practical. When trial descends upon you — loss, illness, disappointment, fear — how do you receive it? How do you move within this universe whose laws you have understood? What is asked of you when what opposes you comes? And how do you turn the knowledge of the system into a walking within the system?

These questions are not answered by a chapter about the universe, but by a chapter about the human within the universe. This is what the following chapter opens: The Laws of Friction — the chapter in which the self meets what sculpts it, so that what obstructs you is, itself, what forms you.



A Pause for Reflection

Before you fold this chapter, look at one opposite that weighs on your life now — an illness, a constriction, a lack, an adversary — that you have been asking God to lift from you. Then ask yourself honestly: what if this very opposite were the chisel by which you are meant to be sculpted, not the punishment by which you are meant to be broken? And what might grow in you if you looked at it as a tool in the hand of a Wise One, not a flaw in a system that has slipped from His hand?

Chapter Five • The Laws of Friction



Part One: Introduction — In Toil

We closed the previous chapter at a point where it appeared that knowledge does not suffice. We came to know that the universe runs by laws, that the opposites are a structure, that friction is a sculpting, and that evil, in many of its places, is an absence and not an existence. All of that is sound understanding. But understanding alone does not carry its bearer when trial actually descends. It does not aid you in the moment your hands tremble, your chest suffocates, and that harsh question rises in your throat: why me? why now?

In that moment, knowing the laws does not help you. You need to know how to walk within them.

And because this is the matter of this chapter, we should begin from where the Qur'an itself began when it spoke of the nature of the human

in this world — a single verse, four words, that condenses all that comes after it:

*“Indeed, We created the human
in toil (kabad).” (Qur’an 90:4)*

Pause at this verse a long pause, for it holds the key to the whole chapter. Understand it rightly, and your relationship with all that happens to you would change. Let its meaning escape you, and you would keep struggling against what cannot be abolished, demanding of life what it was not made for.

What Does the Word Kabad Mean?

The word, in Arabic, is wider than the hasty reader supposes. It is no single word with a single meaning, but an integrated semantic field gathering four connected meanings, each opening onto the next:

First: kabad in the sense of hardship and toil. This is the meaning that first comes to mind. The human is created in fatigue, in labor, in struggle. He is not created in ease and then has hardship come upon him as an accident; he is created in its very core. It is the condition of his existence, not a passing incident within it.

Second: kabad in the sense of strength and firmness. Kabad, in the tongue of the Arabs, is the hard and firm. They say, "a she-camel of kabad," meaning of strength and solidity. In this lies a hidden significance not to be missed: that the hardship in the human is no weakness clinging to him, but a strength deposited in him. Kabad is not only what he carries, but what makes him able to carry.

Third: kabad in the sense of the middle and uprightness. The kabad of a thing is its middle. You say "the kabad of the sky," meaning its middle where the sun stands at its zenith; and "the kabad of the bow," meaning its middle between its two ends. The meaning opening here: that the human is fashioned to stand in the position of tension between the opposites, not in one pole of them. Not in pure ease, nor in pure trial. In the middle, where the forces pull at him from two directions, and so form him.

Fourth: kabad in the sense of constant accompaniment. The one who "kābada" a thing keeps to it, persists with it. The human "labors" at his life in this sense — keeping to it with its hardship, never parting from it, nor it from him. So long as he is in this world, he is in this accompaniment.

Four meanings in a single word — and the Qur'an is not extravagant with words. In choosing "kabad" to describe the human, it gathers for you in two letters that he is created in hardship, with a strength to match it, in a middle between the opposites, keeping to it so long as he lives.

"In Toil," Not "With Toil"

And now, do not let the preposition escape you. The Qur'an did not say "with toil," nor "by toil," nor "toward toil." It said in toil. And the difference between these prepositions is a difference in the whole vision.

Had it said "with toil," hardship would be something accompanying the human, walking beside him, coming at times and ceasing at others — an accident, not an essence. The stance toward it would be that the human tries to "rid himself" of it, as he rids himself of a heavy companion.

But it said "in toil." And the adverbial here denotes encompassment and place. Toil is not the human's companion, but the place he dwells in. Not something he meets on the road, but the road itself. You cannot exit it, as a fish cannot exit the water and remain a fish.

This small difference in the prepositions opens a great difference in understanding. One who supposes he lives “with” hardship spends his life trying to avoid it, and so suffers twice: once from the hardship when it comes, and once from the disappointment of the effort when he discovers it does not end. One who understood that he is “in” hardship turns away from trying to exit it, toward learning how to move within it. And the difference between the two is the difference between a lifetime wasted in resistance, and a lifetime in which something grows.

A Condition of Motion, Not a Punishment of Motion

And now we reach the juncture that should settle in your awareness before we go on: toil is no punishment upon the human, but a condition of the human.

Reflect on everything that grows in the universe. As you saw in the previous chapter, nothing strengthens without resistance. And so is the human. Created in total ease, he would not discover his strength, for strength appears only when something resists it. Created in prior certainty, he would not know his truthfulness,

for truthfulness manifests only when it meets what provokes its falsehood. Created in pure peace, his spirit would not ripen, for ripening is not completed without a friction that distinguishes the essence from the impurities.

Toil, then, is the condition without which the human is not a human. Remove it from him, and another creature emerges, lower in rank, for all the comfort it might appear to have — just as if you stripped fire of its heat to avoid a blaze, it would no longer be fire, but become something else that does not perform its function.

So toil did not come in the verse in the form of a punishment, but in the form of the first divine design. Indeed, We created the human in toil. “We created” — the very act of creation. That is, toil is not what befell the human after he was created, but what he was created with and within. Not accidental, but original. Not a punishment for a prior sin, but a necessary structure so the human may be capable of his journey.

The Toil the Human Chooses

And the Qur’an does not content itself with describing the human as “in toil,” but follows the

description with an extremely precise practical signal. Reflect on His words:

*“So when you have finished,
labor on; and to your Lord direct
your longing.” (Qur’an 94:7-8)*

Pause at the phrasing. “When you have finished” — finished from what? From a prior labor. “Labor on” — do what? Move to another labor. It is as though the verse were telling you: do not wait for the moment you finish with all hardship, for that moment is not of the design of your existence. Move instead from fatigue to fatigue, from effort to effort, from arena to arena.

And here is a subtle difference between two Arabic words that should settle in your awareness: kabad and naṣab. Kabad is the hardship you were created in, the condition of your existence that you do not choose. Naṣab is the fatigue you choose, that you put on by your will, exerting yourself in it willingly. The first is your decree, the second your striving within the decree. The first is what runs upon you, the second what you do. There is no escape from kabad, as you saw — but naṣab is a choice: either you exert yourself in what raises you, or in what drains you.

Then comes the conclusion that opens the door to all that follows in this chapter: and to your Lord direct your longing. Notice that the Qur'an did not say "long for such-and-such," but fronted the phrase "to your Lord." And fronting, in Arabic, gives the meaning of restriction. That is: make your longing toward your Lord alone. This is what turns *naṣab* from a meaningless exertion into a labor with a direction. What distinguishes a human who exerts himself in the world from one who exerts himself toward God is not the amount of fatigue, but its direction.

And when you gather the two verses — Indeed, We created the human in toil and So when you have finished, labor on; and to your Lord direct your longing — the picture is complete: a creature in hardship, called to a continuous labor, in a single explicit direction. This is the structure of meaning for all of human life, as the Qur'an opens it in two phrases.

The Place of This Verse in the Qur'an's Discourse

And notice: the verse did not say "We created some people in toil," nor "We created the disbelievers in toil," but "We created the human." The human in his absoluteness. The

believer and the disbeliever, the rich and the poor, the prophet and the layman, the intelligent and the slow, the beautiful and the ordinary. All of them in toil. No one excludes himself from this reality, however else it may appear to him in a moment of his life.

And this in itself is a message. You are not the one chosen alone for pain. No one lives far from his toil. The one you look at and see his apparent ease has his hidden toil. The one you envy for what he possesses carries what you do not see. The Qur'an opens this reality to you early, so you do not drain your lifetime comparing yourself with an illusion that does not exist: the illusion of "a life without toil."

And the prophets (peace be upon them) — those whom God chose — were not exempt from this law; rather they were the most in toil of people, as its detail will come. Were toil a punishment, the farthest of people from it would be the nearest to God. But the matter is reversed: the nearest to God are the most in toil. And there is no explaining this except that toil is an honor to the human, not a humiliation — the door through which he enters his true rank, not the barrier that bars him from it.

What Opens After This Verse?

And once this reality settles in your awareness, everything is transformed. You no longer ask, “how do I flee from hardship?” for you have realized that fleeing it is fleeing your very humanity. You no longer wait for the moment in which all your trials end, for you have understood it is a moment that will not come — and had it come, you would not be “you” afterward, but another creature with no motion and no growth.

The question that should replace the old one is: what does this toil want to make of me? How do I move within hardship, instead of draining myself trying to exit it? How do I receive trial as a design, not a punishment? How do I receive pain as an awakening, not a revenge? And how, in the end, can I let what obstructs me form me?

These questions open the door to what follows. We will see in the next part that trial is not a punishment but a design — precisely calibrated, laid with wisdom, meant to disclose you to yourself, not to break you. Then we understand how pain itself is an awakening, how Satan is a tester and not a conqueror, how your will interacts with destiny so that it widens, and

how labor becomes, in the end, the road to meeting your Lord.

All of this, a detail of what a single verse condenses: Indeed, We created the human in toil.

Part Two: Trial Is a Design, Not a Punishment

When trial descends upon you — loss, illness, disappointment, brokenness — a question of the utmost harshness visits your chest: what did I do to deserve this? Did God punish me? Was He angry with me? You begin to review your sins, small and great, hunting within them for a cause that justifies what is happening. You may find a sin, and be reassured — at least — that the universe is logical. Or you may find nothing proportionate to the size of the pain, so your distress deepens: why me? what sin equals this harshness?

This question itself reveals a hidden assumption dwelling in our awareness, which we ought to uncover before going on: the assumption that the relationship between trial and sin is one of cause and effect. That trial is a punishment, and one who has not sinned ought not to be tried. That God's reckoning with His

servants rests on the logic of “a cup for a cup”: a sin here, a trial there.

The truth is that this understanding, for all its prevalence, is deviant at its root. Trial in the Qur’an is no punishment, but a design. No revenge, but a formation. No message of anger, but a message of disclosure.

First: The Meaning the Most Tried of the Prophets Disclose

Were trial a punishment, the farthest of people from it would be the nearest to God. But history says exactly the opposite. The prophets (peace be upon them) — the chosen, the elect — are the most tried of people. The Prophet Job (Ayyūb, peace be upon him) lost his family, his wealth, and his health — not for a sin he committed, but for his lofty position. The Prophet Jacob (Ya‘qūb, peace be upon him) lost his sight from grief over his son — not for a transgression. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) buried seven of his children, lived through the Year of Sorrow, and was persecuted for thirteen years. And his household (peace be upon them) met what they met of killing, captivity, and displacement.

In the hadith related from the Prophet (peace be upon him): “The most severely tried of people are the prophets, then the next best, then the next best.” Notice the order: not the most in sin, but the nearest in closeness. This is a rule that does not square with understanding trial as a punishment. It squares only with understanding it as a design — a design that discloses your state, and opens for you the arena of sculpting the essence and raising your rank to a higher station.

This does not mean, of course, that everyone afflicted is among the prophets or the righteous. Some trials come as a direct result of our choices, as you saw in the law of causality. Whoever eats voraciously falls ill. Whoever lies loses trust. Whoever neglects loses. These are natural consequences of their causes, not heavenly punishments sent down. But many of the great trials in your life — the ones that shake you from your roots, for which you find no proportionate cause in your conduct — are not punishments. They are a design.

Trial Reveals; It Does Not Destroy

And the difference between trial as a punishment and trial as a design is a difference

of purpose. Punishment's purpose is to break: to discipline the sinner and pain him so he is deterred. The design's purpose is to disclose you to yourself, then open for you the arena of building — showing you your state first, then letting you, by your will, acquire the qualities that will raise you to a rank you would not have reached without this friction.

And a precise distinction is indispensable here. Trial discloses your state to you, yes — it shows the place of your weakness and your strength, your truthfulness and your falseness. But it does not disclose a firmly-rooted quality stored in you waiting to appear, as though a ready, buried metal. It opens before you the moment of choice in which you make and build the quality. So when there descends upon you what provokes your panic, trial does not disclose a latent patience, but places you before two choices: to panic, and so entrench panic, or to be patient, and so build patience as a brick added to your self. The *fiṭra* alone is given in you; the firmly-rooted quality is made in the arena of trial.

So trial does not come to break you, but to open in you the arena of formation. What shatters in you is not your essence, but what has

gathered upon it of illusions and attachments; and what you build in its place is the existential quality you choose. So when the human emerges from his trial, he does not emerge less than he entered, but loftier and purer — not only because something latent was disclosed, but because something new was acquired and built — if he understood, received, and did not waste it.

Second: Trial Is Precisely Calibrated to Your Capacity

This understanding reveals a second wisdom in the design of trial: that it is precisely calibrated to your ability. There does not come to you what exceeds it. There does not descend what surpasses what you were created for. This is no optimistic promise, but an explicit Qur'anic declaration:

*“God does not burden a soul
beyond its capacity.” (Qur'an
2:286)*

Weigh the phrasing. “He does not burden” — an absolute negation. “Beyond its capacity” — a precise definition of the ceiling. You can extract from this verse but a single meaning: what

descends upon you is bounded by your ability to bear it, even if it appears in its moment to be above it. And the feeling that the trial is “greater than your endurance” does not negate the truth, but reveals that you are discovering your ability in this very moment, when you did not know it before.

So it is not equal that the great of people and the small of them have the same trial befall them in the same measure. Each is tried according to his capacity. The Prophet (peace be upon him) was tried with what no one else could bear — not because he was weaker, but because he was wider. The more a human’s vessel widens, the wider what can descend into it; the more it narrows, the narrower what it can receive.

And this, understood rightly, strips from trial much of its harshness. For you no longer stand before it with the feeling of a victim, but with the understanding of one invited: invited to discover your capacity, to know what you did not know of yourself, to emerge from the experience a wider version of your old self.

Third: Ease Runs With Hardship, Not After It

And the third understanding that reveals the design of trial comes from a famous verse, which many read superficially and so lose its depth:

*“For indeed, with hardship
comes ease; indeed, with hardship
comes ease.” (Qur’an 94:5-6)*

Pause at the preposition. The verse did not say “after hardship comes ease,” but “with hardship.” And the difference between the two prepositions is the difference between two whole understandings of life.

Were the verse “after hardship comes ease,” ease would be a deferred reward — coming once hardship ends, like a prize granted to one who was patient. The stance toward it would be: bear the hardship now, and wait for the ease later. But it said “with.” That is, ease runs in the very moment hardship runs. Not after it in time, but with it in existence. Bound to it, born from its very womb.

And this opens a new understanding to every trial you undergo. Ease is not what comes when the trial ends, but what is born within it — if you

search for it. The strength you discover you possess while in the midst of the storm — that is that ease. The patience that sprouts in your chest when you supposed you would not endure — that is that ease. The wisdom disclosed to you in the moment of brokenness, which would not have been disclosed without it — that is that ease. The supplication that comes out of your heart with a sincerity you had not known — that is that ease.

Ease, then, is latent in the very core of hardship, like the plant latent in the seed. Trial breaks the shell, and ease comes out. And one who waits for ease after hardship ends misses the true ease that was with him in every moment.

Fourth: “Of Thorns” — the Divine Will Chooses for You the More Beneficial, Not the Easier

And there is a fourth understanding that reveals the design of trial, coming from a verse strange in its phrasing, which uncovers an essential difference between what the human chooses for himself and what God chooses for him:

*“And [recall] when God
promised you one of the two
groups — that it would be yours —
and you wished that the one
without thorns would be yours; but
God intended to establish the truth
by His words.” (Qur’an 8:7)*

The historical context relates to the Battle of Badr, when before the Muslims lay two options: the trade caravan of Quraysh (the easy one, less dangerous, with assured spoils), or the armed army of Quraysh (the hard, the dangerous, “of thorns”). The human soul inclined to the caravan. But God chose for them the confrontation.

And the verse reveals a law wider than its context: that the human by his nature inclines to the easier road, the less costly, the nearer to safety, while the divine will heads toward the road that establishes the truth and forms the human capable of carrying it. And this road, for the most part, is the “one of thorns” — what has in it a thorn that scratches, a resistance that wearies, a price that is paid.

Here lies a great wisdom in the governance of destiny. Left to his innate choices, the human would always choose the easier, and so stay at

his lowest level. But the divine will — in its mercy to him, not its cruelty upon him — pushes him toward what forms him, even where he dislikes it. Trial, in this sense, is no punishment, but an educational choice. No cruelty from God, but a mercy that lifts him past his innate inclination to the easy, toward what raises him.

So the Qur'an said in another verse: "Perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you, and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. And God knows, while you do not know." (Qur'an 2:216) Your hatred of trial does not negate its goodness. Your love of the easy does not negate its harm. And the divide between what you see and what it truly is, is the difference between your limited knowledge and God's encompassing knowledge.

A Scene: Lady Zaynab (peace be upon her) in Damascus

And because concepts manifest in persons more than in words, reflect on a single scene from the life of the household of the Prophet (peace be upon them), which reveals how trial works when it is a design, not a punishment.

Lady Zaynab the daughter of 'Alī (peace be upon her) — daughter of the Commander of the

Faithful, granddaughter of the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) — was led captive from Karbalā' to Kufa, then to Damascus. She witnessed in a single day the killing of her brother al-Ḥusayn (peace be upon him), his children, her brothers, and her cousins. Then she — and the women of the household (peace be upon them) — were led without covering, moved from city to city, displayed as though they were captives from among the non-Muslims.

Imagine the scene. A woman carrying in her chest this measure of loss. Any other human, had a tiny part of what befell her befallen him, would have broken. But she did not break. She did not weep for herself even once. And when she entered the assembly of Yazīd in Damascus, and stood before him while he was on his throne, she did not bow, nor did she soften her address; she delivered a speech that stripped from him his legitimacy before the people of his own land. She addressed him: "Scheme your scheme, exert your effort, and strive your utmost — by God, you will not erase our remembrance, nor extinguish our revelation."

Reflect on what this scene reveals. The trial that befell her was among the harshest ever to befall a creature on earth. But it did not break

her; it showed to history her essence, which — but for this trial — would have stayed hidden from people. Had she lived in ease, history would not have known that in the daughters of prophethood was this strength. Had she been preserved from trial, this speech that resists time would not have come from her mouth. Trial, for her, was no punishment, nor even a discipline, but the arena in which she appeared as she truly was.

And this is a stance condensed in a phrase attributed to her, when she was asked about what she saw in Karbalā': "I saw nothing but beauty." It is not the phrase of a woman dulled by calamity, but the phrase of a woman who reached a layer of understanding in which she sees that trial, however severe, runs within a weighed divine design. What appears from outside a calamity discloses, from within, another beauty — the beauty of truthfulness when it is tested, the beauty of faith when it is unveiled, the beauty of the human when she attains her true station in the universe.

Fifth: The Transformation of Bad Deeds into Good

And there is a fifth wisdom in the design of trial, which the Qur'an condenses into an astonishing verse:

*“Except for one who repents,
believes, and does righteous work
— for them God will replace their
bad deeds with good ones.”
(Qur'an 25:70)*

Pause at the phrasing. He did not say “erase their bad deeds,” nor “conceal their bad deeds,” nor “forgive their bad deeds.” He said “replace.” That is, transform. Change their nature. Make what was a bad deed a good one. And this is a law more wondrous than the law of forgiveness. Forgiveness conceals; replacement transforms.

And the meaning this opens is deep. The experience is not erased from your record — it remains, but its meaning is transformed. The brokenness you passed through, when you return to it after years of repentance and learning, becomes a cause of ascent, not a cause of fall. The sin you committed, once it becomes the impetus for your return to God, becomes in your balance a good deed, not a bad one. What

was a wound in your journey becomes the door you entered by into the sincerity of the relationship with God.

This is no optimistic philosophy, but an explicit Qur'anic law. Everything that runs in your life — including your bad deeds and errors — can be transformed, if you enter the entrance of repentance, faith, and righteous work. Nothing in your journey is lost. No experience is wasted. No brokenness is without meaning, if you understood it and transformed it.

The Transformation of the Question

And once these five truths settle in your awareness — that trial is a design, not a punishment; that it reveals, it does not destroy; that it is precisely calibrated to your capacity; that ease runs with it, not after it; that the divine will chooses for you the more beneficial, not the easier; and that all that ran can be replaced with good deeds — your question is transformed at its root.

