

The Twenty-Third Word

[This Word contains Two Chapters]

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

*Indeed, We have created man on the most excellent of patterns, * Then sent him down to the lowest of the low, * Except those who believe and do good deeds.¹*

First Chapter

We shall explain in five 'Points' only five of the virtues of belief out of thousands.

FIRST POINT

Through the light of belief, man rises to the highest of the high and acquires a value worthy of Paradise. And through the darkness of unbelief, he descends to the lowest of the low and falls to a position fit for Hell. For belief connects man to the All-Glorious Maker; it is a relation. Thus, man acquires value by virtue of the Divine art and inscriptions of the dominical Names which become apparent in him through belief. Unbelief severs the relation, and due to that severance the dominical art is concealed. His value then is only in respect to the matter of his physical being. And since this matter has only a transitory, passing, temporary animal life, its value is virtually nothing. We shall explain this mystery by means of a comparison:

For example: among man's arts, the value of the materials used and that of the art are entirely different. Sometimes they are equal, sometimes the material is more valuable, and sometimes it happens that five *liras*' worth of art is to be found in material like iron worth five *kurush*. Sometimes, even, an antique work of art is worth a million while the material of which it is composed is not worth five *kurush*. If such a work of art is taken to the

¹ Qur'an, 95:4-6.

antiques market and ascribed to a brilliant and accomplished artist of former times, and announced mentioning the artist and that art, it may be sold for a million *liras*.² Whereas if it is taken to the scrap-dealers, the only price received will be for the five kurush's worth of iron.

Thus, man is such an antique work of art of Almighty God. He is a most subtle and graceful miracle of His power whom He created to manifest all his Names and their inscriptions, in the form of a miniature specimen of the universe. If the light of belief enters his being, all the meaningful inscriptions on him may be read. As one who believes, he reads them consciously, and through that relation, causes others to read them. That is to say, the dominical art in man becomes apparent through meanings like, "I am the creature and artefact of the All-Glorious Maker. I manifest His mercy and munificence." That is, belief, which consists of being connected to the Maker, makes apparent all the works of art in man. Man's value is in accordance with that dominical art and by virtue of being a mirror to the Eternally Besought One. In this respect insignificant man becomes God's addressee and a guest of the Sustainer worthy of Paradise superior to all other creatures.

However, should unbelief, which consists of the severance of the relation, enter man's being, then all those meaningful inscriptions of the Divine Names are plunged into darkness and become illegible. For if the Maker is forgotten, the spiritual aspects which look to Him will not be comprehended, they will be as though reversed. The majority of those meaningful sublime arts and elevated inscriptions will be hidden. The remainder, those that may be seen with the eye, will be attributed to lowly causes, nature, and chance, and will become utterly devoid of value. While they are all brilliant diamonds, they become dull pieces of glass. His importance looks only to his animal, physical being. And as we said, the aim and fruit of his physical being is only to pass a brief and partial life as the most impotent, needy, and grieving of animals. Then it decays and departs. See how unbelief destroys human nature, and transforms it from diamonds into coal.

SECOND POINT

Just as belief is a light which illuminates man and makes legible all the missives of the Eternally Besought One inscribed upon him, so too it illuminates the universe, and delivers the past and the future from darkness. I shall explain this mystery with a comparison I saw during a vision, which concerns one meaning of the verse:

*God is the Protector of those who believe; He leads them out of darkness into light.*³

² See, page 295, footnote 19.

³ Qur'an, 2:257.

It was like this:

I saw in a vision an awesome bridge built between two high mountains situated opposite one another. Beneath the bridge was a valley of great depth. I was on the bridge. A dense darkness had enveloped every part of the world. I looked to my right and saw a vast grave swathed in an unending dense gloom, that is, I imagined it. I looked to my left and as though saw violent storms and calamities gathering amid terrifying waves of blackness. I looked beneath the bridge and imagined I saw a profound abyss. I had a dim torch in the face of this terrifying darkness. I used it and could see a little with its light. A most horrific situation appeared to me. In fact, such awful dragons, lions, and monsters appeared around me and on the bridge in front of me that I exclaimed: "Oh! This torch brings me only trouble!", and I angrily cast it to the ground and broke it. Then on smashing it, the darkness suddenly dispersed as though I had turned on the switch for a huge electric lamp that lit up the whole world. Everywhere was filled with the lamp's light. It showed everything as it was in reality.

I saw that the bridge I had seen was a highway through a plain passing over even ground. The vast grave I had seen on my right I realized consisted from top to bottom of beautiful, verdant gardens and gatherings for worship, service, conversation, and the remembrance of God under the direction of luminous men. The precipices and peaks on my left which I had imagined to be tempestuous and stormy I now saw fleetingly to be a vast, lovely, and elevated place of feasting, recreation, and enjoyment behind mountains that were adorned and pleasant. And the creatures I had thought to be terrifying monsters and dragons, I saw were familiar domestic animals like camels, oxen, sheep, and goats. Declaring, "All praise be to God for the light of belief," I recited the verse,

God is the Protector of those who believe; He leads them out of darkness into light,

and I awoke from my vision.

