

The Eleventh Word

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

*By the sun and its glorious splendour; * By the moon as it follows it; * By the day as it shows [the sun's] glory; * By the night as it conceals it; * By the firmament and its wonderful structure; * By the earth and its wide expanse; * By the soul and the order and proportion given it.¹*

Brother! If you want to understand a little about the talisman of the wisdom of the world and the riddle of man's creation and the mystery of the reality of the prescribed prayers, then consider this short comparison together with my own soul.

One time there was a king. As wealth he had numerous treasuries containing diamonds and emeralds and jewels of every kind. Besides these he had other, hidden, wondrous treasuries. By way of attainment he had consummate skill in strange arts, and encompassing knowledge of innumerable wondrous sciences, and great erudition in endless branches of abstruse learning. Now, like every possessor of beauty and perfection wants to see and display his own beauty and perfection, that glorious king wanted to open up an exhibition and set out displays within it in order to make manifest and display in the view of the people the majesty of his rule, his glittering wealth, the wonders of his art, and the marvels of his knowledge, and so that he could behold his beauty and perfection in two respects:

The First Respect: so that he himself could behold them with his own discerning eye.

The Other: so that he could look through the view of others.

With this purpose in mind, the king started to construct a vast and majestic palace. He divided it into magnificent apartments and dwellings, and decorated it with every sort of jewel from his treasuries, and with his own hand so full of art adorned it with the finest and most beautiful works. He ordered it with the subtlest of the arts of his wisdom, and decked it out with the miraculous works of his knowledge. Then after completing it, he set up in the palace broad tables containing the most delicious of every kind of food

¹ Qur'an, 91:1-7.

and every sort of bounty. He specified an appropriate table for each group. He set out such a munificent and artful banquet that it was as though the boundless priceless bounties he spread out had come into existence through the works of a hundred subtle arts. Then he invited his people and subjects from all the regions of his lands to feast and behold the spectacle.

Later the king appointed a Supreme Commander (PBUH) as teacher, to make known the purposes of the palace and the meanings of its contents; to describe its Maker and its contents to the people, make known the secrets of the palace's embellishments, teach what the arts within it were pointing to, and to explain what the well-set jewels were, and the harmonious embroideries; and to explain to those who entered the palace the way in which they indicated the perfections and arts of the palace's owner, and to inform them of the correct conduct in beholding them, and to explain the official ceremonies as the king, who did not appear, wished them to be. The teacher and instructor had an assistant in each area of the palace, while he himself remained in the largest apartment among his students, making the following announcement to all the spectators. He told them:

"O people! By making this palace and displaying these things our lord, who is the king of the palace, wants to make himself known to you. You therefore should recognize Him and try to get to know Him. And with these adornments He wants to make Himself loved by you. Also, He shows His love for you through these bounties that you see, so you should love Him too by obeying Him. And through these bounties and gifts which are to be seen He shows His compassion and kindness for you, so you should show your respect for Him by offering thanks. And through these works of His perfection He wants to display His transcendent beauty to you, so you should show your eagerness to see Him and gain His regard. And through placing a particular stamp and special seal and an inimitable signet on every one of these adorned works of art that you see, He wants to show that everything is particular to Him, and is the work of His own hand, and that He is single and unique and independent and removed. You therefore should recognize that He is single and alone, and without peer or like or match, and accept that He is such." He spoke further fitting words to the spectators like these concerning the King and this station. Then the people who had entered the palace separated into two groups.

The First Group: Since these people had self-knowledge, were intelligent, and their hearts were in the right place, when they looked at the wonders inside the palace, they declared: "There are great matters afoot here!" They understood that it was not in vain or some trifling plaything. They were curious, and while wondering: "I wonder what the talisman to this is and what it contains," they suddenly heard the speech the Master and Instructor was giving, and they realized that the keys to all the mysteries were with

him. So they approached him and said: "Peace be upon you, O Master! By rights, a truthful and exact instructor like you is necessary for a magnificent palace such as this. Please tell us what our Lord has made known to you!" First of all the Master repeated the speech to them. They listened carefully, and accepting it, profited greatly. They acted as the King wished. And because the King was pleased at their becoming conduct and manners, he invited them to another special, elevated, ineffable palace. And he bestowed it on them in a way worthy of such a munificent king, and fitting for such obedient subjects, and suitable for such well-mannered guests, and appropriate to such an elevated palace. He made them permanently happy.