You no longer ask, “why is this happening to me?” for you have understood that the question itself rests upon a faulty assumption. You begin to ask, “what is being built within me now?” And between the two questions lies the difference

between a lifetime wasted in complaint and a lifetime in which something grows. The first question drains you, seeking an answer you may never obtain. The second opens doors to you, turning you from a victim awaiting heaven's answer into a partner in the process of your own formation.

But if trial discloses, what exactly does it disclose? Does it disclose everything in the same measure? Or does each kind of trial have its own disclosure, revealing a particular one of your four dimensions? This is what the next part opens, when we pause at To test you as to which of you is best in deed.

Part Three: “To Test You as to Which of You Is Best in Deed”

In the fourth chapter, in speaking of the opposites, we paused at the verse He who created death and life to test you as to which of you is best in deed (Qur'an 67:2). But we paused at it as a disclosure of the structure of the opposites in the universe. Now we return to it from a different angle — not to understand the structure of the opposites, but to understand what is tested in us when the opposites meet us.

Three words in this verse deserve a pause, each opening a door.

The First Word: “To Test You”

The lām in “to test you” is the lām of causation — it reveals the purpose of the creation of death and life. God did not create these two opposites without purpose, but for your sake. And trial in the Qur’an is no examination in a moment, but a journey of disclosure across time. God does not test you in a single moment and then issue His verdict; He opens your whole life as an arena of disclosure. Every day of your days, and every hour of your hours, is an examination — not to punish you in it, but to disclose you.

The Second Word: “Which of You”

“Which of you” — a form that presupposes difference. Were people identical, the question “which of you” would have no meaning. By this single word the verse reveals that trial is not uniform. Each human, in his trial, is alone, not measured against another.

And this in itself is a mercy. For you are not held to account by what was possible for the prophet, or for one born in circumstances other

than yours. You are held to account by what was possible for “you,” with your own capacities — as we came to know them in the fourth chapter. The divine question is not “did you reach the rank of so-and-so?” but “did you reach your own rank, that you were created for?” This is the question disclosed by trial, not the question of comparison.

The Third Word: “Best in Deed”

And reflect now on the most precise word in the verse. The Qur’an did not say “the most of you in deed,” nor “the fastest of you in deed,” nor “the most visible of you in deed,” but “best in deed.”

And excellence (iḥsān) in the Qur’an is a precise concept. It is not merely outward mastery, but the truthfulness of the inner manifest in the outer — the presence of intention, the purity of motive, the steadiness of the heart upon the true meaning of the deed. And this distinction is essential. Two people may do the same act in the same measure, yet their balance with God differs radically. The one who does it for God, and the one who does it to be said of him that he did — both are deeds, but only one is “best.”

And because this concept manifests in persons more than in words, reflect on a single prophetic hadith. When Imam ‘Alī (peace be upon him) dueled ‘Amr ibn ‘Abd Wudd on the Day of the Trench and killed him, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “The strike of ‘Alī on the Day of the Trench is better than the worship of the two worlds (jinn and humankind).” A single strike, in a single moment, outweighing the worship of jinn and humankind gathered across the ages. The worth lay not in the act itself — striking with a sword is an act thousands of others do — but in its depth and its intention. The Imam (peace be upon him) was fighting for God alone, to the point that when ‘Amr spat in his face, he rose off him and withdrew, lest a share for the self mix into his killing. Then he returned, once his anger had subsided, and killed him for God. The outward act is one; the inner from which it issued is what raised it to that station.

And this opens for you an understanding of your whole life. The balance is not measured by quantity. A single prayer with complete presence is better than years with an absent heart. A word of truth in its place is better than sermons that overflow with no spirit. What raises a deed is not its quantity, but what issues from it.

The Four Dimensions in the Arena of Trial

And because trial discloses the inner, and because your inner — as you came to know in the third chapter — is composed of four dimensions, trial discloses all these dimensions together.

It discloses your spirit: the extent of its connection to the above, and what it leans upon when your support below collapses. The connected spirit does not break when it is shaken, because its support was not shaken. It discloses your heart: what was truly in it when you claimed something else was. You suppose your heart loves God — but money, when exposed to loss, reveals to you that you loved it more. It discloses your intellect: its steadiness before the shaking. Was your creed built upon evidence, or upon habit? And it discloses your body: its capacity, its endurance, your relationship with it. Do you own your body, or does it own you?

And the complete trial discloses the four dimensions together. When a heavy trial descends, you find your spirit being tested, your heart being unveiled, your intellect being

shaken, and your body being pained — all at one time.

An Inventory of Disclosure

And each kind of trial has its own disclosure. He tries you with money, so you see your heart as it is — were you a guest upon it, or attached to it? Were you using it, or being used by it? Whoever's heart was above the money is pained by its loss without breaking. Whoever's money was above his heart collapses at the first tremor.

He tries you with loss, so you see your depth. Those we lose, we are tested by them — not only our love for them, but our own depth. Was our love for them a kind of leaning, or a kind of giving? Did we love them for ourselves, or love them for themselves? In loss, the difference is unveiled.

He tries you with relationships, so you see the intention of drawing near. He tries you with strength, so you see your justice. He tries you with weakness, so you see your humility. He tries you with joy, so you see your awareness — were you waiting for it to fill you, or were you already full and it came to crown you? He tries you with sorrow, so you see your steadfastness — do you lean on God, or on what is around you?

The one who leans on God grieves the grief of a human, but does not lose his steadfastness. The one who leans on what is around him collapses with his support, so his grief widens until it becomes despair.

A Test of Direction, Not of Purity

And see that all these trials do not ask you to be entirely pure. They do not ask that you not be pained, or not fear, or not grieve. These are demands no human fulfills. The prophets (peace be upon them) themselves were pained, grieved, and feared. But they kept their direction.

Life is no test of purity, but a test of direction. Not in not falling, but in rising when you fall. Not in not being pained, but in not losing your direction in pain. One who understands life as a test of purity drains himself chasing an impossible perfection. One who understands it as a test of direction receives his weakness with honesty, rises, and continues.

Evil and Good: Both Disclose

And do not suppose that what discloses you is only the bad trials:

“And We test you with evil and with good as a trial, and to Us you will be returned.” (Qur’an 21:35)

“With evil and with good.” Both are a trial, and both disclose. Evil tests your patience, and good tests your humility. Evil pushes you to God, because you resort to the One you suppose able to lift it. And good tests the sincerity of the relationship with God — do you forget Him when you obtain what you want, or do you increase in nearness to Him? So the Prophet (peace be upon him) said in the related hadith: “How wondrous is the affair of the believer! All his affair is good for him. If prosperity befalls him he is grateful, and that is good for him; and if adversity befalls him he is patient, and that is good for him.”

The Bridge to What Follows

And if you have mastered these foundations — that trial is a journey of disclosure and building, showing you your state then opening for you the arena of acquisition; that each human is held to account by his capacity; that “best in deed” discloses the inner, not the outer; that all four dimensions manifest in it; and that life is a test of direction — your relationship with all that happens to you is transformed.

But a question keeps pursuing you, especially when trial intensifies upon you. Why should the disclosure be this painful? Can trial not disclose without pain? And why, when pain descends, does it appear as though it is more than necessary — excessive, surplus, exceeding what it discloses?

These questions open a new chapter. Not the chapter of trial as a design, nor of trial as a disclosure, but the chapter of pain itself — what its function is, why it is this sharp, and why God did not choose a gentler way to disclose us to ourselves. This is what the next part reveals.

Part Four: Pain as an Awakening

We came to know in the previous part that trial discloses. But a question stays lodged in the chest: why does it disclose by pain? Can the disclosure not be by a calmer, gentler, less harsh way? Why should the heart be torn for it to understand, the body be broken for it to grasp, the spirit be shaken for it to awaken?

The question ought to be inverted at its root. Pain is no violent means of disclosure that God chose from among several. Pain itself is the disclosure. It is not a tool from which disclosure results, but the disclosure in its conscious form.

When you truly know yourself, you are pained. And when you are pained, you have known. And one who is not pained in his life does not yet know himself — however much he supposes he does.

The Function of Pain: The Bell of Truth

Reflect on what pain does in your body.¹¹ Were there in your body no capacity to feel pain, you would not know your hand is burning when it touches the fire. You would keep touching it until it was destroyed. Pain in the body is the bell that says to you: stop, something here ought to change. It is not your enemy, but your guardian.

And so too the pain in the spirit, the heart, and the intellect. When your self is pained in a relationship, the pain says to you: something in this relationship is not upright. When you are pained by a decision you made, the pain says to

¹¹Medicine confirms this guardian function of pain from the side of its opposite: there is a rare genetic disorder called Congenital Insensitivity to Pain (CIPA), whose bearer is born unable to feel pain, so he suffers repeated burns, fractures, and wounds — even biting his tongue and fingers without knowing — because the alarm bell that protects everyone else is disabled in him. So pain, in its origin, is a protection, not a defect. It is cited here for diagnosis, not as proof. See a systematic review in: Personalized Medicine (MDPI), 2024.

you: reconsider. When you are pained by your whole life in a vague way, the pain says to you: there is a flaw in the direction. Pain is the language of God to His servant, by which He speaks to him when he hears Him by nothing else.

And it does three things in your depth. It discloses to you what needs to change — for the comfortable life hides from the human his flaws, but pain strips away the coverings. It returns the heart to its true size — for the ego in ease swells until it supposes itself to be everything, a human pattern the Qur'an revealed frankly in the first of what was revealed:

*“No! Indeed, the human
transgresses, when he sees himself
self-sufficient.” (Qur'an 96:6-7)*

Pain comes to remind the ego of its size, to bring it down from a tower it had built of pure illusion. And it prevents you from going blind — for a blessing without trial makes the human forget the One who blessed him, so he is occupied with the blessing away from its Giver. And the Qur'an reveals this movement precisely:

*“And when affliction touches the
human, he calls upon his Lord,*

*turning to Him; then when He
bestows on him a favor from
Himself, he forgets that for which
he was calling before.” (Qur’an
39:8)*

And pain returns you to the Giver when you forget Him in the blessing.

“The Nearer Punishment Short of the Greater”

And the Qur’an reveals this function frankly in a verse among the most precise that have come in describing pain:

*“And We will surely make them
taste the nearer punishment short
of the greater punishment, that
perhaps they will return.” (Qur’an
32:21)*

Pause at every word in this verse, for it carries the whole key.

“We will surely make them taste” — with the heavy emphatic *nūn*. Not merely “We make them taste,” but “We will surely make them taste,” with certainty and decisiveness. This pain is no

chance, no accident. It is an intended divine governance, not descending arbitrarily.

“Of the nearer punishment” — “of” (min), which means partition. That is: a portion, a part, a slight thing. And the word “nearer” carries two meanings at once: the nearer (in place and time) and the lighter (in severity). The pain you undergo in the world is “nearer” in both senses: near to you, not deferred to the Hereafter, and lighter than what awaits one who does not take heed.

“Short of the greater punishment” — “short of” (dūn) here is a particle of distinction from, not direction toward. That is: distinct from the greater punishment, lesser than it, a means by which the human avoids it. And this is a matter of the utmost greatness: the near pain spares you the far pain. The wound in the world protects you from destruction in the Hereafter.

“That perhaps they will return” — “perhaps” (la‘alla), a particle of hope: the hope of a response. God — exalted is He — does not hope out of ignorance, but in the sense that He opens the door before you and awaits your free response. He did not say “that they will return” in the form of certainty, because the return is

not imposed, but offered. Pain is the offer; its acceptance is left to you.

And the meaning the whole verse opens: that pain in your life — much of it — is no punishment, but a message of return. No revenge, but a painful mercy. No humiliation, but an awakening before the course hardens and the door of return closes. When you are pained in the world, you find the door still open. When the human is pained in the Hereafter, the door has already closed. So pain in life — however severe — is in truth a blessing, because it comes when repentance benefits, when the return benefits.

What the Ancients Understood and Modernity Forgets

And for the importance of this understanding, the scholars of the Muslims, of their various schools, paused upon it. Imam Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī — in *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* (Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn) — reveals this meaning precisely when he says, in substance: that trial descends upon the servant for one of three reasons — an expiation for a sin, a raising of a rank, or an alert to return. No trial is free of one of these. Whoever looked at it with the eye

of the first was patient; whoever looked with the eye of the second was grateful; whoever looked with the eye of the third returned. The idea is precise: pain does not come in vain, but carries a function the servant ought to discover. And whoever did not discover it missed what it was possible to benefit from.

But what the ancients understood by direct intuition has become, in our age, strange — indeed, rejected. Western modernity, which our contemporary culture has absorbed in varying degrees, looks at pain as a disorder to be removed at any cost. It treats the human as a perpetual patient needing anesthesia, markets to him sedatives, sleeping pills, and psychological painkillers, and replaces the bell with suppression. When a psychological pain comes to him, he is not told “listen to what it says to you,” but “suppress it.” When an existential anxiety comes, he is not called to reflection, but to distraction. The result: a human living heedless of the messages of his inner self, his disorder worsening without his knowing, until his greater trial explodes all at once. Modernity suppressed the nearer pain, and so summoned the greater. It inverted the verse entirely.

Pain Does Not Come by Chance

And because pain is a message, each kind of it carries its own message, if you listened. Bodily pain says to you: look at your body, you have neglected something in it. Psychological pain says to you: look at your relationships, or your thoughts, or what you carry of an unseen weight. Spiritual pain says to you: look at your connection with God, it has weakened somewhere. And the great catastrophes — loss, severe illness, complete brokenness — say to you: reconsider everything, for the whole of life is asking you for a reordering.

And whoever neglects these messages does not abolish them, but postpones them. The postponed pain returns, more severe. For when the “nearer” fails to awaken you, what is greater comes. That perhaps they will return — the divine hope with you remains open. But the windows narrow when you ignore.

Receiving Pain, Not Fleeing It

And the understanding that ought to settle in your awareness after all this: that pain is no enemy you flee, but a teacher you receive. The difference between two people before the same pain is not the amount of what they undergo, but

how they receive it. The first wants it to end, and so drains himself in attempts at anesthesia and distraction, and his pain increases. The second receives it, listens to it, asks it: what do you want to teach me? — and the pain dissolves to the extent of his understanding.

This does not mean pain disappears by mere understanding. No. But it is transformed — from a meaningless torment into a track with a direction; from a constriction that strangles you, into a journey you walk through. And the human can endure much pain, if he knows its meaning. What breaks him is not the amount of pain, but his sense of its futility.

A Bridge to What Follows

After these meanings become clear — that pain is a bell, that the nearer punishment spares you the greater, that modernity inverted the meaning, and that every pain is a message — your relationship with all that descends upon you widens.

But if pain is a mercy, and trial a design, then what is the role of Satan in all this? Is Satan not the source of evil? How do we understand his existence within a system designed for growth,

not destruction? And is he an adversary to be fought, or a function to be understood?

These questions open the next part.

Part Five: Satan — a Tester, Not a Conqueror

After all we have seen about trial and pain as a design and an awakening, a new question visits the reflective reader: very well, we have understood that trial is a disclosure, and that pain is a bell. But what about Satan? Is he not the one who pushes us to sin, seduces us, makes evil seem fair to us? How does he enter this system that appears precisely designed for growth?

The question ought to be freed at its root before we answer it. And the great paradox the Qur'an reveals is that Satan — for all his being a manifest enemy to the human — plays, without intending it, an assisting role in bringing humankind to the goal for which God created them. This is no dialectical paradox, but a truth built on a deeper understanding of God's governance. For God — the Wise, the Almighty, who made subservient to the human what is in the heavens and the earth, and made the angels subservient to his service — would not permit

Satan to corrupt His purpose in creating the human. But He permitted him to work because in his very work, despite him, is a service to what God wants from His servant.

Satan Does Not Create Evil; He Discloses and Provokes It

Reflect on the function Satan performs. Is he the one who creates appetite in you? No — appetite is in your constitution originally, deposited in you by God as part of your capacities. Is he the one who creates anger in you? No — anger too is a force placed in your nature. Is he the one who creates arrogance, or envy, or stinginess in you? No — all these are latent forces in the human, awaiting something to move them.

Satan's role does not exceed moving and adorning. He moves what is in you originally, adorns it, makes it attractive. But he does not create it. And when the human responds to Satan's enticement, he responds to something that was in him, not to something that came to him from outside.

But this very moving — for all its being evil in Satan's intent — serves the formation of the human in God's higher governance. Because

moving summons resistance, resistance develops the latent capacities and stirs the intellect, the will, and the forces of the self to defend. And the result, as history and reality reveal, is that great numbers of humans deserve stations they would not have reached but for the challenges and provocations Satan practices. Satan supposes he is destroying them, while in truth he is raising them — without his knowing or intending.

The Metaphor of Vaccination: The Soul's Inoculation

And so this meaning may settle in your awareness, reflect on a metaphor from modern medicine, which reveals this wisdom with the utmost precision: the vaccination with which we inoculate our children.

Vaccination, in reality, is the introduction of a weakened version of the disease into the body. On its surface it is a strange act: why inject a healthy child with disease? But in its depth is a deep wisdom. The body does not build its immunity against the disease except when it meets it. The body that has experienced nothing forms no antibodies, and so is weak before the first real infection. But the body that has experienced the weakened version forms its

immunity, and becomes able to face the real version when it comes.

And Satan, in the human's life, plays the role of the spiritual vaccination. He is a version of evil, permitted to meet you, so that your self may form an immunity against the greater evil. Had the human not met enticements he resists, the power of resistance would not have formed in him. Had he not experienced the adornment of falsehood, he would not have known the firmness of his compass in distinguishing the truth. Satan, then, does not destroy the sound human, but fortifies him.

And the most beautiful thing in this metaphor is that it also reveals to you the meaning of the small sins the believer commits from time to time. They are more like the side effects of the vaccine. When a child is vaccinated, sometimes a fever, or redness, or fatigue comes to him. These symptoms are undesirable in themselves, but they are evidence that the body is resisting the vaccine, not evidence of its failure — and but for this resistance, the immunity would not form. So too the small sins of the sincere believer. They are — for all our dislike of them — evidence of our resistance to Satan, not evidence of our surrender to him. And the self that sins then

seeks forgiveness has formed in it a deeper immunity than the self that has not sinned and not been tried.

“Over My Servants You Have No Authority”

And the Qur’an settles this relationship precisely in a verse that reveals the limits of Satan’s authority:

*“Indeed, over My servants you
have no authority, except those
who follow you of the deviators.”
(Qur’an 15:42)*

And al-Sayyid al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī pauses at this verse a pause that reveals its true depth. He says, in substance: that God, glory be to Him, says to Satan — My servants, that is, humankind, you have no authority over them; this is the rule, and this is the origin. As for your authority, it is realized only exceptionally over those who follow you of the deviators — those whom their negative practices in life have mastered to the degree that it is correct to call them “deviators.” And because they are deviators, they follow you — not that you dominate them by force.

And the difference between the two understandings is an essential difference in your whole life. One who understands that Satan is a force dominating him from outside lives in perpetual defense, fearing to be taken by surprise, that his choice be stripped from him against his will. One who understands that the origin is the absence of authority, and that authority is realized only by his own choice, lives in tranquility — for he knows the key is in his hand, not in his enemy's. Satan cannot storm his heart, unless he himself opens the door.

Beware of Hasty Judgment

And from this understanding springs an important warning: do not judge a human by Satan's authority over him from a limited perspective. If you see someone practicing a forbidden thing or more — lying, or listening to what he should not, or committing a minor sin — do not hasten to judge that Satan has taken hold of him and controls him. For in such a judgment you look at only one side of his life, and overlook the other sides Satan could not turn him from, which are for the most part far more than his bad deeds.

Reflect on the human you judge. Does he not strive in his work to feed his family? Does he not show kindness to his mother at times? Does he not perform what he can of his duties? Does he not serve his community, even by a little? Does his heart not contract when he sees an injustice, even where he could not change it? These are all righteous deeds that slipped away from Satan, witnesses that his authority over the man is not absolute, but partial. It is not right to judge a magnificent painting that has in it some errors as ugly and hideous. The painting as a whole is what is judged, not its details alone.

“The Believer Is Tried and Ever-Repentant”

And this understanding opens to you a prophetic hadith of the utmost depth. It is related that the Companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) came to him one day and said: “O Messenger of God, we fear hypocrisy in ourselves.” The Prophet (peace be upon him) asked: And why do you fear that? They said: When we are with you and you remind us and stir our longing, we feel awe and forget the world, and grow ascetic until it is as if we behold the Hereafter, Paradise, and the Fire while we are with you. But when we leave you and enter

these homes and smell the children and see the household and family, our state almost changes from what it was with you, until it is as if we were upon nothing. Do you fear for us that this may be hypocrisy?