Thus, the two mountains were the beginning and end of life; that is, this world and the Intermediate Realm. The bridge was the road of life. To the right was the past, and to the left, the future. As for the small torch, it was the human ego, which is egotistical, relies on what it knows, and does not heed the heavenly revelation. The things imagined to be the monsters were the events and strange creatures of the world.

Thus, one who relies on his ego, who falls into the darkness of heedlessness and is afflicted with the blackness of misguidance resembles my first state in the vision, which, like with the pocket-torch and due to deficient and misguided knowledge, saw the past in the form a huge grave amid darkness imbued with non-existence. It showed the future to be a stormy and desolate

wasteland governed by coincidence, and events and beings, which are all submissive officials of One All-Wise and All-Compassionate to be monsters. Such a person as though manifests the verse,

*And those who reject belief, their protectors are the evil ones; they lead them out of light into darkness.*⁴

But if such a man attains to Divine guidance and belief enters his heart, and if the tyranny of his soul is smashed and he heeds God's Book, he will resemble my second state in the vision. Then the universe will suddenly take on the colour of day and be filled with Divine light. The world will recite the verse,

*God is the light of the heavens and the earth.*⁵

Then he will see with the eye of the heart that the past is not a vast grave, but where the groups of purified spirits who each century having performed their duties of worship under the leadership of a prophet or saint exclaim, "God is Most Great!" on completion of the duties of their lives, and fly to elevated abodes, moving on to the past. He will look to the left, and through the light of belief distinguish in the distance a feasting-place of the Most Merciful set up in palaces of bliss in the gardens of Paradise, beyond the mountainous revolutions of the Intermediate Realm and the hereafter. And he will realize that the storms and earthquakes and tempestuous events are all submissive officials, and understand that they are the means for instances of wisdom which though apparently harsh are in fact most gentle, like the storms and rains of spring. He will even see death to be the introduction to eternal life, and the grave, the door to everlasting happiness. You can deduce further aspects for yourself. Apply the reality to the comparison!

THIRD POINT

Belief is both light and strength. Yes, one who acquires true belief may challenge the whole universe and be saved from the pressure of events in accordance with the strength of his belief. Saying, "I place my trust in God," he travels through the mountainous waves of events in the ship of life in complete safety. He entrusts all his burdens to the hand of power of the Absolutely Powerful One, voyages through the world in ease, then takes his rest in the Intermediate Realm. Later he may fly up to Paradise in order to enter eternal happiness. Otherwise, if he does not rely on God, rather than flying, the burdens of the world will drag him down to the lowest of the low. That is to say, belief necessitates affirmation of Divine unity, affirmation of Divine unity necessitates submission to God, submission to God necessitates reliance on God, and reliance on God necessarily leads to happiness in this

⁴ Qur'an, 2:257.

⁵ Qur'an, 24:35.

world and the next. But do not misunderstand this, reliance on God is not to reject causes altogether; it is rather to know that causes are a veil to the hand of power and have recourse to them. Knowing that attempting causes is a sort of active prayer, it is to seek the effects only from Almighty God, recognize that the results are from Him alone, and to be thankful to Him.

Those who place their trust in God and those who do not, resemble the two men in this story:

One time two men loaded heavy burdens onto both their backs and heads, and buying tickets, boarded a large ship. As soon as they boarded it, one of them left his load on the deck, and sitting on it guarded it. The other, however, since he was both stupid and arrogant, did not put down his load. When he was told: "Leave that heavy load on the deck and be comfortable," he replied: "No, I won't put it down, it might get lost. I am strong, I'll guard my property by carrying it on my head and back." He was told again: "This reliable royal ship which is carrying you and us is stronger, it can protect it better than you. You may get giddy and fall into the sea together with your load. Anyway you will gradually lose your strength, and by degrees those loads will get heavier and your bent back and brainless head will not have the power to bear them. And if the Captain sees you in this state, he will either say that you are crazy and expel you from the ship, or he will think you are ungrateful, accusing our ship and jeering at us, and he will order you to be put into prison. Also you are making a fool of yourself in front of everyone. For the perceptive see that you are displaying weakness through your conceit, impotence through your pride, and abasement and hypocrisy through your pretence, and have thus made yourself a laughing-stock in the eyes of the people. Everyone's laughing at you." Whereupon the unfortunate man came to his senses. He put down his load on the deck and sat on it. He said to the other: "Ah! May God be pleased with you. I've been saved from that difficulty, from prison, and from making a fool of myself."

O man who does not place his trust in God! You too come to your senses like that man and place your trust in Him, so that you may be delivered from begging before all the universe, trembling before every event, from pride, making a fool of yourself, misery in the hereafter, and the prison of the pressures of this world...

FOURTH POINT

Belief makes man into man, indeed, it makes him into a king. Since this is so, man's basic duty is belief and supplication. Unbelief makes him into an extremely impotent beast.

Out of thousands of proofs of this matter, the differences in the ways animals and man come into the world are a clear indication and decisive proof.

Yes, these differences show that humanity becomes humanity through belief. For when animals come into the world, they come complete in all points in accordance with their abilities as though having been perfected in another world; that is, they are sent. They learn all the conditions of their lives, their relationships with the universe, and the laws of life in either two hours or two days or two months, and become proficient in them. Animals like sparrows and bees acquire in twenty days the power to survive and proficiency in their actions that man only acquires in twenty years; that is, they are inspired with them. This means that the animals' fundamental duty is not to be perfected through learning and progress by acquiring knowledge, nor to seek help and offer supplications through displaying their impotence, but in accordance with their abilities to work and act. Their duty is active worship.