As for the Second Group, because their minds were corrupted and their hearts extinguished, when they entered the palace, they were defeated by their evil-commanding souls and took notice of nothing apart from the delicious foods; they closed their eyes to all the virtues and stopped up their ears to the guidance of the Master (PBUH) and the warnings of his students. They stuffed themselves like animals then sank into sleep. They quaffed elixirs which had been prepared for certain other matters and were not to have been consumed. Then they became drunk and started shouting so much they greatly upset the other spectating guests. They were ill-mannered in the face of the Glorious Maker's rules. So the soldiers of the palace's owner arrested them, and cast them into a prison appropriate to such unmannerly people.

O friend who is listening to this story with me! Of course you have understood that the Glorious Creator built this palace for the above-mentioned aims. The achievement of these aims is dependent on two things:

The First: The existence of the Master (PBUH) whom we saw and whose speech we heard. Because if not for him, all the aims would have been futile. For an incomprehensible book with no author consists only of meaningless paper.

The Second is the people listening the Master's words and accepting them. That is to say, the Master's existence is the cause of the palace's existence, and the people's listening to him is the cause of the continuation of the palace's existence. In which case, it may be said that if it had not been for the Master (PBUH), the Glorious King would not have built the palace. And again it may be said that when the people do not heed the Master's (PBUH) instructions, the palace will of a certainty be transformed and changed.

Friend! The story ends here. If you have understood the meaning of the comparison, come and behold its reality.

The palace is this world. Its roof is the heavens illuminated with smiling stars, and its floor, the face of the earth adorned from east to west with multifarious flowers. As for the King, he is the Most Holy One, the Pre-Eternal and Post-Eternal Monarch, Whom all things in the seven heavens and the

earth glorify and extol, each with its particular tongue. He is a king so powerful He created the heavens and earth in six days, then abided on the Throne. One of Power and Majesty, Who, alternating night and day like two threads, one white and one black, writes His signs of the page of the universe; One to Whose command the sun, moon, and stars are subjugated. The apartments of the palace are the eighteen thousand worlds, each of which has been set in order and decorated in a fashion suitable to it. The strange arts you saw in the palace are the miracles of Divine power you see in this world, and the foods you saw there allude to the wonderful fruits of Divine mercy in this world, especially in summer, and above all in the gardens of Barla. The stove and kitchen there is the earth here, which has fire in its heart, and the face of the earth. While the jewels of the hidden treasures you saw in the comparison are the similitudes of the manifestations of the sacred Divine Names. And the embroideries there, and the signs of the embroideries, are the well-ordered and finely worked beings and the harmonious impresses of the pen of power which adorn this world and point to the Names of the All-Powerful One of Glory.

As for the Master, he is our Master Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him). His assistants are the prophets (Peace be upon them), and his students, the saints and purified scholars. The ruler's servants in the palace indicate the angels (Peace be upon them) in this world. And the guests invited to the banquet to spectate in the comparison are the jinn and mankind in this guest-house of the world, and the animals, who are the servants of mankind. As for the two groups, one of them here consists of the people of belief, who are the students of the All-Wise Qur'an, the interpreter of the verses and signs of the book of the universe. The other group consists of the people of unbelief and rebellion, who follow Satan and their evil-commanding souls; deaf and dumb, like animals, or even lower, they form the group of the misguided, who recognize the life of this world only.

FIRST GROUP: These are the felicitous and the good, who listened to the Master, 'the Possessor of Two Wings.' He is both the worshipping servant of God; in regard to worship he describes his Sustainer so that he is like the envoy of his community at the Court of Almighty God. He is also God's Messenger; with regard to Messengership he conveys his Sustainer's decrees to men and the jinn by means of the Qur'an.