And the Prophet (peace be upon him) answered them with words that ought to settle in the awareness of every reader:¹² “No. These are the steps of Satan, making you desire the world. By God, were you to remain in the state you described of yourselves, the angels would shake your hands, and you would walk upon water. And were you not to sin, God would create a creation that would sin, then seek God’s forgiveness, and He would forgive them. Indeed, the believer is tried and ever-repentant.”

Reflect on what this hadith reveals. Sin and seeking forgiveness, trial and repentance, are placed within the design of the human’s journey to God. Were the human not to sin and seek forgiveness, he would not know God’s mercy. Were he not to experience falling, he would not know the worth of rising. Were Satan not to

¹²The root of this meaning is established in Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim from the hadith of Abū Hurayra and Abū Ayyūb (may God be pleased with them): “Were you not to sin, God would create a creation that would sin, then seek forgiveness, and He would forgive them.” It has come with this fuller context in other sources.

draw him in moments, he would not discover the sincerity of his turning to God in other moments. The sin followed by seeking forgiveness is no deviation in the journey, but part of its design.

And this is an understanding that puts the sincere believer's chest at ease. Do not reproach yourself for your humanity. Do not despair of God's mercy because of a stumble. Do not suppose the fall abolishes the rising that preceded it. The human is tried by the nature of his existence, ever-repentant by the *fiṭra* he was created upon. What is required of him is not to be an angel, but to be a human sincere in his return whenever he stumbles.

Existential Functions in a System Designed to Make the Human

And when you gather all that you have seen in this chapter — trial as a design, pain as an awakening, Satan as a vaccine that fortifies rather than a force that conquers — you discover that what appears in the universe to be “evil” is not in vain, but existential functions within a system designed to make the human.

Trial is no punishment, but a door of disclosure. Pain is no revenge, but a message of return. Satan is no conqueror, but a tester who

plays an assisting role without intending it. Sin is no end, but a side effect of a resistance running in the inner. And all these functions serve a single purpose: that the human be formed by his will, not be compelled to form. That he choose his road, not be driven to it. That he build himself by his choice, not have imposed upon him what he becomes.

And here the secret of this whole chapter becomes clear. For the qualities you acquire in the arena of friction — your patience, your truthfulness, your certainty, your forbearance — are no passing ornament you leave at the door of the grave. They are your very self, with which you will live in the Hereafter as you live with it now in the world. For you truly possess nothing but what you have become; and the firmly-rooted quality you built by your will becomes part of your essence, which you carry with you wherever you go. This is “the eternal self”: not what you gathered, but what you became; not what you possessed, but what you acquired of existential qualities. And trial, in this sense, is no enemy that disrupts your life, but the chisel in which the self that endures is sculpted.

And were you to remove from the system any of these functions, the system itself would break.

Remove trial, and the human would not be formed. Remove pain, and he would not awaken. Remove Satan, and his choice would not be his choice. Remove the possibility of sin, and he would not know God's mercy. These four are no flaw in the design of the universe; they are the design itself.

The Bridge to What Follows

But if this is the nature of the system, a question of the utmost importance remains: are you — as a human — merely a recipient of what God decrees? Is your role confined to responding to what descends? Or is there a place for your will in changing what descends upon you? And if everything is by a measure, then where is the place of supplication?

These questions open the next part: The Flexibility of Destiny.

Part Six: The Flexibility of Destiny

In the fourth chapter, when we spoke of the law of causality, we raised a question and deferred its answer: if everything runs by its strict causes, then what is the place of supplication? How does the human interact with a precise destiny? Can he change anything by his

asking? Or is supplication merely a psychological tranquility, with no effect in reality?

The question deserves opening now. For supplication is the bridge that links understanding and action, the knowledge of the system and the movement within it. And whoever did not understand supplication rightly either abandons it out of his deterministic understanding of destiny, or uses it in a twisted way that makes him await from God what He did not promise.

The Law Is Not a Prison

The pressing questions begin once it settles in our awareness that the universe runs by laws that do not lapse. A silent fear rises in the chest: does this strictness mean my life is governed by an iron chain of causes that cannot be breached? Are we prisoners in a cage of laws? If everything moves by causality, where is the space of supplication? And where is the place of divine intervention?

These questions appear frightening, but they rest upon an incomplete understanding that ought to be corrected. We came to know in the fourth chapter that the cosmic laws are no independent entities standing on their own, but

a reflection of the interaction of the qualities of the beings themselves. And being so, they answer to whatever new force enters the equation. They do not break, but they change with the change of capacities and inputs. There is a great difference between the laws being a prison, and their being an arena in which multiple forces move, some affecting others.

Reflect on a child trying to lift a heavy stone and unable to. Does the universe oppose him? No. The cause is simple: his muscles do not have the capacity. The law is one: weight needs force. And if a strong man comes and lifts the stone easily, has he broken the law? No. The law is as it is, fixed, unchanged. What changed is the capacity. A new cause entered the equation, and so the result changed.

“Rather, Both His Hands Are Outstretched”

And so the place of supplication in this system may settle in your awareness, recall what we came to know in the fourth chapter: that God — in every instant — is present in the universe, acting within it, pouring out existence upon every existent in every moment. He is no first maker who then withdrew, but a Self-Subsisting

One who holds the universe by His renewed command. And this truth the Qur'an condenses in its decisive reply to one who supposed God had withdrawn from the governance of the world:

“And the Jews said, ‘God’s hand is fettered.’ Fettered are their hands, and cursed are they for what they said. Rather, both His hands are outstretched; He spends however He wills.” (Qur’an 5:64)

“Rather, both His hands are outstretched” — in every moment, by a free will that does not end. And this is what opens the door to supplication in the first place. For one who does not act is not supplicated to; but one whose hands are outstretched, supplication to Him has meaning — it summons a new outpouring upon your capacities, letting the result change.

The Secret of Supplication

And once these truths are settled in your awareness — that the laws answer to capacities, and that God’s hand is outstretched in every moment — the secret of supplication opens to you.

Supplication is no request to break the law, but a request to add a higher force to the equation of your life. You do not ask God to stop gravity. You ask Him to place in your hand what makes you able to deal with it. You do not ask for the abolition of the causes, but for the summoning of a cause that was not in your reckoning. You do not ask for the disabling of the system, but for the activation of a level higher than it.

And the Qur'an reveals this in a phrase of the utmost precision:

*"His command, when He
intends a thing, is only that He
says to it 'Be,' and it is." (Qur'an
36:82)*

Reflect on the phrasing. "Be" is no abolition of the laws, but the bringing about of a cause from a higher world that was not apparent to you. It is no breaking of the world, but the opening of a door in its structure. God does not act in the universe by breaching its laws, but by introducing new forces upon them.

And when you supplicate, you ask God to bring about in your life a cause that was not — not to abolish what is established. And this

difference softens your whole relationship with supplication. You no longer wait for time to stop, or gravity to invert. You wait for what was not to enter your life, so the possible widens, and doors open that were not open.

Destiny Is a Web of Possibilities

And because supplication summons a new cause, destiny itself is no single solid road, but a web of possibilities. This understanding frees the reader from a common, faulty conception: that destiny is a “written line” that does not change, and that everything you do is preordained in its precise details.

The truth is more precise. Destiny moves in a web of possibilities, in which the field of what can happen widens according to what the human enters into the equation of choices and supplications. Supplication is the force that moves you from one possibility to another, from one result to another, from one track to another. It is no contending with destiny, but an activation of another destiny.

So the Prophet (peace be upon him) said in the related hadith: “Nothing repels the decree except supplication.” Supplication repels the decree, yet it is itself a decree. So there is no

contradiction. Supplication is part of the system, not a breach of it.

The Functions of Supplication

And supplication has functions in your life that ought to settle in your awareness, so that you use it with understanding.

It widens your valley. As you saw in the law of the rain and the valleys in the fourth chapter, the divine outpouring is one, but the vessels differ. Supplication intervenes in the vessel, not in the outpouring. When you supplicate, you ask God to widen your capacity, to break in you what keeps the rain from being held.

It summons a higher force. When your causes are weak, or insufficient, or beyond your ability, supplication summons a force that works from a higher level — not breaching the laws, but working above them.

It transforms the meaning. Even when the outward does not change, supplication changes the inward. The trial that descends upon you is transformed, by the effect of your supplication, from a meaningless constriction into a door with a direction. The pain does not vanish, but it acquires meaning.

But supplication does a fourth thing, deeper than these three, and it is what makes it beloved to God in itself, regardless of its outward response. Supplication raises your existence.

Reflect on the words of God:

“And your Lord says, ‘Call upon Me; I will respond to you.’” (Qur’an 40:60)

God — the Absolutely Free of need — invites us to supplication. Not out of a need of His for our supplication, for He is free of need of every creature. But in supplication is an entrenchment of the state of servitude to God within us, and that is what draws us near to Him, raising the level of our existence. When you supplicate God, you discover your need of Him, and so your rank rises. You discover your want, and so your self widens. You discover that you are not the one subsisting by himself, and so an horizon higher than your self opens.

And reflect on what the Qur’an does when it speaks of supplication in another way:

“And when My servants ask you about Me — indeed, I am near. I respond to the call of the caller

*when he calls upon Me.” (Qur’an
2:186)*

Reflect on the phrasing. “And when My servants ask you about Me” — He did not say “and when they ask you,” but set the intermediary (the Prophet, peace be upon him), and yet the answer came directly: “indeed, I am near.” The intermediary is broken in the answer, to affirm that between the servant and his Lord, in supplication, there is no intermediary. God is “near,” responding to the caller when he calls. Supplication in itself is a door of nearness, not merely an instrument of request.

The Balanced Duality

And the understanding that ought to settle in your awareness after all this is condensed in an eloquent phrase from the heritage of Islamic wisdom: “Work by the means as though they were everything, and rely upon God as though the means were nothing.”

Reflect on this phrase. It is no contradiction, but the very nature of human existence. To be a vicegerent in the earth, and a servant before God. To walk firmly within the laws of the world, while your heart is suspended upon the One who laid them down. To take to the causes with all

the diligence you have, then rely upon God as though you did nothing.

And whoever deviates from this balance in either direction is lost. One who works by the means without reliance descends into materialism, so anxiety drains him and he ends in frustration. One who relies without taking to the means descends into laziness, awaiting from God what He did not promise. The correct balance gathers the two, in a single movement with two dimensions: a dimension in the earth, and a dimension in the heavens.

The Bridge to What Follows

After these meanings become clear — that the law is no prison; that God's hand is outstretched in every moment; that supplication activates a higher destiny; that destiny is a web of possibilities; that supplication itself raises your existence; and that reliance does not abolish striving — you are freed from two weights together: the weight of determinism that makes you only a recipient, and the weight of anxiety that makes you suppose everything rests on your shoulders alone.

But a final question remains: how does all we have seen in this chapter — of trial, pain, Satan,

destiny, and supplication — gather into a single movement that condenses the whole meaning? What is the word that sums up the human's stance toward this system?

This is what the last part opens, the conclusion of the chapter.

Part Seven: Chapter Conclusion

And here we have reached the end of this chapter. We came to know in the fourth chapter how the universe works: by its laws, its causality, its capacities, its single outpouring upon different vessels, its opposites, its friction, and the illusion of evil that appears in it. And we came to know in the fifth chapter how the human walks within this universe: in an intended toil, a disclosing trial, an awakening pain, a testing Satan, and a destiny that supplication activates.

And all this is theoretical understanding of the system you were placed in. But knowledge alone does not move. The question awaiting you now, after all this, is: what do you do with this understanding? How do you translate it into movement?

The answer the Qur'an condenses in a single word that contains a whole existence-journey:

labor (kadḥ). And in a single scene that reveals to you what runs in the human when destiny meets his will.

Labor — the Human's Answer Within the System

Labor passed before you in earlier chapters as the human's exhausting movement on his road to his Lord. And here it settles into its place in this chapter: for labor is the human's answer within the opposites of the universe, his movement when he rubs against them and so chooses and builds. And the Qur'an condensed all this movement into a single verse:

*"O human being, you are
laboring toward your Lord with
[great] exertion and will meet
Him." (Qur'an 84:6)*

The human is a laborer by his nature. He does not part from hardship, just as he does not part from the toil with which we opened this chapter. But labor — as the Qur'an reveals — is not in a void, nor around the self, but toward your Lord. It is a movement with a direction. And the difference between a human who labors and is formed, and one who labors and is drained by his

labor, is not the amount of effort, but its direction.

And here the threads of the whole chapter meet. Trial discloses you, pain awakens you, Satan tests you, and destiny answers your supplication — all of this in the service of a single labor, if you direct it toward your Lord. And all of it turns into a futility that drains you, if you direct it toward other than Him.

And because labor heads, by its nature, toward a meeting, what meets you in the end is the sum of your labor. You do not meet your Lord with a self you assumed before you were tested. You meet Him with a self shaped by your labor on your road to Him. This is what the Qur’anic emphasis “and will meet Him” reveals — an inevitable end, but the form of your meeting with it is what is shaped on the road.

The Scene of the Ship — Where Sincerity Is Born

And because concepts manifest in scenes more than in words, reflect on a scene the Qur’an draws with the utmost precision, gathering for you in a single image all we have seen in this chapter — toil, trial, pain, and supplication:

"It is He who carries you over land and sea, until, when you are in the ships and they sail with them by a good wind and they rejoice in it, a violent wind comes upon them, and the waves come at them from every side, and they think that they are encompassed — they call upon God, sincere to Him in religion: 'If You save us from this, we will surely be among the grateful.'" (Qur'an 10:22)

Reflect on the movement of the scene in four phases:

First, the pleasant sailing. "And they sail with them by a good wind and they rejoice in it." This is the life of ease. Everything runs as it should. And in this moment, they do not call upon God. Why would they call when everything has run according to expectation?

Second, the encompassing by the waves. "A violent wind comes upon them, and the waves come at them from every side." The state inverts suddenly. And reflect on "from every side" — no escape, no direction from which they are safe. All the support they leaned upon — the ship, the

wind, the experience, the skill — collapses in a single moment.

Third, the unveiling. “And they think that they are encompassed.” When the human becomes certain there is no way out, what was hiding in his depth is unveiled. What he was leaning upon — money, strength, relationships, planning — all falls at once. Nothing remains but a single thing.

Fourth, the supplication in complete sincerity. “They call upon God, sincere to Him in religion.” And reflect on the word “sincere.” In ease, many of them used to call upon God — but with a heart attached to various causes. Now, when all the causes have fallen, nothing remains but God alone. The supplication became sincere because there was no longer a partner in it.

And the meaning this whole scene reveals: that everything we came to know in this chapter — trial, pain, Satan, and supplication — serves a single purpose: that the self be unveiled to itself with sincerity, when all the supports that were veiling it fall. The human is not formed in the ease in which his illusions hide themselves from him. He is formed in the moment the fragility of every support but God is unveiled, so his will awakens to the truth.

Chapter Conclusion

And here we have reached the end of this whole chapter. We came to know that the universe is a precise system of laws, that the opposites in it are no flaw but a design, and that what appears to be evil in it has existential functions. We came to know that what obstructs the human — of trial, pain, Satan, and strict destiny — is itself what forms him, if he understood and received.

And the summary our reader ought to come out with is that everything that runs in this existence — of constriction and spaciousness, of joy and sorrow, of light and darkness, of the easy and the one of thorns — is not in vain, nor a cruelty, nor a favoritism. It is a consistent design, whose purpose is to bring the human out from where he is to where he ought to be. It does not abolish pain, for in pain is an awakening. It does not abolish Satan, for in his existence is a fortification. It does not abolish toil, for in toil is a strength. It does not abolish death, for in death is a meeting.

All of this in the service of a single purpose: that the human be formed by his will, not be compelled to form. That he choose his road, not be driven to it. That he build himself by his

choice, not have imposed upon him what he becomes.

And here the secret of this whole chapter becomes clear. For the qualities you acquire in the arena of friction — your patience, your truthfulness, your certainty, your forbearance — are no passing ornament you leave at the door of the grave. They are your very self, with which you will live in the Hereafter as you live with it now in the world. For you truly possess nothing but what you have become; and the firmly-rooted quality you built by your will becomes part of your essence, which you carry with you wherever you go. This is “the eternal self”: not what you gathered, but what you became; not what you possessed, but what you acquired of existential qualities. And trial, in this sense, is no enemy that disrupts your life, but the chisel in which the self that endures is sculpted.

But the knowledge of the system — however wide — does not suffice alone. The question that what we have recited in this chapter opens is: how does the human actually move within this system? What turns understanding into conduct, and knowledge into a being? What makes the human move from a reader of the law to a traveler on his road to God?

The answer is opened by the next chapter: The Making of the Will. There we discover the will as the essence of humanity, and self-honesty as the moment in which intention unites with act. Then follows the chapter of the Movement of the Essence, where knowledge becomes an identity from which good issues by nature. And that is the bridge between what we have come to know and what we will become.



A Pause for Reflection

Before you fold this chapter, summon a single pain that has accompanied you these days, and that you were asking: why is this happening to me? Then change the question as this chapter taught you, and ask: what does it awaken in me, this pain? Which door in my self was shut, so it knocked upon it; and which truth was I heedless of, so it came to remind me of it? And if you find in the answer a sincerity you make, not a destiny you complain of, then you have begun to read friction with the eye of the laborer, not the eye of the victim.

Chapter Six • The Making of the Will



Part One

Introduction — From Knowledge to Movement

After wandering in the third chapter through your four inner dimensions — spirit, heart, intellect, and body — and crossing in the fourth and fifth chapters the strict laws of the universe — the ways, friction, trial, destiny, and supplication — we now arrive at the essential question: why was all this opposition created? Why was a multi-dimensional human placed in a universe surging with opposites and with thorns?

The answer is that all of it is harnessed to produce one precious and rare thing — a thing not born in comfort, nor appearing in a void: the truthful, unified self.

Reflect on all you have come to know. Every friction you experienced, every trial that refined your metal, every pain that awakened you, every

supplication that raised your existence, was nothing but a hammer breaking the false shells, a chisel by which you sculpt — by your will — this truthful essence, so you ascend to a station not attained except by this labor. Labor is movement, and truthfulness is the uprightness of this movement. And when the human attains this self-honesty, he attains the meaning of unity: the inner dialectics dissolve, and the rupture ends between what you are and what you display to the world.

But the knowledge of all this — however wide — does not move on its own. The question awaiting you now, after all you have come to know, is: what do you do with this understanding? What turns the human from a reader of the law into a traveler on his road to God?

Reflect on this subtle difference. When knowledge works alone, it lights the road from afar without moving the foot. When feeling works alone, it shakes the heart without forming a decision. When the body works alone, it repeats the acts without understanding their meaning. But when another force works, deeper than all this, it gathers these scattered layers into a single direction, and turns awareness from

a state of observation into a state of birth. That force is named: the will.

The will is the bridge that connects the inner with the outer. By it the spirit — where the first light dwells — is linked to the heart, where the intention stirs, to the intellect, where the map is formed, to the body, where the act is realized. Absent the will, these layers stay four separate rooms in which the light does not meet. Present, they become like doors that all open in a single direction, so the light enters all at once.

And because the will holds this rank, we should begin from it: to understand why the human was created willing, how his will is formed, where it draws its strength from, how it deviates, and how it becomes upright. That is what the next part opens.



Part Two

The Will, the Essence of the Human

Reflect on the universe around you. Everything in it runs upon a way it does not deviate from. The sun runs a fixed course it cannot delay, the moon revolves in an orbit it

does not leave, and inanimate matter submits to the laws it was created upon. The angels, in the height of their purity, glorify the praise of God tirelessly, knowing no meaning of hesitation, no opposing desire entering their acts. The animal follows the instinct it was created with, unable to step out of its nature. Everything in the universe — as the Qur'an describes it — is submissive by its nature, led by its fiṭra:

*“Do you not see that to God
prostrates whoever is in the
heavens and whoever is on the
earth, and the sun, the moon, the
stars, the mountains, the trees,
and the moving creatures, and
many of the people? But upon
many the punishment has been
justified. And whomever God
humiliates, none can honor.
Indeed, God does what He wills.”
(Qur'an 22:18)*

Pause at this verse. The heavens prostrate, the earth prostrates, the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, the creatures — all prostrate, all in a single form: the complete, unhesitating prostration, the prostration with no division in it. Then comes the mention of the

people, and behold they alone in the universe are split into two groups: “and many of the people” prostrating, “and upon many the punishment has been justified,” refraining. Reflect on this split. Why was the moon not split into a prostrating one and a refraining one? Why were the mountains not split? Why did all the creatures come in a single form, and the people come in no form but two?