As for man, he needs to learn everything when he comes into the world; he is ignorant, and cannot even learn completely the conditions of life in twenty years. Indeed, he needs to go on learning till the end of his life. Also he is sent to the world in a most weak and impotent form, and can only rise to his feet in one or two years. Only in fifteen years can he distinguish between harm and benefit, and with the help of mankind's experience attract things advantageous to him and avoid others that are harmful. This means that man's innate duty is to be perfected through learning and to proclaim his worship of God and servitude to Him through supplication. That is to say, it is to know the answers of the questions: "Through whose compassion is my life so wisely administered in this way? Through whose generosity am I so kindly raised? Through whose graciousness am I so delicately nurtured and ministered to?" It is to beseech and supplicate the Provider of Needs through the tongue of impotence and poverty; it is to seek from Him. It is to fly to the high station of worship and servitude to God on the wings of impotence and poverty.

This means that man came to this world to be perfected by means of knowledge and supplication. In regard to his nature and abilities everything is tied to knowledge. And the foundation, source, light, and spirit of all true knowledge is knowledge of God, and its essence and basis is belief in God.

Furthermore, since man is subject to endless tribulations and afflicted with innumerable enemies despite his boundless impotence, and suffers from endless needs and has innumerable desires despite his boundless poverty, after belief, his fundamental innate duty is supplication. As for supplication, it is the basis of worship of God and servitude to Him. In order to secure a desire or wish he cannot obtain, a child will either cry or ask for it, that is, he will supplicate through the tongue of his impotence either actively or verbally, and will be successful in securing it. In the same way, man is like a delicate, petted child in the world of living creatures. He has to either weep at the Court of the Most Merciful and Compassionate One through his

weakness and impotence, or supplicate through his poverty and need, so that the things he wants may be made subject to him, or he may offer thanks for their being made so. Otherwise like a silly child who creates a fuss over a fly, saying: “With my own strength I subjugate things it is not possible to subjugate and things a thousand times more powerful, and I make them obey me through my own ideas and measures,” he displays ingratitude for the bounties. And just as this is contrary to man’s innate nature, so he makes himself deserving of severe punishment.

FIFTH POINT

Belief necessitates supplication as a certain means of securing needs, and both human nature has an intense desire for it, and Almighty God decrees,

*Say: My Sustainer would not concern Himself with you but for your supplication,*⁶

which has the meaning of: What importance would you have if you did not offer Me supplications? He also commands:

*Call upon Me and I will answer you.*⁷

If you say: We frequently offer supplications, but they are not accepted. But the verse is general, it states that every supplication is answered.

The Answer: To answer is one thing, to accept is something quite different. Every supplication is answered, but its being accepted and exactly what was sought being given is dependent on Almighty God’s wisdom. For example, if a sick child calls the doctor, saying: “Doctor! Doctor!”, and he replies: “Here I am, what do you want?”, and the child says: “Give me that medicine!”, the doctor will either give him exactly what he asks for or something better and more beneficial for him. Or knowing that medicine is harmful for his illness, he will give him nothing.

Thus, since Almighty God is all-present and all-seeing, He responds to the supplications of His servants. Through His presence and response, He transforms the desolation of loneliness and solitude into familiarity. But He does this, not in accordance with man’s capricious and importunate demands, but in accordance with the requirements of dominical wisdom; He gives either what is sought or what is better than it, or He gives nothing at all.

Also, supplication is a form of worship and recognition of man’s servitude to God. The fruits of this pertain to the hereafter. The aims pertaining to this world are the times of a particular sort of supplication and worship. For example, the prayers and supplications for rain are a form of worship.

⁶ Qur’an, 25:77.

⁷ Qur’an, 40:60.

Drought is the time for such worship. Worship and supplications of this sort are not in order to bring rain. If they are performed with that intention alone they are not worthy of acceptance, for they are not sincere worship. Sunset is the time of the evening prayers. And eclipses of the sun and moon are the times of two particular prayers known as salat al-kusuf and salat al-khusuf. That is to say, with the veiling of the two luminous signs of the night and day, God's tremendousness is proclaimed, so Almighty God calls his servants to a sort of worship at those times. The prayers are not so that the sun and moon will be revealed (whose appearance and how long the eclipses will continue have anyway been reckoned by astronomers).

In just the same way, drought is the time for the prayers for rain, and the visitation of calamities and infliction of harmful things the times of certain supplications when man realizes his impotence and through his supplication and entreaty seeks refuge at the Court of One Possessing Absolute Power. Even if the calamities are not lifted despite many supplications, it may not be said that they were not accepted. It should rather be said that the time for the supplication is not yet over. If through His graciousness and munificence Almighty God removes the calamity, light upon light, then the time for that supplication is over and done with. That is to say, supplication has the meaning of worship and man's acknowledging his servitude to God.

As for worship and servitude to God, it should be purely and sincerely for God's sake. Man should only proclaim his impotence and seek refuge with Him through supplication, he should not interfere in His dominicality. He should leave the taking of measures to Him and rely on His wisdom. He should not accuse His Mercy.