This happy community heeded the Messenger and listened to the Qur'an. They saw themselves invested with the prescribed prayers, which are the index of all the varieties of worship, and numerous subtle duties within elevated stations. Indeed, they saw in detail the duties and stations which the prayers point to with their various formulas and actions. It was like this:

Firstly: Since they observed the Divine works, and in the form of a transaction in the absence of the person concerned, saw themselves in the station

of observing the wonders of the sovereignty of dominicality, they performed the duty of extolling and glorifying God, declaring: "God is Most Great!"

Secondly: Through being seen in the station of herald of His brilliant and wonderful works, which are the manifestations of the sacred Divine Names, exclaiming: "Glory be to God! All Praise be to God!", they performed the duty of hallowing and praising God.

Thirdly: In the station of perceiving and understanding with their inner and outer senses the bounties stored up in the treasuries of Divine mercy, they started to carry out the duty of thanks and praise.

Fourthly: In the station of weighing up with the scales of their spiritual faculties the jewels in the treasuries of the Divine Names, they began the duty of praise and declaring God to be free of all fault.

Fifthly: In the station of studying the Sustainer's missives, written with the pen of power on the plan of Divine Determining, they began the duty of contemplation and appreciation.

Sixthly: With beholding the subtle, delicate, fine beauties in the creation of things and in the art in beings, in the station of declaring God to be free of all defect, they took up the duty of love and yearning for their All-Glorious Creator, their All-Beauteous Maker. That is to say, after looking at the universe and works and performing the duties in the above-mentioned stations through transactions in the object of worship's absence, they rose to the degree of also beholding the transactions and acts of the All-Wise Maker, whereby, in the form of a transaction in the presence of the person concerned, they responded with knowledge and wonder in the face of the All-Glorious Creator's making Himself known to conscious beings through the miracles of His art, and declared: "Glory be unto You! How can we truly know you? What makes You known are the miracles of the works of Your art!"

Then, they responded with love and passion to that Most Merciful One's making Himself loved through the beautiful fruits of His mercy. "You alone do we worship and from You alone do we seek help!", they declared.

Then they responded with thanks and praise to the True Bestower's showing His mercy and compassion through His sweet bounties, and exclaimed: "Glory be unto You! All praise is Yours! How can we thank You as is Your due? You are utterly worthy of thanks! For all Your bounties spread through all the universe hymn Your praises and thanks through the clear tongues of their beings. All Your bounties lined up in the market of the world and scattered over the face of the earth proclaim Your praises and extol You. Through testifying to Your munificence and generosity, all the well-ordered and well-proportioned fruits of Your mercy and bounty offer You thanks before the gazes of Your creatures."

Then they responded, saying: “God is Most Great!” before the manifestation of Divine beauty, glory, perfection, and majesty in the mirrors of beings, ever changing on the face of the universe; they bowed reverently in their impotence, and prostrated in humility with love and wonder.

Then announcing their poverty and need, they responded with supplication and beseeching to the Possessor of Absolute Riches’ displaying the abundance of His wealth and breadth of His mercy, and declared: “From You alone do we seek help!”

Then they responded appreciatively to the All-Glorious Maker’s displaying the subtleties and wonders of His antique art in the exhibition of creatures, exclaiming: “What wonders God has willed!” Observing and applauding them, they declared, “How beautifully they have been made! What blessings God has bestowed!” Holding everyone witness, they said in wonder: “Come! Look at these! Hasten to the prayers and to prosperity!”

And they responded with submission and obedience to the Monarch of Pre-Eternity and Post-Eternity’s proclamation of the sovereignty of His dominicality in every corner of the universe and the manifestation of His unity. Declaring: “We hear and we obey!”, they affirmed His unity.