Because humanity alone — among all creatures — possesses the power to choose. The sun cannot but prostrate, and the mountains cannot but prostrate. But the human can. And so he was split. And the split in the human is evidence that he is the only creature God granted the ability to stand against his *fiṭra*, to oppose his desires, to transcend the weakness of his body, and to reshape his self by his decision, not by his nature. So the human was no mere creature among creatures, but a project for perfection not completed unless he possesses the force that makes knowledge a life, desire a choice, and trial an ascent. That force is named: the will.

And the human was not created willing only to be tested, but to attain a station no one else attains. Reflect on a scene the Qur’an reveals

with the utmost precision. The angels — in their purity and nearness — the meaning of their presence was not completed except when they prostrated to Adam. Not because he is of clay — for clay is lower than light — but because he carries what the angels do not: the power to choose. So the divine address came, disclosing the reality of this station:

*“So when I have proportioned
him and breathed into him of My
spirit, fall down to him in
prostration.” (Qur’an 15:29)*

The prostration was an acknowledgment that this being had been prepared to bear an existential dimension attained not by compelled obedience, but by conscious will. For the perfection that does not come from freedom carries no worth, and the obedience that does not cross the fire of opposition is but a fixed quality with no movement. The human, by contrast, was placed in a world of light and shadows, of pleasure and pain, of appetite and guidance, to make his perfection with his own hand. So He said:

*“Indeed, We offered the Trust to
the heavens, the earth, and the
mountains, but they declined to*

*bear it and feared it; and the
human bore it.” (Qur’an 33:72)*

Reflect on this Trust. It was not the intellect alone, for the intellect does not summon the fear of the heavens. It was not the spirit alone, for the spirit is a divine outpouring. The Trust is the readiness to bear the will and the responsibility of choice — the ability to choose, and to bear the consequences of your choice. And because this bearing is heavy, heavy, the greatest of the creatures feared it. But the human bore it.

For the human does not resemble God in form — far exalted is God above that — but resembles Him in choice. The whole universe is driven, except the human, for he is charged. And the charge has no meaning without will, and the will no meaning without a susceptibility to deviation or uprightness. Were the human without appetite, he would return to the rank of the angel; were he without intellect, to the rank of the animal. But he gathered appetite and intellect, darkness and light, weakness and awareness, to bear a will capable of raising him above the angels, or lowering him beneath the animal. This duality is no deficiency in his creation, but a precise engineering that grants

him the possibility of the perfection he was created for.

And because God willed for the human a perfection he deserves, He did not give him perfection ready-made. Were he created perfect, he would become part of the totality of the worlds that possess their qualities as they are granted, not as they make them. But God willed for the human to make himself: to ascend degree by degree, to test his intentions at every step, to forge his spirit by his own experience, not by a quality imposed upon him from the beginning.

And for that He made the universe subservient to him:

*“And He has made subservient
to you whatever is in the heavens
and whatever is on the earth — all
from Him.” (Qur’an 45:13)*

Reflect on this subservience. It is no free privilege, but an existential responsibility. Everything made subservient to you was made so that you may test your will by it, not so that you may be exempted from making your self. The whole universe — with its night and day, its sun and moon, its laws, opportunities, and trials — became in the service of a single project: that

the human become a vicegerent, the only creature who can draw near to God by his will, not by his nature.

And from here you understand why the human came to the earth, not to Paradise. Paradise is the realm of fulfillment; the earth, the realm of formation. Paradise is a result; the earth, a prelude. Paradise is a harvest; the earth, a sowing. Paradise is serenity; the earth, friction. The human had to descend to a material, opposing world — a world pulled at by voices, called by appetites, tested by choices — so that what he can be might appear, not only what he was fashioned upon. For the will is not formed in pure light, but ripens when there is on the road what opposes it, in the heart what weakens it, in the intellect what justifies for it, so it keeps searching for a point of truthfulness to settle at.

So the human — not the angel — was the creature nearest to God in existential resemblance. Not because his rank is naturally higher, but because his perfection comes by free choice. For God does not ask of the human a compelled perfection, but a perfection he chooses for God. And this is the essence of the servitude that raises its bearer. The angel is a worshipper by its nature, but the human is a

worshipper by his will. So the worship of the human — when it is sincere — is heavier in weight, because it comes from a self that can refuse, and then chooses.

And from here — from this very will — springs God's balance. Perhaps you recall what we saw at the end of the third chapter: that people do not begin the journey from a single point. This one differs from that in capacity, in environment, in circumstances, in emotional breadth. And because this difference is a reality that cannot be transcended, God did not place the balance in what the human possesses of ability, nor in what he achieves of result. He placed it in something else, possessed by every human whatever his capacity, and done by every human whatever his circumstances: striving. He said:

*“And that the human will have
nothing but what he strives for,
and that his striving will be seen.”
(Qur'an 53:39-40)*

Pause at this wondrous restriction: “the human will have nothing but what he strives for.” Not what he inherited, nor what he was granted, nor what he achieved, nor what he reached. Only what he strove for. Because

everything besides striving may be from God to you in the first place, but striving is from you. And His words “and that his striving will be seen” reveal that this striving — however hidden from the eyes of people — will emerge complete on the Day of Resurrection, nothing of it lost. And He affirms this very balance in the scene of the reckoning:

*“Indeed, the Hour is coming — I
almost keep it hidden — so that
every soul may be recompensed for
what it strives for.” (Qur’an 20:15)*

The recompense is “for what it strives for,” not for what it achieves. And the difference between striving and achieving is the difference between what you possess and what departs from your hand. Striving is by your will; achieving is by the will of God. So He made the recompense upon what you possess, as a mercy from Him not to hold you to account for what you do not. And this is a subtle point that reveals the rank of the will in God’s balance: it is no condition of success, but is success itself. And whoever strove sincerely has attained what God asks of him, even if he did not attain what people ask.

And because the human is a chooser, God did not leave him without a compass. He deposited in his spirit a *fiṭra* that guides him to what benefits him — as you saw in the third chapter — and disclosed to him the two directions of the road as an inspiration within his self:

*“By the soul and how He
proportioned it, and inspired it [to
know] its wickedness and its
righteousness — he has succeeded
who purifies it, and he has failed
who corrupts it.” (Qur’an 91:7-10)*

Pause at the word “inspired it.” Inspiration is a disclosure, not an imposition. God showed the soul the two directions of the road — wickedness and righteousness — but did not move it in either. So the recompense came in the form of the act, not the inspiration: “he has succeeded who purifies it, and he has failed who corrupts it.” Success is for whoever purified, not for whoever was inspired; failure for whoever corrupted, not for whoever was shown the road. The *fiṭra* discloses the direction, but the will is what chooses.

And from here springs the charge. From here springs the reward. From here springs the responsibility. Because the human was not left

alone on his road: his fiṭra guides him from within, and God's inspiration discloses to him the two directions, but the movement, in the end, is an act of his will.

Yet the will alone — however great — cannot bear what awaits it. The self is ever-inciting to evil, the environment pulls at the human from every side, the appetites push, the fears restrain. So from where does the will draw a strength to withstand all this? Does the human's strength alone suffice it?

Reflect on a verse you repeat in every prayer, and perhaps have not paused at its secret:

*“You alone we worship, and You
alone we ask for help.” (Qur'an
1:5)*

Were worship an act springing from the human's ability alone, it would suffice to say “You alone we worship,” and the verse would end. But God placed after it “and You alone we ask for help,” as though revealing to you that worship is the act, and seeking help is the energy of the act. To worship means to move your will in His obedience; to seek help means to ask Him for the strength by which you move your will. The human does not accomplish what

he was created for relying on his awareness and his own will alone, but on the sustenance God pours upon him whenever he turns to Him. So “You alone” was fronted twice: a restriction of worship, and a restriction of seeking help. As though the verse were telling you: worship none but God, and ask the strength for His worship from none but Him.

Indeed, reflect on a layer deeper than this. The very will by which you turn to God — where did it come to you from? It is disclosed in the words of Imam al-Sajjād (peace be upon him) in the Supplication of Abū Ḥamza al-Thumālī, with a phrasing that shakes the heart:

*13“By You I knew You, and You
guided me to You, and You called
me to You; and were it not for You,
I would not have known what You
are.”*

Reflect on this wondrous sequence. “By You I knew You”: I did not know You by my own power, but by You. “And You guided me to You”: I was not guided to You by my own strength, but

¹³From the Supplication of Abū Ḥamza al-Thumālī, narrated from Imam ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (peace be upon him), recorded by al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī in Miṣbāḥ al-Mutahajjid.

You guided me. "And You called me to You": I did not seek You in the first place, but You called me, and I responded. "And were it not for You, I would not have known what You are": were it not for You, I would not have known You at all. Even the will by which the human turns to God is a gift from God. The will is from you, but the ability for this will is a gift from Him. So the people of nearness — the closer they drew — were the more intense in their sense of God's grace, not the grace of themselves. For they realized that every step toward Him was only by His aid.

And from this angle you understand the deep difference between two wills: a will that relies on the human's strength alone, and a will connected to God. The limited human will collapses at the limits of pain, or fear, or loss. However great it is, it stays subject to the state of its bearer: active when he is active, idle when he is idle, and the first shock that exceeds its capacity breaks it. But the will connected to God strengthens the more it holds fast to Him, because its source is not a self that fluctuates, but a Lord who does not. So you may see the people of nearness increase in steadfastness the more they face difficulty — not because difficulty is desirable in itself, but because it shows them the limits of

their human will, and opens for them the door of reliance upon a higher power.

And you may ask: do the corrupt not also possess mighty wills? Indeed they do. Pharaoh was a man of solid will, and many of the tyrants of history were men of unbending resolves. But their will connects to specific sources — appetite, or power, or worldly ambition — and collapses when its sources collapse. Reflect on Pharaoh at the moment of drowning: “until, when drowning overtook him, he said, ‘I believe.’” (Qur’an 10:90) The will had not been lost, but the foundation it stood upon had crumbled. The will connected to God, by contrast, has a source that does not run out, for it draws from a Living, Self-Subsisting One.

And thus the will is no quality added to the human from outside, but the quality by which he becomes a human. And whoever does not understand why he was created willing, and why he needs to seek God’s help upon his will, will not understand why he does not attain his perfection unless he wills with a connected will.

And from here another question opens before you, more subtle than the one before. If the will holds this rank, and if the human is connected to God in his movement, then why do many of us

keep walking a road we know in our depths we do not want? Why do we wear masks upon ourselves before we wear them for people? What keeps the human from seeing himself as he is? That is what the next part opens.

* * *

Part Three

Self-Honesty — When the Gaps Dissolve

Perhaps you have felt one day a constriction whose cause you do not know. Or a pain that returns to no specific event. Or an unsettledness that dwells in you even on days of comfort. You possess enough money, enjoy acceptable health, sit among your family — and yet something is missing in you. Feelings move within you, and you find no justification for them. You try to explain the constriction by something outside — a tiring work, a passing dispute, a hard circumstance — then the circumstance passes and the constriction stays. As though the pain comes not from outside you, but from within. But you do not know from where exactly.

This constriction is not random, nor is it the result of material circumstances alone.¹⁴ Its source is deeper than all this. Its source is gaps within you, between your four dimensions. The spirit calls to one thing, the body goes to another. The heart feels one way, the intellect is convinced of its opposite. What your fiṭra guides you to differs from what your feelings attach to. What your intellect knows differs from what your limbs do. These gaps are not seen with the eye, but they consume you within mercilessly. They squander your energy, weigh down your movement, and make you walk much without truly advancing.

And the Qur'an revealed this truth with the utmost precision. Reflect on His words:

*“And whoever turns away from
My remembrance — indeed, he will
have a constricted life.” (Qur'an
20:124)*

¹⁴Psychologists call this constriction arising from the conflict between what the human believes and what he does “cognitive dissonance,” a concept put forward by Leon Festinger in 1957: a state of psychological tension arising from the inconsistency between convictions and behavior, driving one either to change his act or to justify the gap. It is cited here for diagnosis, not as proof. See: L. Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (1957).

Pause at the word “constricted” (ḍank). It is from “ḍank,” the severe constriction the self cannot expand to. And the constricted life is not the life of little money — how many a poor person lives a life wide of heart — but the contracted life, anxious of heart, scattered of mind, however numerous the blessings around it. And notice the cause God named: “whoever turns away from My remembrance.” Turning away from the remembrance of God is not merely forgetting His name, but a severing of the link between the spirit — which yearns for God — and the rest of the dimensions. And when this link is severed, the spirit opens a gap with the body, the heart, and the intellect, so the constriction arises. It is no punishment God sends down, but a natural effect of the human’s division against himself.

And in another verse the Qur’an strikes a more precise parable:

*“So whomever God wills to
guide, He expands his breast to
Islam; and whomever He wills to
send astray, He makes his breast
tight and constricted, as though he
were climbing into the sky.”*

(Qur’an 6:125)

Reflect on this wondrous metaphor: “as though he were climbing into the sky.” Climbing into the sky — in the understanding of the ancients — was impossible, draining its doer to no purpose. And even today, after the human discovered the layers of the atmosphere, we know that the higher you climb, the more the oxygen decreases, the breast tightens, breathing grows heavy, every breath a battle. The human divided within himself is like the one climbing into the sky: he expends a great effort at every step, suffocates while he breathes, works much and does not arrive. Not because life is harsh upon him, but because something in him keeps him from breathing freely. That something is the gaps that extended between his four dimensions.

And from here, the pain you feel — in many cases — is no enemy, but a messenger. It comes to tell you that within you is a gap that needs to close. The constriction is a warning, the constraint an invitation, the suffocation a call. The wider the gaps, the more severe the constriction; the more they dissolve, the more the breast expands. And this is what this chapter addresses: the dissolving of the gaps. And this process has a name we call it by in this book: self-honesty.

Self-honesty — in this meaning — is not the telling of the truth to people. It has nothing to do with telling your neighbor what he hates, or declaring what you hide. It is far deeper. It is a state in which what you know with your spirit is in harmony with what your heart feels, with what your intellect is convinced of, with what your limbs do. A state in which the gaps between your dimensions dissolve. And the more intense this harmony, the nearer you draw to what the Qur'an calls "the station of the truthful" (al-ṣiddīqīn) — which is what we will open in the next part.

But before we reach that rank, we should understand how these gaps arise in the first place, and why the human finds difficulty in closing them.

The human is not born with gaps. He is born with a pure fiṭra, told of in the third chapter, that guides his spirit to what benefits it. Then he enters life. He learns, loves, fears, aspires, and fails. And in each experience he comes out with a conviction, or acquires a habit, or takes a stance. At times these are consistent with your original fiṭra; at other times contrary to it. So the first small division arises: a gap between what your spirit guides you to and what your limbs do.

Then the gaps accumulate. The body pants after an appetite the intellect disapproves of. The intellect is convinced of an idea the heart does not love. The heart attaches to a person the spirit knows does not suit it. And the gaps grow.

And the more the gaps grow, the more the human needs what covers them. So the human invented a solution as ancient as the human: masks. Reflect on the masks the people around you wear, and on those you wear yourself. An apparent strength that hides an inner fragility. A gentleness that hides a fear of rejection. An excessive confidence that hides a buried anxiety. A declared asceticism that hides a concealed greed. An outward religiosity that hides a doubt. The masks do not hide the gap, but widen it — for they make what you display farther from what you conceal. And the longer you wear the mask, the more you forget your original features beneath it, until you suppose the mask is your true face.

And here a Qur'anic verse reveals to us an astonishing truth about the insight latent in every human. He said:

“Rather, the human, against himself, is a clear witness, even

though he presents his excuses.”
(Qur'an 75:14-15)

Reflect on this wondrous declaration. The human — every human — is “against himself, a clear witness.” And the insight here is not merely a seeing, but a penetrating, piercing sight. You see your gaps. You know them in a way no one among people knows. You know when your heart lies to your intellect, when your intellect deceives your spirit, when your body disobeys what your *fiṭra* guides it to. And you know the masks you wear, one by one. The heart does not flatter its owner. It knows where the human breaks even while he speaks of strength. It knows where the intention is sullied even while he embellishes his motives.

But the verse completes: “even though he presents his excuses.” That is, however many excuses he invents, however many justifications he adorns, however much he tries to convince himself that what he does is right, his insight remains a witness against him. The excuses do not hide the truth from its owner, but hide it from his apparent awareness alone. His depths know. So the human who multiplies his excuses, his outside is at ease, his inside anxious —

because the inner insight knows the excuses did not close the gap, but widened it.

And here it becomes clear that the dissolving of the gaps does not begin with knowledge, for the human knows his gaps. Nor with conviction, for he is convinced they exist. It begins with something else: the courage to see what he knows. The will to look at what he covers. The readiness to take off the mask — not before people, but before himself. This courage is not easy, for the human has grown used to the mask, and taking it off reveals a face he may not love. But this face — however ugly it appears — is the only sincere starting point. There is no other road.

So He said:

*“So if they had been true to
God, it would have been better for
them.” (Qur’an 47:21)*

Notice the phrasing. It did not say “if they had known the truth.” Nor “if they had understood the religion.” Those mentioned in the verse knew. They understood. But “if they had been true to God.” Truthfulness here is no new piece of information, but a relinquishing of a mask they know is a mask. Had they done that,

“it would have been better for them.” Good does not accompany the masks, but accompanies the intention when it is purified, even if at its beginning it is modest, marked with something of weakness.

And the dissolving of the gaps is no single moment the human crosses once and is then done. It is a process. Every time you take off a mask, you discover a deeper mask beneath it. Every time you close a gap, another is unveiled to you that you did not see. And every time God tries you with something, He exposes in you a division you did not know. So self-honesty is a track that extends with the whole of life, not a stage that closes.

And thus you understand the prophetic hadith we saw in the fifth chapter: “Indeed, the believer is tried and ever-repentant.” The believer is not one who reached perfection all at once, but one whom time continually tries — that is, discloses to him new gaps he did not see — then he repents, that is, returns to truthfulness, takes off another mask, closes another gap. And repentance here is not an act of expiation for a sin, but an act of truthfulness after an unveiling. So He said “Indeed, God loves those who repent”

— not because they fell, but because they did not stop closing the gaps.

And every time you close a gap, you feel something strange. A constriction lifts, a serenity descends, a life expands. Not because your external circumstances changed, but because the inner gaps are closing. As though you were climbing into the sky, then began to descend to an earth in which you can breathe. For whoever is truthful with himself is truthful with God; and whoever is truthful with God, another life is opened before him — one not known by those who wear their masks upon themselves.

And the more the gaps dissolve, the nearer you draw to a state in which the gap vanishes entirely. A state in which the human becomes one in his being, truthful in every dimension of his dimensions, marked with a special mark the Qur'an named: *ṣiddīqiyya* (the rank of the truthful). That is what the next part opens.



Part Four

The Station of the Truthful — When the Gap Vanishes

Reflect on what we saw in the previous part. When the human takes off his masks, acknowledges his gaps, and repents from his divisions, the gaps between his four dimensions begin to narrow. The spirit, the heart, the intellect, and the body draw near one another. What was discordant begins to respond. But the question this part opens is: what happens when the gap vanishes entirely? What does the human become when his four dimensions become a mirror of one another, with no contention and no hesitation?

This rank is no imagining, but a station the Qur'an named with a special name. Reflect on the description of Abraham (peace be upon him):

*“And mention in the Book
Abraham. Indeed, he was a man of
truth (ṣiddīq), a prophet.” (Qur'an
19:41)*

Pause at the word “a man of truth” (ṣiddīq). It is an intensive form of “truthfulness,” conveying the human's attainment of a degree of

truthfulness in which he is not false in any of his affairs — not in his word, nor his act, nor his intention, nor his inner. As though his truthfulness ran in his being as the blood runs in his veins. But the more precise observation is that the Qur'an placed "a man of truth" before "a prophet." Prophethood came after the truthfulness. Because prophethood is a revelation from God, but truthfulness is a state the servant attains by his labor — and God chooses for prophethood none but one who has reached in his truthfulness a degree by which he deserves to bear the revelation.

What makes the human a man of truth? It is a state in which the disparity between his four dimensions vanishes. A state in which his intention matches his act, his word his inner, his outer his secret, his choice his fiṭra. No gap and no fold. What his spirit guides him to, his heart responds to. What his heart loves, his intellect affirms. What his intellect is convinced of, his body translates. What his body does returns to nourish his spirit. An integrated circle, with no gap in it, no contradiction. Reflect on this image. The human who does a righteous deed so his heart increases in light, so he sees the truth more clearly, so his intellect is guided to a purer conviction, so he commands his body with a

more righteous deed. A circular movement that nourishes itself. This is the man of truth.

And *ṣiddīqiyya* is no mental station attained by understanding, nor a devotional station attained by rituals alone, but a station of existential harmony made by the conscious will and preserved by it. It is — in reality — a natural extension of self-honesty. Self-honesty is a process; *ṣiddīqiyya* is a state. Self-honesty is a track; *ṣiddīqiyya* is a station. And the human walks in self-honesty for long until he attains something of *ṣiddīqiyya*. The more a gap dissolves, the nearer he draws to the station, until every division vanishes within him.