Indeed, what is in reality established by the Qur'an's clear verses is that just as all beings offer their own particular glorification and worship, so what rises to the Divine Court from all the universe is supplication. This is either through the tongue of innate ability like the supplication of plants and animals, through which they seek forms from the Absolute Bestower and to display and manifest His Names. Or it is through the tongue of innate need. These are the supplications for all their essential needs – beyond their power to obtain – offered by animate beings. Through this tongue, the animate beings seek certain things from the Absolutely Generous One for the continuance of their lives, like a sort of sustenance. Or it is supplication through the tongue of exigency, through which all beings with spirits who find themselves in some plight or predicament make supplication and seek urgent refuge with an unknown protector; indeed, they turn to the All-Compassionate Sustainer. If there is nothing to prevent it, these three sorts of supplication are always accepted.

The fourth sort of supplication is the most well-known; it is our supplication. This too is of two sorts: one is active and by disposition, and the other,

verbal and with the heart. For example, having recourse to causes is an active prayer. To gather together causes is not in order to create the effect, but through the tongue of disposition to take up an acceptable position in order to seek the effect from Almighty God. To plough a field is to knock at the door of the treasury of mercy. Since this sort of active supplication is directed towards the Absolutely Generous One's Name and title, it is accepted in the great majority of cases.

The second sort is to offer supplication with the tongue and the heart. It is to seek certain wishes which the hand cannot reach. The most important aspect, the most beautiful aim, the sweetest fruit of this is this: "The one who offers the supplications knows that there is Someone Who hears the wishes of his heart, Whose hand can reach all things, Who can bring about each of his desires, Who takes pity on his impotence, and answers his poverty."

O impotent, needy man! Do not neglect a means like supplication, which is the key to the treasury of mercy and to an inexhaustible strength. Cling to it! Rise to the highest peaks of humanity! Include in your supplications those of all the universe, like a king! Say, "*From You alone do we seek help*,"⁸ like a servant and deputy representing all the universe! Be on the Most Excellent Pattern of creation!

⁸ Qur'an, 1:4.

Second Chapter

INCLUDING FIVE REMARKS WITH RESPECT TO MAN'S HAPPINESS AND MISERY

[Since man has been created on the most excellent of patterns and has been given most comprehensive abilities, he has been cast into an arena of trial and examination in which he may rise or fall to stations, ranks, and degrees from the lowest of the low to the highest of the high, from the earth to the Divine Throne, and from minute particles to the sun. He has been sent to this world as a miracle of Divine Power, the result of creation, and a wonder of Divine art before whom have been opened two roads leading either to infinite ascent or infinite descent. We shall explain the mystery of this awesome progress and decline of man's in five 'Remarks'.]

FIRST REMARK

Man stands in need of most of the varieties of beings in the universe and is connected to them. His needs spread through every part of the world, and his desires extend to eternity. As he wants a flower, so he wants the spring. As he desires a garden, so does he also desire everlasting Paradise. As he longs to see a friend, so does he long to see the All-Beauteous One of Glory. Just as in order to visit one he loves who lives somewhere else, he is in need for his beloved's door to be opened to him, so too in order to visit the ninety-nine per cent of his friends who have travelled to the intermediate realm and so be saved from eternal separation, he needs to seek refuge at the court of an Absolutely Powerful One. For it is He Who will close the door of this huge world and open the door of the hereafter, which is an exhibition of wonders, remove this world and establish the hereafter in its place.

Thus for man in this position the only True Object of Worship will be One in Whose hand are the reins of all things, with Whom are the treasures of all things, Who sees all things, and is present everywhere, Who is beyond space, exempt from impotence, free of fault, and far above all defect; an All-Powerful One of Glory, an All-Compassionate One of Beauty, an All-Wise One of Perfection.

O man, if you are the slave of Him alone, you will earn a place superior to all creatures. But if you hold back from this servitude to Him, you will become an abased slave to impotent creatures. If you rely on your ego and own power and abandoning reliance on God and supplication, deviate into pride and boasting, then you will fall lower than an ant or bee in regard to goodness and creation, and become weaker than a spider or a fly. You will become heavier than a mountain in regard to evil and destruction, and more harmful than a pestilence.

Yes, O man! You have two aspects: one is that of creation, good, acts, and positivity. The other is the aspect of destruction, non-existence, evil, negativity, and passivity. In regard to the first aspect, you are lower than a bee or sparrow, and weaker than a spider or fly. Whereas in regard to the second aspect, you surpass the mountains, earth, and skies; you take on a burden before which they expressed their impotence and from which they shrank, and you assume a sphere more extensive and vaster than them. For when you create and do good, you are able to do so only to the extent of your own power and strength and to the degree your hand can reach. But when you commit evil and destruction, then your evil overwhelms and your destruction spreads.