Then, before the manifestation of the Godhead of that Sustainer of All the Worlds, they responded with worship and humble veneration, which consists of proclaiming their poverty within need, and with the prescribed prayers, which are the summary of worship. Thus, through performing their various duties of worship in the mighty mosque known as the abode of this world, they carried out the obligations and duties of their lives, and assumed ‘the finest of forms.’ They ascended to a rank above all creatures by which, through the auspiciousness of belief and assurance and ‘the Trust,’ they became trustworthy Vicegerents of God on the Earth. And after this field of trial and place of examination, their Munificent Sustainer invited them to eternal happiness in recompense for their belief, and to the Abode of Peace in reward for their adhering to His religion of Islam. There, He bestowed on them out of His mercy bounties so dazzling that no eye has seen them, nor ear heard them, nor have they occurred to the heart of man² – and so He does bestow these on them, and He gave them eternity and everlasting life. For the desirous, mirror-bearing lovers of an eternal, abiding beauty who gaze upon it will certainly not perish, but will go to eternity. The final state of the Qur’an’s students is thus. May Almighty God include us among them, Amen!

As for the other group, the sinners and the wicked, when they entered the palace of this world at the age of discretion, they responded with unbelief to

² See page 88, footnote 22.

all the evidences of Divine unity, and with ingratitude towards all the bounties, and by accusing all creatures of being valueless, insulted them in an unbelieving manner. And since they rejected and denied all the manifestations of the Divine Names, they committed a boundless crime in a short time and became deserving of endless punishment. For the capital of life and man's faculties were given him for the duties mentioned above.

O my senseless soul and foolish friend! Do you suppose your life's duty is restricted to following the good life according to the requisites of civilization, and, if you will excuse the expression, to gratifying the physical appetites? Do you suppose the sole aim of the delicate and subtle senses, the sensitive faculties and members, the well-ordered limbs and systems, the inquisitive feelings and senses included in the machine of your life is restricted to satisfying the low desires of the base soul in this fleeting life? God forbid! There are two main aims in their creation and inclusion in your essential being:

The First consists of making known to you all the varieties of the True Bestower's bounties, and causing you to offer Him thanks. You should be aware of this, and offer Him thanks and worship.

The Second is to make known to you by means of your faculties all the sorts of the manifestations of the sacred Divine Names manifested in the world and to cause you to experience them. And you, by recognizing them through experiencing them, should come to believe in them.

Thus, man develops and is perfected through the achievement of these two basic aims. Through them, man becomes a true human being.

Look through the meaning of the following comparison, and see that the human faculties were not given in order to gain worldly life like an animal.

For example, someone gave one of his servants twenty gold pieces, telling him to have a suit of clothes made out of a particular cloth. The servant went and got himself a fine suit out of the highest grade of the cloth, and put it on. Then he saw that his employer had given another of his servants a thousand gold pieces, and putting in the servant's pocket a piece of paper with some things written on it, had sent him to conclude some business. Now, anyone with any sense would know that the capital was not for getting a suit of clothes, for, since the first servant had bought a suit of the finest cloth with twenty gold pieces, the thousand gold pieces were certainly not to be spent on that. Since the second servant had not read the paper in his pocket, and looking at the first servant, had given all the money to a shopkeeper for a suit of clothes, and then received the very lowest grade of cloth and a suit fifty times worse than his friend's, his employer was bound to reprimand him severely for his utter stupidity, and punish him angrily.

O my soul and my friend! Come to your senses! Do not spend the capital

and potentialities of your life on pleasures of the flesh and this fleeting life like an animal, or even lower. Otherwise, although you are fifty times superior with regard to capital than the highest animal, you will fall fifty times lower than the lowest.

O my heedless soul! If you want to understand to a degree both the aim of your life and its nature, and the form of your life, and the true meaning of your life, and its perfect happiness, then look! The summary of the aims of your life consists of nine matters:

The First is this: To weigh up on the scales of the senses put in your being the bounties stored up in the treasuries of Divine mercy, and to offer universal thanks.

The Second: To open with the keys of the faculties placed in your nature the hidden treasuries of the sacred Divine Names.

The Third: To consciously display and make known through your life in the view of the creatures in this exhibition of the world the wondrous arts and subtle manifestations which the Divine Names have attached to you.

The Fourth: To proclaim your worship to the Court of the Creator's dominicality verbally and through the tongue of your disposition.