And here comes a verse that reveals this state in an extremely precise phrasing. God said of the Gathering:

*“The Day when neither wealth
nor children will avail, except one
who comes to God with a sound
heart.” (Qur’an 26:88-89)*

Reflect on the description of the heart: “sound” (*salīm*). Soundness here is not merely the heart’s freedom from sin. The heart’s freedom from sin is a rank the God-conscious attains by his struggle, when he strives to avoid

what God forbade, and repents whenever he slips. This is a precious rank, but it is not the utmost of what God asks. The soundness intended here is far deeper. It is the soundness of the heart from division — a state in which the gap between all the human's dimensions vanishes, until sin itself becomes far from his nature, not seeping into him at all.

Notice the difference. The ordinary God-conscious one knows the truth, so he struggles against his self to follow it, fears sin so he avoids it, slips at times so he repents. He is in perpetual effort. But the man of truth has transcended this stage. The truth has become in him a nature, truthfulness in him a *fiṭra*, until the mere thought of sin becomes repugnant to him, as the thought of eating what disgusts becomes repugnant to a healthy human. There is no longer between him and sin a distance of effort and struggle, but a distance of nature and existence. The sound heart — in this meaning — is the heart that does not divide between the spirit and the body, does not deceive itself, does not wear a mask over its inner. It is the heart in which the gaps have dissolved until it became one with itself, and so one with the truth. And when the heart is sound in this meaning, the limbs are sound, conduct becomes upright, and

the human is transformed from a collection of contending desires into a single being that knows who he is and knows what he wants.

And whoever attains this soundness becomes simple. Do not understand simplicity here as shallowness or superficiality. Simplicity in the language of the sages is the opposite of compositeness. The divided human is composite of many selves, each self claiming that it is him — a self that is religious and a self that amuses itself, a self that loves people and a self that envies them, a self that seeks the truth and a self that flees from it. This compositeness wearies the human, turning him into an arena of unending inner confrontation. But the man of truth is simple: a single self, a single intention, a single direction. So you find in his clarity a tranquility you do not find in another — because he is near to God. And God is simple in reality. The more the human draws near to God, the simpler he becomes; the more he draws near to division, the more composite he becomes, and the heavier his fatigue.

And from here you understand the secret of the serenity the people of God carry. Their serenity is not the result of the absence of challenges, for life is not free of challenge. Nor

the result of money they possess, or authority they lean upon. It is the result of what is deeper than all that: the absence of the inner gap. When there is in you no dialectic between one dimension and another, the fatigue that consumes you vanishes within you. Reflect on a truth we disclosed in the previous part: true exhaustion comes not from the abundance of effort, but from the self that lost its unity. And here is its other face: true tranquility comes not from the absence of effort, but from the self that has united. So He said:

*“Truly, in the remembrance of
God do hearts find rest.” (Qur’an
13:28)*

Notice this restriction: “Truly, in the remembrance of God do hearts find rest.” Not by money, nor family, nor success, nor influence, nor even the lifting of calamities. By the remembrance of God. Because the remembrance of God is what closes the widest gap in the human — the gap between his spirit and the rest of his dimensions. When the human remembers his Lord, his spirit returns to its center, so the rest of the dimensions fuse with it. And then they find rest.

And because this station is precious, none has attained it but a few of the people. And the highest model the believer can reflect upon in this regard — after Abraham the friend of God (peace be upon him) — is Lady Fāṭima al-Zahrā' (peace be upon her), the greatest woman of truth (al-Ṣiddīqa al-Kubrā). She was given this title not as a rhetorical exaltation, but because she reached, in the absence of the gap in her being, a unique extent. It is related in the books of both schools — Sunni and Shī'a — the words of the noblest Prophet (peace be upon him and his household):

¹⁵*“Indeed, God is angered by her anger, and pleased by her pleasure.”*

Reflect on this hadith. God — in the perfection of His freedom from need — makes His pleasure follow her pleasure, and His anger follow her anger. How can that be? And why is permitted with Fāṭima (peace be upon her) what is not permitted with another? The secret is that she reached, in the matching of her dimensions

¹⁵Narrated by al-Hākim in al-Mustadrak ‘alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn and by al-Ṭabarānī in al-Mu‘jam al-Kabīr, with a chain on the authority of the Household (peace be upon them); and its root, “Fāṭima is a part of me, so whoever angers her angers me,” is agreed upon by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

with the truth, an extent in which the gap vanished between her pleasure and God's pleasure, and between her anger and God's anger. Had she not reached this rank, it would have been possible for her to be angered by what does not deserve God's anger, or pleased by what He is not pleased with — and had it been so, it would not have been permissible for God to make His pleasure follow hers. But she (peace be upon her) reached, in the truthfulness of her *fiṭra* with her acts, the truthfulness of her heart with her tongue, the truthfulness of her choice with what her spirit guided her to, an extent in which her inner balance became a mirror of the balance of the truth with no lapse. She did not unite with God — far exalted is God above that — but became a clear mirror in which the rulings of the truth are reflected as they are. And this is the station of *ṣiddīqiyya* in its most complete forms: not that you be truthful in your word alone, but that all of you — in all your dimensions — match the truth, until your very being becomes a witness to it.

And here something important should be noted. The man of truth is not a human without dialectic. The dialectic in the universe is standing, and in the self is standing, and will remain so long as life is “in toil” — as we saw in

the fifth chapter. But the difference is that the man of truth has settled his inner dialectic. He no longer hesitates between two voices, but has come to know which voice he responds to. He no longer divides between two convictions, but has come to know which springs from his fiṭra. He no longer struggles against his self at every step; his steps have become natural toward what is the truth, as the sound body breathes without thinking of its breathing.

And because the man of truth is in this state, his movement in life becomes lighter. Not because the trials grow lighter upon him, but because the inner obstacles have fallen. He used to expend effort convincing himself, and no longer needs it. He used to expend energy justifying his choices, and dispensed with it. He used to circle around his decisions for days, and came to make them with ease. The world around him did not change, but he changed within, so he crosses the world with a light step. So He said:

*“And whoever is conscious of
God — He will make for him a way
out, and will provide for him from
where he does not reckon.”
(Qur’an 65:2-3)*

The way out here is not merely a solution. It is a passage from the narrowness of vision to the spaciousness of meaning. And the provision, reckoned and unreckoned, is not only money, but the provision of the heart from serenity, the provision of the intellect from clarity, the provision of the spirit from nearness. All of that is opened for the one conscious of God — that is, whose four dimensions have united in the obedience of God.

And thus the sixth chapter closes its circle. We began with a question: what do you do after all you have come to know? And we end with an answer: you become a single self, truthful with itself, unified in dimensions. A self that knows who it is, knows what it wants, knows the road. A self that has attained what it can of the station of the truthful, and so entered the company about which God says, in the noblest description:

“And whoever obeys God and the Messenger — those are with the ones whom God has favored: the prophets, the truthful, the martyrs, and the righteous. And excellent are those as companions.” (Qur’an 4:69)

Reflect on this order: the prophets, then the truthful, then the martyrs, then the righteous. The truthful after the prophets — because *ṣiddīqiyya* is the highest that a believer other than a prophet attains. And the man of truth, as we now understand, is not one who reached an absolute perfection, but one in whose being the gaps dissolved until he became one. And this station is open to every believer who walks the path of self-honesty.

But a final question opens before you. The truthful, unified self — what does it do in the world? How does it move among people? How does this inner harmony turn into an outer effect? And how does the truth — in which it has united — pass from a knowledge in its being to a being that carries the truth itself?

That is what the next chapter opens: The Movement of the Essence.



A Pause for Reflection

Before you fold this chapter, look at a single gap between what you know to be the truth and what you do in secret — one you have grown used to justifying to yourself with an excuse you

know in your depths is a mask. Do not ask today to close it entirely, but ask yourself a single honest question: if I took off this mask now, what relief would I be depriving myself of, while I suppose I am sheltering behind it?

Chapter Seven • The Movement of the Essence



Introduction

The Movement That Makes You

Reflect on how you began. You were not, on any day, as you are now. You were not a body, nor a beating heart, nor a thinking mind. You were a drop of fluid in your father's loins, then a drop that passed into your mother's womb, then a clinging clot, then a lump of flesh, then bones, then the bones were clothed with flesh, then the spirit was breathed into you, then you came out into the world a child. Before the drop, there were atoms in your father's loins; before those atoms, they were in food he ate; before the food, in soil, water, air, and light. And before all that, you were in the knowledge of God, where you had of existence nothing but that you were known to your Creator.

You — with all that “you” means — are the result of an unbroken movement. From the knowledge of God to your existence, from your

drop to your childhood, from your childhood to your maturity, from your maturity to what you are now. You were not still for a single moment. Even as you read these words, the atoms of your body are changing, the cells of your skin die and others succeed them, your breaths run like waves, your heart beats without asking your leave. You are in an essential movement that does not stop, does not ask leave, and that no stillness reaches.

This movement is no accident in your existence; it is your existence. Were it to stop, you would be finished. Were an atom of your body to be still, it would disintegrate. Were the beats of your heart to quiet, you would pass to the other life. The human is a creature moving by his original nature, unable to exit this movement, as the sun cannot exit its revolving, nor the mountain its hidden passage.

But here a question opens before you, one that transforms the whole view of life: to where do you move?

The movement is a decree, but the direction is a choice. And the human we reflected upon in the previous chapters — with his four dimensions, his will, his self-honesty, his unification — all we came to know of him was

nothing but a preparation for this question. For if you understood that you are moving whether you will or not, and that this movement takes you somewhere, you stand before the most important decision in your life: in which direction do you let your movement take you?

And when the human chooses his movement to be toward God — not toward his self, nor his appetites, nor what others want of him — there happens in his being what does not happen in another's. The gaps we drew in the previous chapter — between the spirit, the heart, the intellect, and the body — begin to close. Not because the movement closes them by force, but because the single direction gathers all the dimensions into a single order. Each dimension moves in the same direction, and so meets the others at a single center. The self knits together. The gaps close. And a strange simplicity begins to enter the being: a self that does not contend, does not divide, does not carry within it multiple selves. A single self. A simple self — inwardly unified and undivided.

And here the deepest secret opens. God — exalted is He — is simple in reality. There is in Him no compositeness, no parts, no contention, no division. One in His essence, one in His

attributes. And the more the human draws near to God, the simpler he becomes. Not because God makes him simple by force, but because drawing near to the Simple One requires by its nature that multiplicity dissolve in the one drawing near. And the essential, ascending movement to God is precisely this: the dissolving of multiplicity, the closing of the gaps, the completion of simplicity, the drawing near of the self to its Lord with its whole existence.

And when the self attains this simplicity, it has attained what the Qur'an calls "the tranquil self." Not the self trials have departed from, but the self in which unity has been completed. Not the self that attained serenity after toil, but the self in which serenity has become its nature. This is the self that enters the station of the truthful, where there is no gap between its pleasure and God's pleasure, nor between its anger and God's anger, as you saw at the close of the sixth chapter.

But this ascending movement is not guaranteed in direction. The human always moves, but he may move in a direction other than God's, so his gaps widen instead of closing, his self becomes composite instead of simple, and he draws away from the divine simplicity

instead of drawing near. And because the destination is at stake, we should understand this essential movement: its laws, its directions, how it becomes ascending rather than descending, connecting to God rather than distancing from Him. That is what the coming parts open.



Part One

Movement Is the Law of Existence

What we saw in your self — that you are a movement that does not stop — is not particular to you. It is the law of all existence. Look beyond yourself, to the whole of existence, and you find the same law coursing through everything. There is no still atom, no calm wave, no fixed planet. Everything is in movement — even what you reckon the most firmly-rooted and fixed of things:

*“And you see the mountains,
supposing them firm, while they
pass by like the passing of clouds
— the work of God, who perfected*

*everything. Indeed, He is Aware of
what you do.” (Qur’an 27:88)*

The mountain — which in the language of people became a symbol of fixity — is itself in passage. Nothing stands still. Movement is no state that comes upon existence, but its first attribute. Every existent moves by the mere fact that it exists.

But this cosmic movement is not random, nor does it go in every direction. It is a movement with a destination. Everything in the universe heads toward a single end: God. Reflect on His words about the very origination of the universe:

*“Then He directed Himself to
the heaven while it was smoke, and
said to it and to the earth, ‘Come,
willingly or unwillingly.’ They said,
‘We come willingly.’” (Qur’an
41:11)*

Notice how the command was phrased: “Come, willingly or unwillingly.” The choice is offered, but the result is one. The coming is realized, with no escape from it. And the universe, since it was smoke, answered: “We come willingly.” It chose willingness. And since that moment, it has not ceased coming to God

willingly. Every movement in existence — from the revolving of the galaxy to the vibration of the atom — is a step in this perpetual coming.

And this cosmic direction toward God the Qur'an expressed with a precise word:

"The seven heavens and the earth and whoever is in them glorify Him. And there is not a thing except that it glorifies His praise, but you do not understand their glorification." (Qur'an 17:44)

Reflect on the word "glorify" (yusabbih). It is from "sabaḥa" in the language, meaning to run and hasten in one's movement, as the swimmer runs in the water. So glorification is no mere words said, but a movement the creature moves toward God. Everything in the universe glorifies God by its own movement: the sun by its revolving, the atom by its vibration, the tree by its growth. And notice the reservation at the close: "but you do not understand their glorification." We are not heedless of the existence of the glorification, but of the understanding of its language. Every creature has its glorification, and every glorification a single direction: God.

But this cosmic movement — in everything other than the human — is compelled. The sun cannot stop its revolving, and the atom does not choose to vibrate or not. Everything in the universe heads toward God by its nature, not by its choice. Movement in the universe is a decree, and the direction in it an obligation. So the whole universe — except the human — glorifies, comes, and proceeds to God, unable to do otherwise.

As for the human, he is an exception in this whole system. He too is in perpetual movement he cannot stop — as we saw in the introduction. But he — alone among the creatures — chooses the direction of his movement. Everything draws near to God by compulsion, but the human draws near by choice, or draws away by choice. Everything proceeds to its natural perfection with no lapse, but the human's course is open: he can ascend until he surpasses the angels, and he can sink until he is lower than the beasts. This ability for the two directions is what makes him a unique creature, and a terrifying creature at once. For every being other than him is secured in its destination; the human alone is open to fate.

So He said in an extremely decisive phrasing:

*"We have certainly created the
human in the best of stature; then
We returned him to the lowest of
the low." (Qur'an 95:4-5)*

Reflect on the word "We returned him" — that is, We brought him back to what is below his origin. And this returning occurs not by an arbitrary decree, but by a descending movement the human chooses for himself. And the two verses do not describe two states separated in time, but two directions available to the human's movement at every moment. "The best of stature" is his original reality, upon which he was created. "The lowest of the low" is the extent of the fall he reaches if he chooses the direction of descent.

And from here you understand why it does not suffice the human merely to move. Movement is his decree that he does not choose; what he chooses is its direction. And the human who does not choose a conscious direction surrenders himself to a current that sweeps him to where he does not want — and has thereby chosen to be swept along, even if he supposes he did not choose.

And because this human movement is of this weight, the Qur'an condensed it into a single comprehensive verse:

*"O human being, you are
laboring toward your Lord with
[great] exertion and will meet
Him." (Qur'an 84:6)*

This verse condenses in seven words all we have seen, and deserves a pause at each word in it.

Reflect first on "laboring" (kādiḥ). Labor (kadḥ) in the language is striving with hardship, the effort that leaves its trace in its doer. The Arabs say "kadaḥahu" if he scratched a mark into him. So the laborer does not come out of his labor as he entered it, but with something inscribed in his being. And notice the form of a statement: "you are laboring." He did not say "labor," nor "you must labor." He said "you are laboring" — a description of what you are, not a command you are given. You are a laborer whether you will or not. Labor is no act you choose, but a state you are in, like the fish in the water.

Then reflect on "toward your Lord." He did not say "laboring in the world," nor "for the sake

of livelihood.” He said “toward your Lord.” And the particle “toward” (ilā) denotes an end and a terminus. So labor is a movement with a direction, and its destination is determined: the Lord. And this reveals a great matter: the movement of every human — the believer and the disbeliever, the righteous and the corrupt, the knower and the heedless — all of it is directed toward God. No one labors in a void. Every step you take pushes you toward the meeting with your Lord, whether you intend this meeting, forget it, or deny it. But — here is the difference — among them is one who labors toward God ascending to Him, and one who labors supposing he is drawing away, while in truth he is only laboring toward His meeting to be reckoned.

Then reflect on the repetition of the verbal noun “laboring” (kadḥan). This emphasis conveys all-encompassment. It is no passing labor, but a labor that fills life. Every moment is labor, every breath is labor. The human labors in his sleep as in his waking, in his silence as in his speech. There is no release from labor so long as life stands, because it is — as we saw in the introduction — the very movement that is the very existence.

Then reflect on the conclusion: “and will meet Him.” The “fa” is the “fa” of result. So long as the human is laboring toward his Lord, he will meet Him inevitably. The meeting is no matter of choice, but a necessary result of a movement that does not stop. But what the human chooses is the form of this meeting. Does he meet his Lord with a sound heart or with a burdened self? With a labor that ascended with him or one that descended with him? Willing as the heavens and the earth, or deviant? The form of the meeting is determined by the direction of the labor.

And the movement the Qur'an reveals is not the movement of the limbs. It is not the distance your body covers, nor the deeds your hands accomplish. It is deeper than that: the movement of the spirit, the movement of the being, the movement of the position the human occupies relative to God in nearness or distance. The human may cover thousands of miles while he has not budged from his existential place. And he may sit in a small room for an hour, and ascend a station.

So you may find a human who works much — projects that do not cease, a schedule that does not quiet — and yet there is no essential movement in him. His hands labor while his

heart is still, his feet run while his spirit is stagnant. And you may find another, less noisy, but every day moves him a shift in his being. For true movement is not measured by the quantity of the steps, but by the kind of transformation it effects in its bearer, and by how much it draws him near to God or far from Him.

And from here, the question you ought to pose to yourself is not “do I move?” — for movement is your decree that you do not part from. The question is: “to where does my spirit move?” Is your direction like the direction of all existence — toward God — or do you revolve in a closed loop around your fear, your appetites, or what people want of you? The whole universe said: “We come willingly.” You alone — O human — can say: I came willingly, or I deviated.

And because movement is of this rank, and because its direction is what determines the destination, we should understand the directions of this movement. When is it an ascent that draws near to God and closes the gaps? When is it a descent that distances and widens the rifts? And when is it a revolving in a wandering that neither ends nor draws near? That is what the next part opens.

Part Two

The Direction of Movement, Not Its Quantity

If movement is a decree from which there is no release, then the question shifts from “how much do you move?” to “toward where?” And in this, people differ greatly. The lesson is not in who covered a longer distance, but in who walked in the correct direction. The human may spend his whole life in eager striving, then discover he was running in the wrong direction. Reflect on this eloquent Qur’anic warning:

*“Say: Shall We inform you of the
greatest losers in their deeds?
Those whose effort is lost in the
worldly life while they think they
are doing well in work.” (Qur’an
18:103-104)*

Notice the precision of the expression: “their effort is lost.” He did not say “their deed is void,” nor “their effort is little.” The effort exists, the exertion is expended, but it lost the road. And more dangerous than the loss of the effort is that they “think they are doing well in work” — that is, they suppose they are upon good. So the loss

here is doubled: a loss in direction, and a heedlessness of this loss. This is the most dangerous kind of movement: an active, diligent movement, but one that distances its bearer from his end while he reckons he is drawing near.

From here we understand that the human's movement does not depart from three directions.

The first is the movement of ascent: a movement that draws its bearer near to God, and closes the gaps between his four dimensions, so he increases with every step in unification and simplicity. It is not necessarily the most noisy, nor the fastest, but it is the most truthful in direction. Whoever walked in it, his deed turned into nearness, his striving into ascent.

The second is the movement of descent: a movement that distances its bearer from God, and widens the gaps within him, so he increases with every step in compositeness and scatteredness. And this movement may be full of activity, laden with accomplishment, yet in its reality a continuous decline. Because the act is not measured by its form, but by the direction it takes its bearer to.

The third is the movement of wandering: a movement that neither ascends nor descends, but revolves in a closed loop. It does not draw near to God, nor arrive at a settlement. Its bearer expends and labors, yet returns from where he began, like one who walks in a desert with no compass, covering vast distances while he has not budged from his place.