For example, unbelief is an evil, a destruction, an absence of affirmation. But that single evil comprises insulting the whole universe, belittling all the Divine Names, and abusing all humanity. For these beings have elevated positions and important duties; they are dominical missives, Divine mirrors, and Divine officials. But unbelief dismisses them from their rank of being mirrors, officials charged with duties, and bearing meanings, and reduces them to the level of futility and being the playthings of chance. And through the destruction of death and separation, it lowers them to the degree of being swiftly decaying ephemeral matter lacking all importance and value, to being nothing. So too through denial it insults the Divine Names, the inscriptions, manifestations, and beauties of which are to be seen throughout the universe and in the mirrors of beings. And it casts down to a position more abased and weaker, more powerless and needy than the lowliest transient animal the one who holds the rank of vicegerent of the earth, known as man. For man is a well-composed ode of wisdom proclaiming the manifestations of the Sacred Divine Names, and a seed-like self-evident miracle of Divine power containing all the members of an eternal tree, and who, with assuming the 'Supreme Trust,' rose to being higher than the earth, sky and mountains and gained superiority over the angels. It reduces him to the level of being a common sign-board lacking all meaning, confused, and swiftly decaying.

In Short: In regard to destruction and evil, the evil-commanding soul may commit infinite crimes, but concerning creativity and good, its power is

extremely little and partial. Yes, he may destroy a house in one day, while it cannot be built in a hundred. However, if the soul gives up egoism and seeks good and existence from Divine assistance, and if it foregoes evil and destruction and relying on the soul, and seeking forgiveness becomes a true slave of God's, then it will manifest the meaning of the verse,

*God will change their evil into good.*⁹

Its infinite capacity for evil will be transformed into an infinite capacity for good. It will acquire the value of the Most Excellent of Patterns and ascend to the highest of the high.

O heedless man! See Almighty God's munificence and generosity! Although it would be justice to record one evil as a thousand and a single good deed as one or not at all, He records a single evil as one, and a single good deed as ten, and sometimes as seventy or seven hundred, or even sometimes as seven thousand. You will also understand from this Remark that to be sent to Hell, which is so dreadful, is retribution for the deed and pure justice, while to be sent to Paradise is pure generosity.

SECOND REMARK

Man has two faces: one, concerning his ego, looks to the life of this world. The other, concerning worship and servitude to God, looks to eternal life. In respect to the first face he is a wretched creature whose capital consists only of the following: of will he has only a partial power of choice like a hair; of power, a weak ability to acquire; of life, a fast dying flame; of a life-span, a fleeting brief spell; and of being, a swiftly decaying small body. Together with this, he is one delicate, weak individual out of the innumerable individuals of the numberless varieties of beings dispersed through the levels of the universe.

In respect of the second face and especially his impotence and poverty, which are turned towards worship, man has truly great breadth and vast importance. For the All-Wise Creator has included in man's nature an infinitely vast impotence and boundlessly huge poverty, so that he can be an extensive mirror containing the innumerable manifestations of an All-Powerful and Compassionate One Whose power is infinite, an All-Generous All-Rich One Whose wealth is boundless.

Indeed, man resembles a seed. This seed has been given significant immaterial members by Divine power and a subtle, valuable programme by Divine Determining, so that it may work beneath the ground, and emerging from that narrow world, enter the broad world of the air, and asking its Creator with the tongue of its disposition to be a tree, find a perfection worthy of

⁹ Qur'an, 25:70.

it. If, due to bad temperament, the seed uses the immaterial members given it in attracting certain harmful substances under the ground, in a short time it will rot and decay in that narrow place without benefit. But if the seed conforms to the creational command of,

*God is the Splitter of the seed-grain and date-stone*¹⁰

and employs well those immaterial members, it will emerge from that narrow world, and through becoming a large fruit-bearing tree, its tiny particular reality and its spirit will take on the form of an extensive universal reality.

Similarly, significant members and valuable programmes have been deposited in man's nature by Divine power and determining. If man uses those immaterial members on the desires of his soul and on minor pleasures under the soil of worldly life in the narrow confines of this earthly world, he will decay and decompose in the midst of difficulties in a brief life in a constricted place like the rotted seed, and load the responsibility on his unfortunate spirit, then depart from this world.

If, however, he nurtures the seed of his abilities with the water of Islam and light of belief under the soil of worship and servitude to God, conforms to the commands of the Qur'an, and turns his faculties towards their true aims, they will produce branches and buds in the World of Similitudes and the Intermediate Realm; he will be a seed of great value and a shining machine containing the members of an everlasting tree and permanent truth which will be the means to innumerable perfections and bounties in Paradise. And he will be a blessed and luminous fruit of the tree of the universe.

Yes, true progress is to turn the faces of the heart, spirit, intellect, and even the imagination and other subtle faculties given to man towards eternal life and for each to be occupied with the particular duty of worship worthy of it. Progress is not as the people of misguidance imagine, to plunge into the life of this world in all its minute details and in order to taste every sort of pleasure, even the basest, make subject to the evil-commanding soul all the subtle faculties and the heart and intellect, and make them assist it; to do this is not progress, it is decline. I saw this fact in a vision which is described in the following comparison:

I was entering a large town when I looked and saw it was full of large palaces. At the doors of some of these palaces was merry-making like a brilliant theatre; it captured and held everyone's attention and was entertaining them. I looked carefully and saw that the lord of such a palace had come to the door; he was playing with a dog and assisting the merry-making. The ladies were indulging in sweet conversation with ill-mannered youths. Grown-up girls were organizing the children's games. And the doorkeeper

¹⁰ Qur'an, 6:95.

had taken the role of directing the others. I then realized that the inside of the huge palace was completely empty. Its refined duties all remained undone. The morals of its inhabitants had declined so that they had taken on these roles at the door.