The Fifth: Like on ceremonial occasions a soldier wears all the decorations he has received from his king, and through appearing before the him, displays the marks of his favour towards him, this is to consciously adorn yourself in the jewels of the subtle senses which the manifestations of the Divine Names have given you, and to appear in the observant view of the Pre-Eternal Witness.

The Sixth: To consciously observe the salutations of living beings to their Creator, known as the manifestations of life, and their glorifications of their Maker, known as the signs of life, and their worship of the Bestower of Life, known as the aims of life, and by reflecting on them to see them, and through testifying to them to display them.

The Seventh: Through taking as units of measurement the small samples of attributes like the partial knowledge, power, and will given to your life, it is to know through those measures the absolute attributes and sacred qualities of the All-Glorious Creator. For example, since, through your partial power, knowledge, and will, you have made your house in well-ordered fashion, you should know that the Maker of the palace of the world is its Disposer, and Powerful, Knowing, and Wise to the degree it is greater than your house.

The Eighth: To understand the words concerning the Creator's unity and Maker's dominicality uttered by each of the beings in the world in its particular tongue.

The Ninth: To understand through your impotence and weakness, your poverty and need, the degrees of the Divine power and dominical riches. Just as the pleasure and degrees and varieties of food are understood through the degrees of hunger and the sorts of need, so you should understand the degrees of the infinite Divine power and riches through your infinite impotence and poverty. The aims of your life, then, briefly, are matters like these. Now consider the nature of your life; its summary is this:

It is an index of wonders pertaining to the Divine Names; a scale for measuring the Divine attributes; a balance of the worlds within the universe; a list of the mighty world; a map of the cosmos; a summary of the vast book of the universe; a bunch of keys with which to open the hidden treasures of Divine power; and a most excellent pattern of the perfections scattered over beings and attached to time. The nature of your life consists of matters like these.

Now, the form of your life and the manner of its duty is this: your life is an inscribed word, a wisdom-displaying word written by the pen of power. Seen and heard, it points to the Divine Names. The form of your life consists of matters like these.

Now the true meaning of your life is this: its acting as a mirror to the manifestation of Divine oneness and the manifestation of the Eternally Besought One. That is to say, through a comprehensiveness as though being the point of focus for all the Divine Names manifested in the world, it is its being a mirror to the Single and Eternally Besought One.

Now, as for the perfection of your life, it is to perceive the lights of the Pre-Eternal Sun which are depicted in the mirror of your life, and to love them. It is to display ardour for Him as a conscious being. It is to pass beyond yourself with love of Him. It is to establish the reflection of His light in the centre of your heart. It is due to this mystery that the Hadith Qudsi was uttered, which is expressed by the following lines, and will raise you to the highest of the high:

*The heavens and the earth contain me not;
Yet, how strange! I am contained in the hearts of believers.*³

And so, my soul! Since your life is turned towards such elevated aims and gathers together such priceless treasures, is it at all worthy of reason and fairness that you should spend it on temporary gratification of the instinctual soul and fleeting worldly pleasures, and waste it? If you do not want to fritter away your life, ponder over the oaths in this Sura of the Qur'an, which allude to the above comparison and truths, and act accordingly:

*By the sun and its [glorious] splendour; * By the moon as it*

³ See, al-'Ajluni, *Kashf al-Khafa*, ii, 165; al-Ghazzali, *Ihya' l-'Ulum al-Din*, iii, 14.

*follows it; * By the day as it shows up [the sun's] glory; * By the night as it conceals it; * By the firmament and its [wonderful] structure; * By the earth and its [wide] expanse; * By the soul and the order and proportion given it; * And its enlightenment to its wrong and its right. * Truly he succeeds that purifies it, * And he fails that corrupts it.*⁴

O God, grant blessings and peace to the Sun of the Skies of Messengership, the Moon of the Constellation of Prophethood, and to his Family and Companions, the stars of guidance, and grant mercy to us and to all believing men and all believing women. Amen. Amen. Amen.

⁴ Qur'an, 91:1-10.