And what determines the direction of the movement is not the act in its outward form, but the heart from which the act issues. When the heart is present, directed to God, the simplest acts become an ascent. And when the heart is heedless or scattered, the acts themselves — however great — invert into a draining that entrenches the heedlessness. So the Qur'an struck this parable in the contrast between the two ways of walking:

*“Is one who walks fallen on his
face better guided, or one who
walks upright on a straight path?”
(Qur'an 67:22)*

Reflect on the two images. “Fallen on his face” — bent over, seeing nothing but the place of his feet, no horizon before him and no destination he heads to. And this is no absence of movement, but a movement without vision. As

for “one who walks upright on a straight path,” he is the one who sees his destination and is upright in his walking to it. Both walk, but the difference is in the insight that guides the walking, not in the walking itself.

And this meaning Imam Ja‘far al-Şādiq (peace be upon him) summarized in an extremely precise saying:

*“One who acts without insight is
like one who travels off the road:
the speed of travel only increases
him in distance.”*

Reflect on this wondrous balance. The traveler off the road, the more he hastens, the more he increases in distance from his end. His speed — which he supposes a virtue — inverts upon him into a curse, multiplying his error rather than correcting it. The lesson is that the effort expended in the wrong direction is not neutral, but harmful: it entrenches the distance, deepens the wandering. So stopping and reconsidering may be better than going on with speed in a road that does not lead.

And from here it becomes clear why people’s strivings differ, though they all labor. He said:

*“Indeed, your strivings are
diverse.” (Qur’an 92:4)*

The striving is diverse — scattered, differing — not in its quantity, but in its destination. Some of it ascends with its bearer to the highest of the high, some descends with him to the lowest of the low, and some leaves him suspended in an unending loop. Labor is one in its form, but its outcomes are diverse by the diversity of the directions.

And if you realized this, you realized that what matters is not that you increase your movement, but that you correct its destination. A single step in the correct direction is better than a thousand steps in wandering. True advancement is not the covering of distances, but the drawing near to God, even by a single step.

But a question imposes itself here: if many people labor and tire and do not arrive, how does the human move without his movement draining him? How is his labor an ascent and not a draining, a nearness and not a dissipation? That is what the next part opens.

* * *

Part Three

How Movement Does Not Drain You

Among the things that most exhaust the human is that he confuses effort with draining. He supposes that fatigue is the evidence of nearness, that the abundance of work is the sign of the ascending movement. The truth is that many move much and tire much, then find in themselves nothing but an increasing emptiness. Because fatigue alone indicates nothing; it may be the fatigue of ascent, and it may be the fatigue of wandering.

And the secret many are heedless of: the human does not tire from work, but tires from the loss of meaning. The heart filled with a clear meaning may work long without collapsing, and the heart empty of meaning tires from a single step. So you find one who serves the one he loves feels not the weight of the service, and one who works under compulsion staggers under the easiest of works. Meaning is what lightens the load, not the scarcity of the load itself. For the energy that moves the human is not in his muscles, but in the meaning that fills his heart.

And from here was the difference between a movement that connects to God and a movement

that severs from Him. The movement severed from God — however great — drains its bearer, because it draws from a limited energy that soon runs out. But the movement connected to God feeds from a meaning that does not dry up, so it does not extinguish the spirit but gives it life. So the Qur'an coupled striving with guidance, but with a precise condition:

*“And those who strive for Us —
We will surely guide them to Our
paths. And indeed, God is with the
doers of good.” (Qur'an 29:69)*

Reflect on the word “for Us” (finā). He did not say merely “those who strive,” but qualified it with “for Us.” So not every striving bears the fruit of guidance, but the striving that is “in God” — that is, for His sake, in His path, and by Him. This qualification distinguishes the fruitful effort from the draining one. The effort “in God” opens paths; the effort in other than Him closes them however much is expended in it.

And the fruit of this connection is that serenity accompanies the movement; it does not come after it. Many wait for their works to end so they may rest, and never rest, because a work that ends is succeeded by a work. But one whose movement is connected to God, serenity

descends upon him while he is in the thick of the work:

*“It is He who sent down
tranquility into the hearts of the
believers, that they may increase
in faith along with their faith.”*

(Qur'an 48:4)

The tranquility here is no stopping of movement, but a serenity that accompanies the one moving. It is the companion that tells you your fatigue is no loss, and that your steps — even if they stumble — are walking toward God, not toward emptiness. So tranquility was a sign of the soundness of the direction: whoever found it in his heart while he works knew his movement was ascending. And whoever found nothing but an increasing anxiety, let him reconsider his destination.

And so the movement may be ascending without draining, you should give each dimension of your dimensions its due. So do not exhaust the body until it collapses, nor neglect the heart until it hardens, nor leave the spirit until it withers, nor overload the intellect until it scatters. And Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim (peace be upon him) guided to this balance in a comprehensive counsel, saying:

“Strive that your time be four portions: a portion for intimate converse with Him, a portion for the matter of livelihood, a portion for the company of trustworthy brethren who make known to you your faults, and a portion in which you seclude yourself for your lawful pleasures; and by this portion you gain the strength for the other three.”

Reflect on the close of the counsel: “and by this portion you gain the strength for the other three.” The portion of rest — which the diligent one may suppose a falling-short — is the condition of the ability for the other portions. Because the neglected dimension does not fall silent, but drains the rest. So whoever exhausted his body disabled his spirit, and whoever neglected his heart confused his intellect. The balance between the dimensions is no luxury, but a condition of the continuous ascending movement. For the essential movement is no subjugation of the self, but a conscious flowing in the presence of God, in which you balance among your dimensions until you arrive.

And we saw in the fifth chapter that reliance is what carries the human when he reaches the limit of his energy. And it is itself what protects the movement from draining, for the one who relies does not carry the weight of results, but expends his striving and entrusts the matter to God, so what weighs on others is lightened for him.

Then the ascending movement has a final secret: that the human, when he moves in the direction the whole universe moves in — toward God — enters into harmony with existence. His movement is no longer an isolated, individual one, but has become part of a greater movement. And when the part harmonizes with the whole, it finds aid from where it does not reckon. Not because the universe serves it, but because it ceased to collide with its laws, and so came to run with them, not against them.

And if you understood how to move without your movement draining you, the deeper question remains: what makes this movement actually transform you? How does the knowledge in your head pass into a being that courses through your existence? How does what you know become what you are? That is what the next part opens.



Part Four

The Mechanism of Knowledge Turning into Being

We have now reached the secret that explains why many know the truth and do not move by it. We have seen that movement is a decree, that its direction is the divide, that meaning protects it from draining. But a deeper question remains: why does knowledge settle in one human and transform him, and pass by another and change nothing in him?

The answer is that knowledge does not settle in the human as information settles in books. The book carries the information without it changing anything in it, because it remains outside it, parked on its paper. And the Qur'an struck this parable for those who carried knowledge and did not benefit from it:

*"The example of those who
were charged with the Torah and
then did not carry it is like that of
a donkey carrying volumes."
(Qur'an 62:5)*

Reflect on the precision of the expression: “were charged with the Torah” first — that is, they knew it and memorized it — “then did not carry it” — that is, it did not become part of them, did not penetrate to their being. For the donkey that carries on its back volumes — that is, books — does not benefit from what is in them, because they remain a load above it, not a meaning coursing through it. So is the human who carries knowledge in his mind without it descending to his being: much knowledge, and a missing effect.

And let us name this “the turning of knowledge into being”: that the distance dissolve between the one who knows and what he knows, until the known becomes a description of the knower, not a piece of information he has.¹⁶ And this meaning is not strange to our philosophical heritage. For the school of Transcendent Wisdom (al-Ḥikma al-Muta‘āliya) — whose foundations were laid by Ṣadr al-Muta‘allihīn al-

¹⁶Transcendent Wisdom (al-Ḥikma al-Muta‘āliya) is a philosophical school founded by Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (Mullā Ṣadrā, Ṣadr al-Muta‘allihīn, d. 1045 AH), its mainstay being his work *al-Ḥikma al-Muta‘āliya fī al-Asfār al-‘Aqliyya al-Arba‘a*. Among its principles is that the soul is “bodily in origination, spiritual in subsistence,” and that it intensifies in existence by “substantial motion” — a motion in the very core of the essence, not in the accidents. It is mentioned here for grounding, not as a commitment to all the details of the school.

Shīrāzī (Mullā Ṣadrā) — built its conception of the soul as “bodily in origination, spiritual in subsistence”: that is, it begins weak, bound to the body, then intensifies in existence and ascends in essence by a movement he called “substantial motion” (al-ḥaraka al-jawhariyya) — a movement in the very core of the self, not in its accidents, by which the soul passes from a weaker essence to a stronger one. And in their view, the soul intensifies by its knowledge and its action, until its acquired qualities become the very substance of its essence, carried with it to the Hereafter. And what concerns us of this — regardless of the fine points of the philosophical school — is the core of the idea we affirm in this book: that the quality does not disclose a buried treasure, but is built and intensified by practice until it unites with the being and becomes an identity. And what the sages refer to by “the union of the knower with the known” — even if they intend by it the ascent of the soul by knowledge — is in its core what we intend here: the turning of knowledge into conduct and disposition, until the human becomes what he knew.

And let us be precise in the distinction. There is a difference between being convinced of the truth intellectually, and uniting with it

existentially. Intellectual conviction is an act in the mind: you understand the idea, accept its correctness, are able to defend it. But you may nonetheless contradict it in your conduct. How many a human knows that truthfulness is good, then lies when he fears; knows that envy destroys, then envies. The knowledge is present, but it has not descended from the mind to the being. Existential union, by contrast, is that the idea become something you are, not something you know. Then you are not truthful because you decided to be truthful, but because truthfulness has become your nature that you do not part from.

And the clearest witness to this difference is what was of Iblīs. Iblīs was not ignorant of God — rather he was among the most knowing of creatures of Him. He knew Him, addressed Him, knew of His existence and His oneness. And yet he disobeyed Him and was arrogant. So why did his knowledge not benefit him? Because his knowledge remained in his mind, and did not unite with his being. He knew the truth as a knowledge, but did not become a place for the truth. Had knowledge alone sufficed, Iblīs would be in the highest of the high.

So the Qur'an did not make the pivot upon knowledge alone, but always coupled it with action. It did not say "those who knew," but "those who believed and did righteous deeds." It did not say "know the truth," but "follow what was sent down to you." Following is the movement that brings the knowledge down from the head to the being.

So how does knowledge turn into being? It is a process that passes through stages, not occurring all at once.

The first is the stage of the mental piece of information. Here knowledge enters the intellect as an idea, which it affirms or denies, but it remains on its surface, not touching its root. Many stop at this stage, carrying abundant knowledge that changes nothing of their state.

The second is the stage of practice. When the human begins to act by what he knew, the meaning passes from the mind to the act. And repeated practice turns the knowledge from an idea he summons into a habit that runs from him without summoning. And here a grave rule: what is practiced becomes an imprint, what is repeated becomes familiar, and what becomes familiar is defended — even if it is falsehood.

The third is the stage of taste. After long practice, the human begins to taste the meaning, not merely think of it. He finds a pleasure in truthfulness, an aversion to lying, before he summons an evidence. Here the meaning has become part of his palate, not merely a conviction in his mind. And taste is the bridge between the idea and the identity.

The fourth is the stage of becoming-nature, and it is the summit.¹⁷ Here the meaning is no longer something the human possesses, but something he is. He does not say “I know truthfulness,” nor “I practice truthfulness,” but has become truthful in his being, from whom truthfulness issues as light issues from the sun, with no affectation and no decision. Here knowledge has turned into being, and the human has become a place for the truth, not a carrier of it.

¹⁷This meaning corresponds — at the level of diagnosis — to what is known as neuroplasticity: the brain reshapes its neural pathways according to what is repeated of act and thought, so the connections that are used grow strong and the neglected ones weaken — which Hebb’s rule (1949) summarizes: “cells that fire together wire together.” That is, what the human practices becomes — with repetition — a structure in his nerves before it is a habit in his behavior. It is cited for diagnosis, not as proof. See: D. O. Hebb, *The Organization of Behavior* (1949).

And when becoming-nature reaches its utmost extent, the union becomes a firmly-rooted identity that does not change. The truth — or the falsehood — is no longer something the human does, but has become something he is, not parting from it as the human does not part from his self. And God may at times inform us of people who reached this firmness in one of the two extremes, informing of a state realized in them, not compelling them to it.

So of the people of truth, He informed us of the purified ones whose union with the truth reached the extent of infallibility, saying of the People of the House:

*“God only intends to remove
from you the impurity, O People of
the House, and to purify you with a
thorough purification.” (Qur’an
33:33)*

And the Prophet (peace be upon him and his household) informed us of Fāṭima (peace be upon her) that “God is pleased by her pleasure and angered by her anger” — as we saw in the previous chapter — because her union with the truth reached an extent in which her pleasure became a mirror of God’s pleasure. These were not compelled to purity, but attained it by the

296

truthfulness of their servitude until it became firmly rooted in them, so God informed of its firmness.

And in contrast, He informed us of people whom misguidance mastered until it became their identity, so there no longer remained in them a place the truth could penetrate. He informed of Iblīs, and informed of Abū Lahab before his death:

*“May the hands of Abū Lahab
perish, and may he perish.”
(Qur’an 111:1)*

And this informing was no compelling of Abū Lahab to disbelief — for the choice remained in his hand — but a disclosure of a union with falsehood that reached a firmness God knew he would not return from, so He informed of the reality as it is, not that He imposed it. For just as truthfulness reaches with its bearer the extent of infallibility, falsehood reaches with its bearer the extent of the seal. And both are the making of choice and long practice, not an imposed decree.

And this law — the law of union — works in both directions equally. So the Qur’an warned of a state the human reaches by his practice of

falsehood, so that the truth no longer becomes able to penetrate to his heart:

“God has sealed them for their disbelief, so they do not believe except a few.” (Qur’an 4:155)

Reflect on the word “sealed.” It is from the stamp by which one seals, and it is the very root of “becoming-nature” (al-taṭabbu‘). So the sealing of the heart is no sudden punishment God sends down at the outset, but the result of a long course of repetition, choice, and practice, that ended with the turning of the corrupt meaning into a structural part of the identity. The human sealed his own heart by his disbelief — as the verse says “for their disbelief” — then God attributed the sealing to Himself because He set the law in motion, not because He initiated the closing.

And from here you grasp the danger of the phrase many repeat: “I know that this is wrong, but I do it.” This phrase is not innocent, for it reveals that knowledge no longer leads, and that practice has begun to pull the being in another direction. With time the equation inverts: defending the error becomes easier than resisting it, and justifying it easier than

abandoning it, until relinquishing it becomes a threat to the identity itself.

And because this union is formed by the small, repeated details, every small act is of consequence. The details are what make the structure, and the structure is what determines the destination. So do not belittle a small disobedience you practice, for it sculpts in your being. And do not make light of a small obedience you persist in, for it builds in you. Because the human — in reality — is the sum of what he has united with, not the sum of what he knows.

And if the matter is so, then the attainment of union with the truth is not the end of the road. For the union may invert, and the truth the human attained may slip from him if he does not guard it. So how is this union guarded? That is what the next part opens.



Part Five

Purification, the Condition of Preservation

We ended in the previous part at a disquieting truth: that union is a law working in both directions, and that the human may unite with falsehood as he unites with the truth. But there is something more precise and more dangerous: that one who attained union with the truth is not safe from losing it. For union may invert. One who tasted the truth and lived it can slip from it gradually without feeling, until he finds himself one day outside it, not knowing when he exited.

And the Qur'an struck for this inversion a shocking parable, in a man who reached the highest of knowledge then stripped himself of it:

“And recite to them the news of the one to whom We gave Our signs, but he stripped himself of them, so Satan followed him, and he became of the deviators. And had We willed, We would have raised him by them, but he clung

*to the earth and followed his
desire.” (Qur’an 7:175–176)*

Reflect on this scene. A man “to whom We gave Our signs” — that is, he reached of knowledge of God what he reached, until it was said he was given what he was given of the names of God. Then “he stripped himself of them” — and stripping in the language is the snake’s emergence from its skin, as though the signs were a skin to him, then he came out of them and left them. And notice the cause God named: “he clung to the earth and followed his desire.” He stripped himself not because the knowledge departed from him, but because he neglected its preservation, so he inclined to his desire until he separated from the truth he was in. And in this meaning it is related in the tradition: “Knowledge is of two kinds: knowledge in the heart — that is the beneficial knowledge; and knowledge on the tongue — that is God’s proof against the son of Adam.” So Bal’am’s knowledge remained on his tongue, and did not settle in his heart, so it did not protect him from stripping away.

And the secret in that is that the truth does not protect itself in the human automatically. It is not like the stone that is placed and remains,

but like the plant that needs continuous watering or it withers. And just as the body needs an immunity that preserves it from illnesses, the truth within you needs a preservation that protects it from inversion. This preservation has a name in the Qur'anic language: purification (tazkiya).

And purification is no mere cleansing from sins, but a continuous developing and tending. Reflect on the oath God swore before He mentioned success:

*“He has prospered who purifies
it, and he has failed who corrupts
it.” (Qur'an 91:9-10)*

Notice: “He has prospered who purifies it” — He did not say “who knew it,” nor “who learned it.” Prospering is coupled with purification, not with knowledge. Because knowledge alone does not prosper, but the purification that turns it into a being and preserves it. And corruption, by contrast — “who corrupts it” — is the hiding of the self and its suppression beneath the rubble of disobediences until it withers. For the self is either purified so it grows, or corrupted so it fades. There is no third between them.

And this preservation is realized on three layers.

The first is the purifying of motives. For the human may seek the truth not for its own sake, but to serve by it his image before people, or to feel superiority over another, or to gain a station or prestige. And this truth sought for other than itself does not endure, because it stands upon a false motive. So if the interest changes, its bearer relinquishes it. So the purifying of the motive was the first of the preservation: that the human seek the truth because it is the truth, not because it is beneficial.

The second is the regulating of continuity. For the truth does not settle in the being by a single act, but by perseverance. And remembrance, worship, and self-accounting are all means that keep the truth present so it does not extinguish. And whoever supposed that he attained the truth once and so dispensed with perseverance has exposed his union to inversion. Because what is not tended with care withers, even if it was firmly rooted in its origin.

The third is the protection of the inner environment. For the human does not live in a void, but in a surrounding that affects him without his feeling. What he sees, what he hears,

whom he keeps company with, what he grows used to — all of that seeps into him and reshapes him. And for the special effect of companionship on the being, the Prophet (peace be upon him and his household) struck an eloquent parable, saying — in what al-Bukhārī and Muslim narrated:

“The example of the good companion and the bad companion is like the carrier of musk and the blower of the bellows: as for the carrier of musk, either he will give you some, or you will buy from him, or you will find a pleasant scent from him; and as for the blower of the bellows, either he will burn your clothes, or you will find a foul smell from him.”

Reflect on the precision of the parable: sitting with the righteous benefits you even if you did not intend — at the least of its states you find a pleasant scent from him. And sitting with the bad harms you even if you did not intend — at the least of its states you find a foul smell from him. So the environment does not impose the meaning upon you by force, but seeps it into you by mixing, until it becomes part of you with no

conscious decision. So the choice of companionship, and the purifying of what enters the heart of images and meanings, was part of the preservation of the truth. Whoever surrounded himself with what contradicts the truth was near to losing it even if he was keen on it. And the migration away from an environment that corrupts the being may be a condition of the survival of the union, when the human is unable to fortify himself in its midst.

And whoever neglected this preservation in its layers exposed himself to the most dangerous of what befalls the bearer of truth: that his union invert, so he loses what he attained — as Bal'am stripped himself of his signs. And here descends the sealing and the stamping we saw in the previous part — not as a sudden punishment, but as a natural result of the neglect of tending, until the plant that was green dries up. So the fall after knowledge is more dangerous than the fall before it; for the one who did not know may be excused for his ignorance, but the one who knew and tasted then relinquished has turned his back on what had become clear to him.

And because the lesson is in what settles in the being at the last, not in what it passes through for a while, the pivot of the matter was

upon the ending. The Prophet (peace be upon him and his household) said — in what al-Bukhārī narrated: “Deeds are but by their endings.” For a deed is not judged accepted until it is sealed with good, because the being may invert before the end. And this affirms that the preservation of the union is no luxury, but what guards what the human attained until he meets his Lord upon it.

But this very law — as it works against one who neglected — works in favor of one who turned toward. For just as the bearer of knowledge strips himself of it if he neglects it, the bearer of heedlessness unites with the truth if it touches his heart. It is related that Bishr al-Ḥāfi was in amusement and disobedience, when Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim (peace be upon him) passed by his door, and asked a servant girl who came out: “Is the master of this house a free man or a slave?” She said: Rather, a free man. He said: “You have spoken truly; were he a slave, he would fear his Master.” And when the word reached Bishr, it shook him in his depths, so he went out barefoot, repentant, until he became one of the eminent figures of asceticism. A single word penetrated to his being and did what years had not done. Because the being remains — so long as life lasts — susceptible to transformation

in both directions: susceptible to stripping away if neglected, and susceptible to union if the truth touches it and it is truthful with it.