I passed on until I came to another large palace. I saw that there was a faithful dog stretched out at the door and a stern and taciturn doorkeeper; it had an undistinguished appearance. I was curious: why was the other the way it was and this palace like this? I went inside. Then I saw that the inside was very merry. Apartment over apartment, the people of the palace were busy with their different refined duties. The men in the first apartment were overseeing the administration and running of the palace. In the apartment over that, girls were teaching the children. Above that the ladies were occupied with fine arts and beautiful embroideries. And on the top floor, the lord was exchanging news with the king, and was busy with his own elevated duties in order to maintain the peoples' tranquillity and his own attainments and progress. They did not stop me since I was not visible to them, and I was able to wander around. Then I came out and looked around: everywhere in the town were these two sorts of palaces. I asked about this and they told me: "The palaces where there is merry-making at the door and whose insides are empty belong to the foremost of the unbelievers and people of misguidance. The others belong to honourable Muslim notables." Then in one corner I came across a palace on which was written my name, SAID. I was curious. I looked more closely and I as though saw my image on it. Calling out in utter bewilderment, I came to my senses and awoke.

And now I shall interpret this vision for you. May God cause good to come of it.

The town was human social life and the city of man's civilization. Each of the palaces was a human being. The people of the palaces were the subtle faculties in man like the eyes, ears, heart, inner heart, spirit, intellect, and things like the soul and caprice, and powers of lust and anger. Each of man's faculties has a different duty of worship, and different pleasures and pains. The soul and caprice and powers of lust and anger are like the doorkeeper and the dog. Thus, to make the elevated subtle faculties subject to the soul and caprice and make them forget their fundamental duties is certainly decline and not progress. You can interpret the rest for yourself.

THIRD REMARK

In regard to his acts and deeds and his labour man is a weak animal, an impotent creature. The extent of his power of disposal and ownership in this respect is so narrow that it is no greater than as far as his hand can reach. Domestic animals, even, the reins of which have been given to man, have each taken a share of his weakness, impotence, and laziness, so that if they

are compared with their wild counterparts, a great difference is apparent. (Like domestic goats and cattle, and wild goats and cattle). But in regard to passivity, acceptance, supplication, and entreaty, man is an honoured traveller in this hostel of the world. He is the guest of One so generous that infinite treasures of mercy have been opened to him and innumerable unique beings and servants subjugated to him. And a sphere so large has been prepared for this guest's recreation, amusement, and benefit that half its diameter is as long and broad as the imagination can stretch.

Thus, if man relies on his ego, and making worldly life his goal, attempts to taste temporary pleasures while struggling to make his living, he becomes submerged within an extremely constricted sphere, then departs. All the members, systems, and faculties given him will testify against him at the resurrection and will bring a suit against him. Whereas if he knows himself to be a guest and spends the capital of his life within the sphere of permission of the Generous One of Whom he is the guest, he will strive for a long, eternal life within a broad sphere, then take his rest and ease. And later, he may rise to the highest of the high.

Moreover, all the members and systems given to man will be happy with him and testify in favour of him in the hereafter. For sure, all the wonderful faculties given to men were not for this insignificant worldly life, but for an everlasting life of great significance. For if we compare man with the animals, we see that man is very rich in regard to faculties and members, a hundred times more so than the animals. But in the pleasures of worldly life and in animal life he falls a hundred times lower. For in each pleasure he receives is the trace of thousands of pains. The pains of the past and fears of the future and the pain at each pleasure's passing spoil the enjoyment to had from them, and leave a trace in the pleasure. But animals are not like that. They receive pleasure with no pains. They take enjoyment with no sorrow. Neither the sorrows of the past cause them suffering, nor the fears of the future distress them. They live peacefully, and offer thanks to their Creator.

This means that if man, who is created on the most excellent of patterns, restricts his thought to the life of this world, he falls a hundred times lower than a creature like a sparrow, although he is higher than the animals. I explained this fact in another place by means of a comparison. It is related to this, so I shall repeat it here. It was like this:

A man gave one of his servants ten pieces of gold and told him to have a suit of clothes made in a particular cloth. Then to a second one, he gave a thousand pieces of gold, and putting in the servant's pocket a note on which certain things were written, sent him to a market. The first servant bought an excellent suit of the finest cloth with the ten pieces of gold. While the second servant did not use his head, and looking at the first servant and not reading the account-note in his pocket, he gave the thousand pieces of gold to a shop

keeper and asked for a suit of clothes. The dishonest shopkeeper gave him a suit of the very worst-quality cloth. Then the wretched servant returned to his lord and received a severe reprimand and a terrible punishment.

Thus, even the most unintelligent will understand that the thousand pieces of gold given the second servant were not to buy a suit of clothes, but for some important trade.

In just the same way, each of the immaterial members and subtle faculties in man have expanded to a degree a hundred times greater than that of the animals. For example, consider faculties and members like man's eyes, which can discern all the degrees of beauty, and his sense of taste, which can distinguish all the varieties of the particular tastes of foods, and his mind, which can penetrate to all the subtlest points of reality, and his heart, which yearns for every sort of perfection, and then consider the extremely simple members of the animals which have developed only one or two degrees. There is just this difference, that in animals a member particular to some function and special to a particular species develops more. But this development is particular.