And if the union is guarded by this purification, it settles and becomes firmly rooted, until the truth becomes an identity that does not part from its bearer. At this limit, the human's situation relative to the truth changes essentially. He no longer struggles against his self to do the truth, but has come to do it by his nature. And deviation is no longer for him a forbidden thing he restrains by his will, but has become alien to his being, recoiling from it by its nature. Like the sound body that does not need to decide to be balanced, but balances of its own health, and expels what harms it without a conscious command. Thus the bearer of truth becomes: truthfulness, justice, and mercy issue from him with no affectation, but because they have become his nature.

And this is the meaning of being adorned with the character of God. It is no outward imitation of qualities the human mimics, but an existential acquisition of them by long living, until his qualities become him. So whoever lived mercy until he united with it became merciful in his being, not affecting mercy. And whoever lived

justice until it became firmly rooted in him became just by his nature, not struggling against his self for justice. Thus the character of God passes to the servant, not by mimicry, but by union.

And if the human attains this station — that the truth become his being — then what has been realized in him? And what changes in his relationship with God and with the world? That is what the conclusion of this chapter opens.

* * *

Chapter Conclusion

From Knowledge to Being

We have covered in this chapter a long journey. We began from movement as the law of existence, then saw that its direction is the divide, not its quantity, then how it does not drain the human, then how knowledge of it turns into being, and finally how this being is preserved by purification. And now, having reached the end, we should pause to see what has actually been realized when the truth becomes the human's being.

What happens is no new addition of knowledge, but a transformation in the mode of existence itself. The difference between one who knows the truth and one in whom the truth has become his being is not a difference in the amount of knowledge, but a difference in the nature of the being. The first carries the truth; the second is carried by the truth. The first possesses a knowledge; the second has come to be possessed by the knowledge. So the question, for one who attained this station, is no longer "do I know the truth?" but a deeper one: "can I live outside it?" And whoever reached this limit knew that what has united with his being does not leave it except by a tearing, as the human does not leave his self.

And this transformation is the condition of the crossing from one rank to another. For the human who carries the truth as a knowledge remains in need of a watcher from outside him to regulate him — a law he fears, an authority that watches him, a punishment he guards against. But the one in whom the truth has become his being, his regulator has become within him, because the truth itself is part of his balance. The first is set right by commands; the second needs only to know the destination. The first needs one to command him; the second needs

only to see the truth to head to it by his nature. And the most complete to embody this station — after the Messenger of God (peace be upon him and his household) — was Imam ‘Alī (peace be upon him), of whom the Prophet (peace be upon him and his household) said: “‘Alī is with the truth, and the truth is with ‘Alī” — narrated by al-Ḥākim in al-Mustadrak and authenticated by him, and recorded by Abū Ya‘lā in his Musnad. For ‘Alī did not follow the truth the following of one who seeks it from outside himself, but the truth came to revolve with him wherever he revolved, because it united with his being until there was no longer a divide between him and it. And this is the utmost the human attains: that the truth become in him a nature, not an affectation, so the right issues from him with no affectation.

And if the human attains this station, his relationship with all around him changes. He no longer looks at God’s commands and prohibitions as restraints imposed upon him from outside, but as an expression of his reality that he has become. He no longer sees the charge as a burden, but as an extension of what he is. Then everything that seemed to another a weight turns into something resembling

breathing: it does not burden him, because it has become his nature.

And here the circle closes that we opened at the start of the book. We said then that you are in a second womb, in which you make the organs of your spirit as you made the organs of your body in the first womb, and that your task is to be formed until you come out with an eternal self. And now we know what this self is in its completion: it is the self in which the truth has become its being. For the spiritual organs whose growth we spoke of — truthfulness, patience, justice, and mercy — are not completed by your knowing them, nor by your practicing them for a while, but by your uniting with them until they become your nature. That is the fetus when it is complete, the traveler when he arrives, and the laborer when he meets his Lord with a self that has become pure truth.

Yet this station — for all its loftiness — the human does not attain by his strength alone. We have seen, since the sixth chapter, that the very will by which the servant turns to God is a gift from Him, and that the one walking to Him walks only by His aid. And here a new horizon opens that we have not yet knocked upon: if the human does not attain his perfection by his bare

strength, then from where comes to him the sustenance that carries him? How does God aid His servant on this road?

All the previous chapters revolved around what the human makes of himself: his dimensions, his will, his truthfulness, his movement, his union with the truth. But the human does not make himself in isolation from his Lord. There is a divine sustenance that encompasses all this, that opens for revelation to be a light that is understood, for the sacred law to be a system that preserves, for the companionship of God to be an effect that is felt. And that is what the next chapter opens — Divine Support: how God sustains His servant who strives toward Him, so his labor turns from an isolated individual effort into a journey surrounded by a care from his Creator so that he may meet Him.



A Pause for Reflection

Before you fold this chapter, summon a single knowledge you possess about yourself or about your Lord, which you know to be the truth, but which has remained a piece of information in your head and has not yet become a description

in your being. Then ask: what is the small, repeated step that, were you to persevere in it, this knowledge would begin to descend from your tongue to your heart, and from your heart to your action, until it becomes one day a nature you do not affect? For the essence does not move by wishing, but by the act that is repeated until it settles.

Chapter Eight · Divine Support



Introduction

To Strive, Then to Be Carried

We closed the previous chapter at a delicate threshold. We saw the human reach the point where the truth becomes his being, so he does not do good by affectation, but it issues from him by nature. But we paused at a question we did not answer: this station, for all its loftiness, does the human attain it by his strength alone?

All that has passed of this book revolved around what the human makes of himself. We came to know his Hereafter-origin, the obligation of his purification, his four dimensions, the laws of opposites that refine him, his will by which he chooses, his truthfulness that unifies him, his movement that turns his knowledge into a being. A whole journey, its axis the human as he builds his self with his own hand.

Yet in this depiction is a deficiency which, left alone, inverts into an illusion. For it suggests that the human is an island that makes itself by itself, and that his attainment of his perfection is the fruit of his bare effort. And this is the most dangerous thing that may befall the traveler: that he suppose his walking to God is by his own power and strength, so self-admiration enters him from where he intended nearness.

The truth is that the human does not make himself in isolation from his Lord. The will by which he chooses is a gift from God, the destination he heads to is a guidance from Him, the strength by which he strives is a continuous support. There is no step the servant takes toward God except that God is the One who enabled him for it. And were the human entrusted to himself for the blink of an eye, his movement would stop, and his striving would be extinguished.

And in this meaning the believer opens every prayer with His words:

*“You alone we worship, and You
alone we ask for help.” (Qur’an
1:5)*

Reflect on the joining of the two halves, and on the fronting of worship before seeking help. "You alone we worship" is an acknowledgment of striving: worship is an effort the servant expends by his will. "You alone we ask for help" is an acknowledgment that this very effort is not completed except by an aid from God. And the commentators noted that fronting worship before seeking help is not in vain, but because the servant is in need, in all his worship, of God's aid; for if God does not aid him, he does not attain what he wants of doing the commands and leaving the prohibitions. So the servant expends his utmost first, then asks for support in what is beyond his utmost — neither one who relies and abandons striving, nor one who is deluded and dispenses with aid. This is the secret of the whole road: that you strive as though everything is in your hand, and trust as though everything is in God's hand.

And this support comes to the servant from two sides. A side from outside him: a map that guides him, a system that preserves him, a light that precedes his step — and that is the legislative support, which God deposited in revelation and the sacred law. And a side from within reality itself: an accompaniment that companions him, an enabling that sets him

aright, a facilitation that lightens his burden, a care that arranges his affair from where he does not reckon — and that is the existential support, which works in the decrees, the opportunities, the moments.

The first support says to the human: this is the road. The second says to him: and you will not walk it alone. The first illuminates the destination; the second carries the steps. And both are from a single source: from the One who created the human and knew that he is too weak to reach his end by his strength alone.

And in this chapter — the conclusion of our journey in the formation of the self — we open these two faces. We begin with the legislative support: how revelation is a map that protects from wandering, and the sacred law a system of maintenance that preserves from collapse. Then we move to the existential support: how God's accompaniment becomes an effect felt on the road, carrying the servant when the means of the earth run out. So when the human gathers his striving and his Lord's support, he comes to know the meaning of walking on his own feet, while not walking alone.

Part One

Revelatory Support: The Map and the Maintenance

When the human reflects on his road in life, he discovers that his great problem is not the scarcity of choices, but their abundance. The abundance of roads he can walk, the abundance of voices that call him, the abundance of desires that pull him in every direction. And he — alone among the creatures — is a being who can choose, deviate, advance, and retreat, as we saw in the previous chapter. So the greatest thing he needs in his journey is not more strength, nor intelligence, nor experience, but a map that tells him: from where to begin, to where to go, how to walk, and what he ought to build within himself before he searches for it outside himself.

And the human without this map is like one walking in a tangled forest: he sees many roads and does not know which leads, hears overlapping voices and does not know which is the truth, so his desires pull at him, his fear overwhelms him, and his inside turns into a contention between opposing wants. But when he places revelation before him, the clamor of the world around him does not vanish, but the

clamor of the inside quiets. Because revelation does not tell him only “what to do,” but tells him “why to do.” And this is the difference between one who lives in chaos and one who lives in meaning.

And this map is revelation. For the Qur’an and the Sunna are no rigid texts laid down to restrict his freedom, but are — in their depth — a guide from the One who created him: the guide laid down by the One who knows him by his nature, by his weakness, by his points of breaking, and by capacities in him he may not know of himself. And who is more knowing of the made than its maker?

*“Does He who created not
know? And He is the Subtle, the
Aware.” (Qur’an 67:14)*

The argument here is rational before it is textual. For if the limited maker is aware of what he made, knowing its fine points, how can the affair of the one He created be hidden from the Creator? “Does He who created not know?” — that is, how can His creation that He brought into being be hidden from Him? And the human who walks in life with his limited eye possesses — if he wishes — a map from the One who encompasses what his eye does not reach.

Legislative support is no miraculous power cast upon him, but a light that precedes the step, distinguishing for him the ambiguous things, lifting the fog off the place of his foot.

And because the Creator is more knowing of His handiwork, He knew that the human, if left to himself with no system that governs him, declines with himself not to comfort, but to the torment of his own self. This is a truth revealed by reflection on the human soul: that the mind, left to itself, inclines to negativity and rumination. For much of our inner movement issues not from an intended awareness, but from firmly-rooted patterns working in secret. And some psychological studies estimate that the larger part of our daily thoughts inclines to negativity, and that most of them are repeated, reproducing themselves day after day — as though the soul, when left without guidance, revolves in a closed loop of anxiety and fears.

And the effect of this neglect does not remain within, but floats to the surface in the form of an increasing disorder.¹⁸ The World Health Organization disclosed in its reports issued in 2025 that more than a billion humans around the

¹⁸World Health Organization (WHO), the reports *World Mental Health Today* and *Mental Health Atlas 2024*, issued on 2 September 2025.

world live with a psychological disorder, and that anxiety and depression are the most common of them, until these disorders have become the second-largest cause of long-term disability among humans. And the paradox is that this worsens alongside an abundance of means of material comfort that previous generations did not know; for the more the world advances in the means of welfare, the wider the void grows within. For material welfare did not close the gap in the soul, but disclosed it and deepened it.

And from here the wisdom of the sacred law becomes clear in a more precise image. We saw in the chapter “The Neglected Obligation” that the purification of the self is the human’s first obligation, and that the self is either purified so it prospers, or left so it is corrupted and fades. And the sacred law is the practical framework by which that purification is realized: no restraint by which the human is curbed, but a program that reshapes him, as the expert trainer rebuilds the one who follows his guidance. For if the body has instructions which, if neglected, make it ill, then the spirit and the self have a program which, if the human neglects it, he declines — and that is the sacred law.

And because the human is a precise, composite structure — with his four dimensions we detailed — revelation did not content itself with being a map that guides, but came as a system of maintenance that preserves. For just as every precise machine has a maintenance manual from its maker, showing how it is preserved from breakdown, the sacred law is the human's maintenance manual from his Creator. It preserves the heart from hardness, the intellect from deviation, the self from greed, the body from excess. Its commands are no loads that weigh him down, but operations of regulation that keep him fit to walk.

For prayer is a daily maintenance of the heart, re-regulating it before it deviates a slow deviation it does not feel. He said: "Establish prayer for My remembrance" (Qur'an 20:14) — for remembrance is no verbal repetition, but a re-regulating of the destination whenever it inclines. And fasting is a maintenance from the dominance of appetite, and almsgiving a maintenance from the greed of the self. And every charge in the sacred law protects a dimension from transgressing upon another, so the self does not become disordered.

Then the most dangerous thing in which the human wanders is not his body, but his intellect. Because the intellect sees with a limited eye a vast world, so it interprets with a relative instrument absolute truths, and is flooded by a torrent of contradictory thoughts. And here revelation places for the intellect a balance that prevents it from equating truth and falsehood, and from sliding into a relativism that swallows everything. He said:

*“So what is there after the truth
except error?” (Qur’an 10:32)*

And error (ḍalāl), in the root of the language — as the commentators mention — is the going off the road, the turning from its course. So the verse establishes that the truth and error are two opposites that do not gather; for whenever it is established that this is truth, it follows that what opposes it is error. And without this balance, the roads become equal in the eye of the wanderer, even if they are contradictory, so he reckons falsehood an opinion against an opinion. And the sacred law does not confiscate the intellect, but protects it from inverting from an instrument of understanding into an instrument of justifying everything its owner desires.

And the most dangerous deviation the intellect falls into is that the human takes his desire as a god, making his want the balance by which he weighs everything:

*“Have you seen the one who
takes his desire as his god?”
(Qur’an 45:23)*

And this substitution is hidden, because it is not declared. Its owner does not say, “I have made my desire a lord,” but practically he arbitrates his want in what he takes and leaves, so he becomes a slave to his fluctuations from where he reckons he is free. And the sacred law breaks this substitution, returning the center of existence to the One God, so the human does not remain a captive of a changing desire.

And just as the sacred law preserves the human from wandering away from his Lord and his self, it preserves him from wandering away from the universe. For the universe, without revelation, is read a cold materialist reading, or a deviant reading. And revelation redefines it: a field of laws, not an arena of chance; a message of wisdom, not a game of futility — as we saw in the chapters of the Laws of Existence and the Laws of Friction, when we understood trial as a design, not a punishment. For whoever

understood the laws no longer saw pain as an enemy, but as a message; nor change as chaos, but as a movement with meaning.

By this a truth in the sacred law is disclosed which is often inverted: that it is no lens that narrows the vision, but the lens that discloses the truth. For without it the human does not see the world as it is, but as his desires and fears dictate to him. He said: "Say: This is my way; I call to God upon insight" (Qur'an 12:108). And insight here is no mental knowledge, but an existential clarity that makes the human see God, see himself, and see the road, at once.

So if the human understood the sacred law in this manner, his relationship with it changes radically. He no longer sees it as a regulating law watching him, but as a guide of return that leads him. And many who have lived far from revelation feel — even possessing every means of comfort — an emptiness no pleasures fill, no accomplishments silence, no relationships quiet. As though the spirit searches for a tune it knows, but no longer distinguishes its source. So when he returns to revelation, he does not return to texts only, but to a voice that reassures before it commands, guides before it pressures, opens before it holds to account. Then he walks in the

“ways of peace” that God promised to whoever was truthful in seeking His pleasure:

“By it God guides those who follow His pleasure to the ways of peace.” (Qur’an 5:16)

And the “ways of peace” — as the people of knowledge interpret them — are the roads of safety leading to the Abode of Peace. And it is said: “Peace” (al-Salām) is God Himself, so its ways are His religion which He legislated. And notice that the peace revelation grants is not the absence of pain, but the absence of wandering. For the road to God is not free of pain, but it is free of being lost. The traveler in it may grieve, but he does not collapse. He may stumble, but he knows how to return. He may be pained, but he understands why.

And this is the truth many are heedless of: that bewilderment is harder on the human than pain. For the human bears pain if he knows its meaning, but he does not bear being pained with no meaning. And revelation grants the meaning even in the harshest moments, turning pain from a wound with no purpose into a threshold he understands why he crosses:

*“So whoever follows My
guidance will not go astray, nor
suffer.” (Qur’an 20:123)*

Reflect on the joining of the two negations: “will not go astray” on the road, “nor suffer” in the heart. For whoever followed the guidance is secure from the straying of the destination, and secure from the suffering of meaninglessness, even if he walks over wounds.

And here revelation grants the human a double compass. An external compass, which is the text — the Qur’an and the Sunna — and an internal compass, which is a light God kindles in the heart when the human is truthful with this text and lives by it. He said:

*“God is the Light of the heavens
and the earth.” (Qur’an 24:35)*

Then He said in the same context:

*“God guides to His light whom
He wills.” (Qur’an 24:35)*

And the commentators interpreted “the likeness of His light” as His attribute in the heart of the believer, and that “God guides to His light” is the light of insight. For the Qur’an is a light from God, so when it meets the light of the

heart that was truthful with it, it becomes “light upon light”; and the human sees the road with the eye of his spirit as he sees it with his intellect. And here the image of legislative support is completed: a map that preserves the direction, a system of maintenance that prevents collapse, a light that precedes the step, then a second light born in the heart that affirms the first.

But the map — however precise, and however its light is kindled in the heart — does not walk the human. It shows him the road, but does not carry his feet in it. And when the human is truthful in walking upon it, he discovers another support, deeper and subtler: a support that works not in the texts, but in reality itself — in the decrees, the opportunities, and the moments he cannot interpret with his intellect alone. That is the existential support, which the next part opens.

Part Two

Existential Support: The Accompaniment

We saw that legislative support is a map that shows you the road, but does not walk you. And

here comes the other support, the deeper and more hidden: a support that comes not through words as in revelation, nor through laws as in the sacred law, but through existence itself. A support that works behind the scene, in the moment the human is weak, the means narrow, the intellect unable to encompass what is happening. It is no idea that is explained, but a truth that is felt; an aid that accompanies you when no one understands you, and opens for you when the doors close.

And the greatest form of this support is the accompaniment: that God be with you. It is no spatial accompaniment — for God is exalted above place — but a nearness by care, guidance, knowledge, concealment, facilitation, and subtle grace. An accompaniment not seen with the eye, but whose effects appear in reality, as though a hidden hand took hold of the threads of your life and arranged them in a way you would not have been able to even if all the powers of the earth gathered for you.

And this accompaniment is of two degrees. A general accompaniment that includes all the creation, and it is the accompaniment of knowledge and encompassment: nothing is absent from Him, nothing hidden of you is

concealed from Him. He said: "And He is with you wherever you are" (Qur'an 57:4). And a special accompaniment not attained by everyone, but by one who purified his heart, stood upright on the road, and was truthful in seeking God:

*"Indeed, God is with those who
are conscious of Him and those
who are doers of good." (Qur'an
16:128)*

For this accompaniment is not only a watching, but a backing; not only a knowing, but a care; no bare encompassment, but an opening, a help, and a subtle grace that runs in its time. And it is no passing feeling that fades in a moment of humility, but a state that settles in the heart when the human lightens himself of reliance upon himself, and trusts God without condition. Then he feels that his steps are not alone, and that what runs in his life — however scattered it appears — lines up in a hidden way that pours into his benefit, even if he did not plan it. This is the meaning of His words: "And He is the protector of the righteous" (Qur'an 7:196) — for the protection here is no following from afar, but a care that leads, a subtle grace that governs, a concealment that protects.

And this guardianship is not promised in the Hereafter alone, but present in the world before it. He said upon the tongue of the angels to the friends of God: "We are your allies in the worldly life and in the Hereafter" (Qur'an 41:31). For the accompaniment works here, in the thick of life, not awaiting another day. Indeed, God made the help of the believer a matter He obligated upon Himself, saying: "And it was incumbent upon Us to help the believers" (Qur'an 30:47) — a striking phrasing, for the Most High, the All-Powerful makes the help of His weak servant "incumbent upon Him," not a passing favor He bestows, but a covenant He bound Himself to.

And from this accompaniment the whole face of existential support takes shape. For it comes to the servant in ascending degrees: an accompaniment that companions him, then an enabling that sets him aright, then a facilitation that lightens his burden, then a harnessing that arranges for him, then — when nothing remains — a sufficiency that carries him. Let us reflect on these degrees one by one.

As for the enabling (tawfiq), it is that you move, so God intervenes in what you cannot move. That you expend the cause, so God takes charge of what is beyond it. That you work to

your utmost, so God completes you with what is above your utmost. So Shu‘ayb (peace be upon him) said: “And my success is only through God” (Qur’an 11:88) — attributing the effect not to his wisdom nor his experience, but to the hand that works with him in secret. And the enabling comes not because the human is strong, intelligent, or seasoned, but because he is truthful; for truthfulness is its door, and sincerity its key.

And the most eloquent thing that depicts this truth is His words to His Prophet on the Day of Badr, when he threw a handful of dust into the faces of the polytheists: “And you did not throw when you threw, but it was God who threw” (Qur’an 8:17). Reflect on the precision of the affirming and the negating at once: He affirmed the throwing to him, “when you threw,” then negated it from him, “and you did not throw.” And the commentators hold that the throwing — in its form — is the act of the Prophet, for he grasped and cast; but the effect — the handful reaching the eyes of an entire army — is from God alone. So the servant expends the form of the act, and God brings about in it the effect that humans are incapable of. This is the enabling in its purest meaning: a movement from you, and a fruit from Him.

And among the signs of enabling is that the hard decision becomes easier, that the road becomes clear after long ambiguity, that the scattered things gather into a single harmony, as though existence rearranges itself around a truthful intention. And the enabling appears not in the opening alone, but at times in the prevention: the prevention that protects you from an ill-considered step, or an opportunity whose outside is good and whose inside is harm. For not every door that opens is a mercy, nor every door that closes a deprivation. So He said: "Perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you" (Qur'an 2:216) — for good is not measured by the form of the event, but by its direction and its wisdom.

And as for the facilitation (taysīr): if the enabling is that God works with you, the facilitation is that God works around you. That you move, then the loads of the road are lightened off you without your knowing how. And the facilitation is not the disappearance of the difficulties, but the change of your relationship with them: it does not remove the mountain from before you, but shows you the pass through it; it does not prevent the pain, but prevents you from collapsing under it. So the Qur'anic promise came in a precise phrasing:

*"We will ease him toward ease."
(Qur'an 92:7)*

Reflect: He did not say "We will give him ease," but "We will ease him toward ease." And the difference is essential: the promise is not that ease be poured upon him from outside him, but that he himself be reshaped — inwardly and outwardly — until ease becomes possible in his case, and the next step becomes lighter than it was. For the facilitation is a response that runs according to a law: when the inside becomes clear, the course becomes clear; when the heart quiets, reality softens. Because the anxious heart sees everything as an obstacle, and the present heart sees in the obstacle a message.

And as for the harnessing of the means and the lifting of obstacles, it is the subtlest of the faces of support. What most amazes the human in his journey is not what he makes by his effort, but what is made for him without his understanding how: an opportunity he did not strive for that comes to him, a danger he did not see that is turned away from him, a door he was clinging to that closes, a door that did not occur to him that opens. And the harnessing is not that the laws be abolished, but that they be arranged in your favor; not that the universe revolve

around you, but that everything be placed in its correct position relative to you. He said: "And He has made subservient to you whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth — all from Him" (Qur'an 45:13).

And among the subtleties of this harnessing is that God often runs it through ordinary means, not through noisy miracles. For the divine destiny works in the fabric of daily life — in a passing meeting, a small decision, a door that closes or opens — not in marvels that break the laws. And the clearest depiction of this is the story of Moses with the righteous servant in the chapter of the Cave. For when God willed to preserve a ship of poor people from a king who took every ship by force, the preservation was not by a miracle that hid the ship, but by the righteous servant boring a hole in it so it appeared defective, so the oppressor left it. And when He willed to preserve a treasure of two orphan boys beneath a wall about to fall, it was not by fixing the wall from the sky, but by the righteous servant setting it up with his hands. A complete governance, running by apparent earthly means, but behind it a hidden care. It is as though Moses (peace be upon him) — the bearer of the apparent law — was learning that behind the apparent is a governance he cannot

encompass, running in reality itself. So even when God sent down the angels as support on the Day of Badr, He alerted that the apparent cause is not the true agent: “And God made it only as good tidings, and that your hearts might be at rest by it. And victory is only from God” (Qur’an 8:10). For the angels are good tidings and reassurance, not an independent power; and victory in reality is from God, even if it runs through the means.

And the lifting of obstacles is another face of the harnessing: for just as God brings near to you what you need, He distances from you what harms you, even if you reckoned it good. And often this subtle grace is not seen until after a while, until, when the human looks back, he sees how he was saved from what he did not see as a danger, how he was redirected without feeling. Then a door of perception opens to him that the Qur’an called a second guidance: “And those who are guided — He increases them in guidance” (Qur’an 47:17). For the first guidance is a knowledge that is received, but the second is a light granted to whoever stood upright — an internal compass that works when the maps break down, making you choose the correct door without encompassing all that is behind it. It is the very “second light” we saw in the first part,

when the light of revelation meets the light of the heart.

Then comes the summit: when the means of the earth run out. For there are moments in which there remains for the human nothing to lean upon; the instruments are drained, the intellect falls silent, the reckonings fail. And in that moment the true collapse does not occur, but the transformation occurs; because the human then relinquishes — at last — the deepest illusion: the illusion of self-sufficiency. And the running-out of means is no punishment, but a condition of transition: from reliance upon what is in the hand, to reliance upon the One in whose hand is everything. He said: “When you sought help of your Lord, and He responded to you” (Qur’an 8:9) — and seeking help here is no supplication of the tongue only, but a state in which the human reaches the utmost point of truthfulness: there remains for me none but You.

And this meaning was embodied in its clearest image, the day Moses (peace be upon him) stood with his people besieged between the soldiers of Pharaoh and the sea. All the means of the earth had run out: a fully armed enemy behind them, water that cannot be crossed

before them, no way out in the reckoning. Then fear spoke in the hearts of his followers:

*“And when the two hosts saw
one another, the companions of
Moses said, ‘We are surely
overtaken.’” (Qur’an 26:61)*

And this was no phrase of despair, but a precise description of the logic of the means when it is entirely exhausted — for they saw, by the apparent, that the enemy would overtake them inevitably. But Moses did not answer from the logic of the means, but from the logic of the accompaniment:

*“He said, ‘No! Indeed, my Lord
is with me; He will guide me.’”
(Qur’an 26:62)*

And the commentators hold that its meaning is: my Lord will show me the road of salvation. For Moses was seeing not the sea only, but what is beyond the sea; standing not in a moment of siege, but in a moment of transition. And in that very moment — not before it and not after it, when the means of the earth ran out and nothing remained but the accompaniment — the command came: “So We inspired Moses, ‘Strike the sea with your staff.’” (Qur’an 26:63). For a

miracle was not created from a void, but a course was disclosed that existed and was not seen. The sea was not abolished, but parted. Reality was not erased, but rearranged. The danger was not denied, but transformed into a road.

And thus existential support works: it comes not often as a noisy miracle, but as a change in your position relative to the event. The sea does not disappear, but a passage is opened in it. Fear is not always abolished, but its authority falls. The hardship is not erased, but the ability to bear it is granted. For it does not change the events first, but changes the heart that faces them, then the events follow it. So He said: "Indeed, my Lord is subtle in what He wills" (Qur'an 12:100) — for subtle grace is no dramatic change, but a precise shift: a small movement within that reshapes the whole outside.

And subtle grace (luṭf), in its root, is a meaning wider than this. For the theologians defined it as everything that brings the servant near to obedience and distances him from disobedience, without reaching the limit of compulsion and coercion. So subtle grace brings near and does not subdue, invites and does not

compel, prepares the means and preserves the choice. And in this meaning, all support — its legislative and its existential — is a form of subtle grace: for the map is a subtle grace, the accompaniment is a subtle grace, the enabling is a subtle grace, the facilitation is a subtle grace, even the harnessing that arranges for you what you were incapable of. All of them are hidden hands that bring you near to God without stripping from you the freedom of walking to Him.

And the fruit of this certainty is a tranquility that does not depart, because whoever is certain that support is in God's hand knows that nothing will befall him except by His permission. He said: "Say: Nothing will befall us except what God has decreed for us; He is our protector" (Qur'an 9:51). For neither do the means bring a benefit not decreed, nor does their loss repel a harm decreed. And when this settles in the heart, many weights fall off it: the anxiety of the future, the fear of incapacity, the illusion that salvation is by his strength alone.

And when the human experiences this support, his relationship with incapacity changes. He no longer fears it, but understands it; because incapacity is no longer the end of the

road, but its most truthful gateway: the gateway of transition from limited power to the accompaniment, from planning to reliance, from obstinacy to conscious submission. Then the human realizes a truth he did not attain before: that he may walk on his own feet, but he does not walk alone; and he may expend his effort, but he is not saved by his effort alone.

And thus the circle of existential support is completed: an accompaniment, then an enabling, then a facilitation, then a harnessing, then a lifting of obstacles, then — when nothing remains — a sufficiency:

“Is God not sufficient for His servant?” (Qur’an 39:36)

The commentators said: Yes, God is sufficient for His servant who fulfilled the right of servitude and relied upon Him; for who is it that can frighten him if the Strong, the Subduer is with him? For everything great is small with God. And in this meaning, the end of the means is no end of the journey, but its deepest beginning. And incapacity is no defeat, but a hidden election of one who has become ready to bear the light without intermediaries.

Chapter Conclusion

A Subtle Grace That Guides, and a Subtle Grace That Accompanies

We have covered in this chapter the two faces of support: a legislative support that comes from outside the human — a map that guides him, a system of maintenance that preserves him, a light that precedes his step. And an existential support that works in reality itself — an accompaniment that companions him, an enabling that sets him aright, a facilitation that lightens his burden, a harnessing that arranges for him, and a sufficiency that carries him when the means run out.

And the two faces may appear different: one of them texts that are recited, the other decrees that run. But they in truth spring from a single source: the subtle grace of God toward His servant. For legislative support is a subtle grace that guides, saying to the human: this is the road. And existential support is a subtle grace that accompanies, saying to him: and you will not walk it alone. And both — as we saw — bring near without compelling, and aid without subduing. For the single subtle grace manifests

once in the form of a word that guides, and once in the form of a hand that carries.

So the greatest thing the servant attains in this station is not strength, but the realization that he is carried. That he know that the map by which he is guided is a gift, that the accompaniment that companions him is a gift, that every step he stepped toward God he stepped only by the aid of God. Then two opposing illusions fall off him: the illusion of self-sufficiency, so he does not suppose that he arrives by his strength alone; and the illusion of incapacity, so he does not suppose that what is required of him is to arrive alone, so he sits idle. Between the two illusions stands the carried servant: he strives with all he was given, and trusts that behind his striving is One who carries him.

And by this the answer to the question we opened the chapter with is completed: does the human attain his perfection by his strength alone? And the answer: no. For neither is the map of his making, nor the accompaniment of his earning, nor even the will by which he strives a pure, severed choice of his. He strives, yes, but in his striving he is carried. He walks on his own feet, but he does not walk alone. That is the

meaning of being carried by the One who created you.

Indeed, support reaches deeper than we suppose: for even the will by which you turn to God — as we saw in the introduction of this chapter — is not purely your making. He said: “And you do not will except that God wills” (Qur’an 76:30). And the meaning of this is not the abolition of your choice — for your choice is real, and the act is truly attributed to you — but its meaning, as the commentators clarify, is that your very will subsists by the will of God, not severed from it. For you choose, but your ability to choose itself is a gift from Him. And this is the utmost to which the servant humbles himself: that he know that his striving is a gift, his destination a gift, and even his will to strive a gift. So there remains for him nothing to boast of, except that God ennobled him by making him worthy to be supported.



And here we have reached the end of the course. We began from the call of eternity, and end at a servant who walks in the earth carried by a care from his Creator. And between the beginning and the end, we crossed all the

chapters: the Hereafter-origin, purification, the four dimensions, the laws of existence and friction, the making of the will and the movement of the essence, and finally the support that surrounds all this. And there remains only that we see how these threads gather into a single state the human lives — not an idea he knows, but an existence he lives. That is the Presence, and that is what the conclusion of this book opens.



A Pause for Reflection

Before you fold this chapter, summon a single place in your life in which you exhausted your striving until you reached the last of what you possess, then stood incapable as Moses stood with the sea before him and the host behind him. Then ask yourself honestly: when what was relieved was relieved, did you attribute the relief to your stratagem alone, or did you see the hand that was working around you while you did not see it? For whoever beheld that he is carried no longer fears the moment the means run out, because he knows that behind them is One whose care does not run out.

Conclusion · Living in the Presence



Entry

When the human reaches the end of this journey, he does not arrive at a new knowledge he adds to what he knows, nor at a skill he masters. He arrives at a state — a state in which the layers of his awareness gather at a single point, as the threads of light gather in a pure ray with no shadow in it. This state the spirit names: the Presence.

And the Presence is not a place, but a presence. Not a passing moment that occurs in prayer then is extinguished, but a mode of being. Not a withdrawal from the world into a hermitage, but an entering into it with another eye. That you live the world while seeing it from the window of the Hereafter, and walk upon the earth while feeling the expanse of the heaven within you. So neither does the world veil you from God, nor does the remembrance of God sever you from the world — rather the two gather for you in a single awareness.

Part One

When the Threads Gather

And if we return to the axes we crossed in this book, we realize they were no adjacent chapters one following the other, but circles meeting at a single center: the human on his road to God.

We began from the introduction, where we reclaimed the station: that you are a vicegerent who bore a Trust the mountains declined. Then came the Hereafter-origin to re-regulate the compass, so it became clear that you are in a second womb, and that the world is a passage, not a homeland. Then the neglected obligation disclosed that the purification of your self is your first obligation, and that the labor toward God is no description of your state, but a charge you are not exempted from. Then your four dimensions were disclosed — spirit, heart, intellect, and body — and how their harmony is the condition of your ascent, their discord the cause of your fall.

Then the laws of existence appeared: that the opposites and destiny are not in vain, but a precise engineering. Then the laws of friction: that what obstructs you forms you — for the

friction you suppose your enemy is the chisel of your sculpting, and trial is a design, not a punishment. Then came the station of choice, the making of the will: that you choose who you are by your will and your truthfulness, so your striving no longer remains random, but directed. Then the movement of the essence: that the truth become your being, so you do not do good by affectation, but it issues from you by nature. And finally, the secret without which no journey is completed was disclosed: divine support — a map from revelation, and a companionship from the heaven, carrying you when your means run out, so the One who created you carries you.

And when these axes gather in a single heart, the whole perspective is transformed. Life no longer remains a chain of scattered events, but a continuous dialogue between your intention and God's laws, between your striving and His will, between what you want and what is wanted for you. You see that what you reckoned against you was returning you to yourself; that pain was opening in you layers that would not have opened by anything else; that the delay was a preparation; that the hearts that came and went were part of the weave, not of the chaos. And you discover that your steadfastness did not come from your strength, but from the divine

companionship that accompanied you without your seeing it.

Here the living in the Presence becomes a way of life — a way that sees the meaning behind the details, the message within the event, the subtle grace in the withholding as in the giving. You live while certain that God is with you, not as a slogan you repeat, but as an existential truth that accompanies you in every step. And you hear the effect of His words:

*“And We are nearer to him than
his jugular vein.” (Qur’an 50:16)*

Not as a verse you memorize, but as an experience you live.

Part Two

The Tranquil Self: The Birth of the Eternal Self

After this journey, the human no longer remains as he was. Not because he knew more, but because he became clearer. He saw his self: its light and its shadow, its weakness and its strength, its fear and its desire. And everyone who saw his self with truthfulness returned to it

with peace. This peace is the first feature of the tranquil self.

And the tranquil self does not abolish fear, nor erase sorrow, nor deny desire. It reorders them all within an awareness that knows how to carry them without their enslaving it. It is a self in harmony: with its Hereafter-origin, with its purpose in the world, with its four dimensions, with the laws of existence, with the support of God that accompanies those who travel to Him. And from this harmony tranquility is born.

And tranquility is no outward calm, but an inner light. Not the absence of pain, but its understanding. Not a stillness, but a movement in the correct direction. So this self was addressed with an address unlike any other:

*“O tranquil self, return to your
Lord, well-pleased and pleasing.”
(Qur’an 89:27-28)*

And the return here is no spatial relocation, but a return to the origin — as the people of knowledge interpret it: return to your Lord as you began from Him. And it is a state the human lives before death, not only after it; for whoever’s heart found rest in God in his world has begun his return before he departs.

And with the birth of the tranquil self, the eternal version of the human is born. A version that lives not by reaction, but by presence. It does not see the world as a prison, but as a passage. It does not see people as a threat, but as the companionship of a test. It does not see failure as an end, but as a juncture. It does not see success as a summit, but as a trust. This version lives not to prove itself, but to draw near to its truth; not to convince others, but to stand truthful before God.

And this version is not born suddenly, but built layer upon layer: awareness, then truthfulness, then experience, then return. But it arrives. It arrives when the compass becomes upright, the axes harmonize, and the direction becomes one. And then “the second human” is born: the one who hopes in God alone, fears God alone, and walks to God alone.

Part Three

The Return to the One

At the end of every truthful journey, the human does not return to where he began, but to who he is. He returns to God — to the truth he forgot when he was occupied with the world. For

the human was not created to dwell here, but to return:

“Indeed, to your Lord is the return.” (Qur’an 96:8)

And the return is no deferred event awaiting death, but a direction that begins from the moment of awareness. A return that is not the return of a body, but the return of a heart: from heedlessness to presence, from scatteredness to unity, from being lost to the road. Every truthfulness you lived, every pain you bore, every door you closed for God, was a step in this great return: the return of the spirit to its center.

And what makes this return easy is that the One you return to is more merciful to you than your own self. For He is the One who made the good deed tenfold and the bad deed only its like, who promised those who repent that He would replace their bad deeds with good ones, who opened the door of pardon to whoever was excessive against himself so long as he did not despair of His mercy. So the return to the One is no return to a strict reckoning that counts the slips, but to a generosity that receives the one who turns with more than he deserves. And whoever knew that his terminus is to this

generosity, it became easy for him to cover the road.

And when the human returns to the One, his vision of everything changes. The world becomes a passage, not a burden. Time becomes a carrier, not a pursuer. Death becomes a beginning, not an end. And God — whom he supposed he was searching for — he discovers was with him all along:

*“He is the First and the Last,
the Manifest and the Hidden, and
He is Knowing of all things.”
(Qur’an 57:3)*

Here the circle is completed: you begin from God, and you return to God. You are born with a breath, and you return with a breath, and between the two you live a life complete in meaning. No fear of a future, no regret over a past, no anxiety from a present:

*“Unquestionably, the friends of
God — no fear shall be upon them,
nor shall they grieve.” (Qur’an
10:62)*

And thus the journey of the eternal self ends — not as a book that was closed, but as an

awareness that awoke. Walk with this awareness, and you will not walk alone. And if you stumble, you will know that the return is always possible, that the road is not lost from a truthful heart, and that the home you are searching for was not far — but nearer to you than your pulse.

And thus you return to the One. You return to the truth. You return to yourself. And you return — in the end — to the God who was with you from the beginning. And there, the journey does not end... but settles. It settles where God promised His truthful servants that their terminus would be:

*“Indeed, the God-conscious will
be among gardens and rivers, in a
seat of truth, with an Omnipotent
Sovereign.” (Qur’an 54:54-55)*

A seat of truth — for whoever was truthful in his road, truthful is his resting place. And with an Omnipotent Sovereign — for there is no end after you are “with Him.” There the words end, and the Presence remains.

About the Author



Abbas Al-Humaid

An Omani author who has devoted his pen to a single question that has accompanied him since youth: how does a human being move toward his Creator — growing nearer, truer, and more complete?

Raised on the edge of hardship, he chose the path of learning over an easier grant. He studied the religious sciences and philosophy in their traditional circles, then mastered strategy, management, and audit within leading global institutions. For over two decades he served as a partner in distinguished international firms — the first Gulf national elected partner at the group level of one of them — before leading institutional transformation across continents for nearly three decades. He is a member of the State Council of Oman and holds the foremost professional designations in accounting, management, and consulting (CPA, CMC, CMgr, CFE).

Yet this career, for all its weight, was never his end but his instrument. He came to see that the two paths that had seemed so far apart — the spiritual and the strategic — were in truth one: that all existence is a purposeful motion toward an end, and that the human being is called to live with the awareness of one journeying to his Lord, with the same precision by which the greatest enterprises are run.

From this intersection his books were born — in Islamic thought, self-development, and strategy — drawing engagement from scholars and specialists across different schools and traditions, and even other faiths. This book is one of their fruits.

He does not write to persuade, but to open the door to reflection; he claims no ownership of truth, but offers a reading drawn from the Holy Qur'an — the unifying source — on questions seldom addressed with clarity. His invitation is open to every seeker of meaning, whatever their starting point.



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