The reason for man's wealth in regard to faculties is this: by reason of the mind and thought, man's senses and feelings have greatly developed and expanded. And numerous emotions have come into being because of the multiplicity of his needs. And his senses have become extremely diverse. And because of the comprehensiveness of his nature, desires have appeared turned towards numerous aims. And because he has numerous duties due to his nature, his members and faculties have expanded greatly. And since he has been created with a nature capable of performing every sort of worship, he has been given abilities which embrace the seeds of all perfections.

Thus, this great wealth in faculties and abundant capital was certainly not given for procuring this temporary worldly life. Rather, man's fundamental duty is to perform his duties, which look to innumerable aims; and proclaim his impotence, poverty, and faults in the form of worship; and observing the glorifications of beings with a universal eye, to bear witness to them; and seeing the instances of the assistance of the Most Merciful One, to offer thanks; and gazing on the miracles of dominical power in beings, to contemplate on them as objects from which lessons may be drawn.

O man who worships this world, is the lover of worldly life, and is heedless of the meaning of 'the most excellent of patterns'! The Old Said saw the reality of worldly life in a vision. It transformed him into the New Said. You too listen to it in the form of a comparison:

I saw that I was a traveller and was going on a long journey; that is to say, I was being sent. The one who was my lord gradually gave me some of the money from the sixty gold pieces he had allotted me. I spent them, and came

to a hostel where there were amusements of all kinds. In one night in that hostel I spent ten pieces of gold on gambling, amusements, and the enjoyment of fame. In the morning I had no money left. Moreover I had done no trade nor bought any goods for the place I was going. All that remained to me from the money were sins and pains, and from the amusements, wounds and sorrow. While in that sorry state, a man suddenly appeared. He said to me:

“You have wasted all your capital and deserve punishment. You are going to your destination bankrupt and with your hands empty. But if you have any sense, the door of repentance is open. When you receive the fifteen pieces of gold that remain to you, keep half of them in reserve. That is, obtain the things necessary for you in the place where you are going.”

I looked, my soul did not agree to this.

So he said: “A third, then.”

My soul still did not obey him.

Then he said: “A quarter.”

My soul could not give up the habits to which it was addicted, so the man angrily turned his back on me and left.

Suddenly, the scene changed. I was in a train in a tunnel, which was travelling fast as though downwards vertically. I took fright. But what could I do, there was no escape anywhere. Strangely, attractive flowers and enticing fruits appeared on both sides of the train. And I, like the foolish and inexperienced, looked at them and stretching out my hand, tried to pick them. But they were covered in thorns and tore at my hands when I touched them making them bleed. With the movement of the train, my hands were lacerated at being parted from them. They cost me much. Suddenly a porter on the train said:

“Give me five kurush and I shall give you as much of the flowers and fruits as you want. You are caused the loss of a hundred kurush with your hands being torn, rather than five kurush. Also there is a penalty; you cannot pick them without permission.”

In distress I put my head out of the window and looked ahead to see when the tunnel would end. I saw that in place of the tunnel's entrance were numerous holes. People were being thrown into them from the long train. I saw a hole opposite me. On either side of it was a gravestone. I looked in amazement. I saw that written on one of the gravestones was the name SAID. In my bewilderment and anxiety I exclaimed: “Alas!” Then suddenly I heard the voice of the man who had given me advice at the door of the hostel. He asked:

“Have you come to your senses?”

I replied: "Yes, but it is too late now."

So he said: "Repent and place your trust in God."

I replied that I would. Then I awoke and saw myself as the New Said; the Old Said had disappeared.

So, that was the vision. May God cause good to come of it! I shall interpret one or two parts of it, then you can interpret the rest for yourself.

The journey was the journey which passes from the World of Spirits, through the mother's womb, youth, old age, the grave, the Intermediate Realm, the resurrection, and the Bridge of Sirat towards eternity. The sixty pieces of gold were the sixty years of life. I reckoned I saw the vision when I was forty-five years old. I had nothing to guarantee it, but a sincere student of the All-Wise Qur'an advised me to spend half of the fifteen that remained to me on the hereafter. The hostel for me was Istanbul. The train was time, and each year a carriage. As for the tunnel, it was the life of this world. The thorny flowers and fruits were illicit pleasures and forbidden amusements which cause pain while indulging in them on thinking of their passing, and on separation lacerate the heart, making it bleed. They also cause a punishment to be inflicted. The porter on the train told me to give him five kurush so that he would give me as many as I wanted.

The meaning of this is as follows: the pleasures and enjoyment man receives through licit striving within the sphere of what is lawful are sufficient for him. No need remains to enter the unlawful. You may interpret the rest for yourself.

FOURTH REMARK

Man resembles a delicate and petted child in the universe. There is a great strength in his weakness and great power in his impotence. For it is through the strength of his weakness and power of his impotence that beings have been subjected to him. If man understands his weakness and offers supplications verbally and by state and conduct, and recognizes his impotence and seeks help, since he has offered thanks by exhibiting them, he achieves his aims and his desires are subjugated to him in a way far exceeding what he could achieve with his own power. Only, he sometimes wrongly attributes to his own power the attainment of a wish that has been obtained for him through the supplications offered by the tongue of his disposition. For example, the strength in the weakness of a chick causes the mother hen to attack a lion. And its newly-born lion cub subjugates to itself the savage and hungry lioness, leaving the mother hungry and the cub full. See this strength in weakness and manifestation of Divine mercy, which are worthy of notice!

Just as through crying or asking or looking unhappy, a child subjugates the strong to himself, and is so successful in getting what he wants that he

could not obtain one thousandth of it with a thousand times his own strength. That is to say, since weakness and impotence excite compassion and a sense of protection towards him, the child can subjugate heroes to himself with his tiny finger. Now, should such a child with foolish conceit deny the compassion and accuse the protection saying: "I subjugate these with my own strength", of course he will receive a slap.

In the same way, if, like Qarun, man says:

*I have been given it on account of the knowledge I have,*¹¹

that is, "I gained this through my own knowledge and my own power" in a way that demonstrates ingratitude and denies his Creator's mercy and accuses His wisdom, he will of course deserve a punishing blow. This means that man's domination and human advances and the attainments of civilization, which are to be observed, have been made subject to him not through his attracting them or conquering them or through combat, but due to his weakness. He has been assisted because of his impotence. They have been bestowed on him due to his indigence. He has been inspired with them due to his ignorance. They have been given him due to his need. And the reason for his domination is not strength and the power of knowledge, but the compassion and clemency of the Sustainer and Divine mercy and wisdom: they have subjugated things to him. Yes, what clothes man, who is defeated by vermin like eyeless scorpions and legless snakes, in silk from a tiny worm and feeds him honey from a poisonous insect is not his own power, but the subjugation of the Sustainer and the bestowal of the Most Merciful, which are the fruits of his weakness.

O man! Since the reality of the matter is thus, give up egotism and arrogance. With the tongue of seeking help proclaim your impotence and weakness at the Divine Court, and with the tongue of entreaty and supplication, your poverty and need. Show that you are His slave. Say:

*God is enough for us, for He is the Best Disposer of Affairs,*¹²

and rise in degree.

Also, do not say: "I am nothing. What importance do I have that the universe should purposefully be made subject to me by an Absolutely All-Wise One, and universal thanks required of me?" Because for sure you are as though nothing with respect to your soul and form, but from the point of view of duty and rank, you are an observant spectator of this majestic universe, an eloquent, articulate tongue of these beings so full of wisdom, a discerning reader of this book of the universe, a supervisor of these creatures

¹¹ Qur'an, 28:78.

¹² Qur'an, 3:173.

full of wonder at their glorifications, and like a foreman of these beings full of respect for their worship.

Yes, O man! In regard to your vegetable physical being and animal soul, you are a deaf particle, a contemptible atom, a needy creature, a weak animal, who, tossed on the awesome waves of the flood of beings, is departing. But being perfected through the light of belief, which comprises the radiance of Divine love, and through the training of Islam, which is enlightened, in regard to humanity and servitude to God, you are a king, and a universal within particularity, and within your insignificance, a world, and within your contemptibility, a supervisor of such high rank and extensive sphere that you can say: "My Compassionate Sustainer has made the world a house for me, the sun and moon lamps for it, and the spring, a bunch of flowers for me, and summer, a table of bounties, and the animals, He has made my servants. And He has made plants the decorated furnishings of my house."

To conclude: If you heed Satan and your soul, you will fall to the lowest of the low. But if you heed Truth and the Qur'an, you will rise to the highest of the high and become the Most Excellent Pattern of the universe.

FIFTH REMARK

Man has been sent to this world as an official and guest, and has been given abilities of great significance. And he has been entrusted with important duties in accordance with those abilities. In order to employ man in fulfilling those aims and duties, powerful encouragement and severe threats have been made. We shall here summarize the fundamentals of worship and of man's duties, which we have explained at length elsewhere, so that the mystery of 'the Most Excellent of Patterns' may be understood.

On coming into the universe man has two aspects of worship and being a slave of God's. One is worship and contemplation in the absence of the Object of Worship. The other is worship and supplication in His presence and addressing Him directly.

First Aspect: It is to affirm submissively the sovereignty of dominicality apparent in the universe and to observe its perfections and virtues in wonder.

Then it is to proclaim and herald the unique arts which consist of the inscriptions of the Sacred Divine Names and to display them to others.

Then it is to weigh on the scales of perception the jewels of the dominical Names, which are all like hidden treasures; it is to appreciatively affirm their value with the discerning heart.

Then it is to study and ponder over in wonder the pages of beings and leaves of the earth and sky, which are like missives of the pen of power.

Then through beholding admiringly the adornment and subtle arts in beings, it is to feel love for knowledge of their All-Beauteous Creator, and to

yearn to ascend to the presence of their All-Perfect Maker and to receive His favours.

Second Aspect: This is the station of presence and address wherein man passes from the work to the producer of the work and he sees that an All-Beauteous Maker wants to make himself known and acquainted through the miracles of His art, and he responds with knowledge and belief.

Then he sees that an All-Compassionate Sustainer wants to make himself loved through the fine fruits of His mercy. So confining his love and worship to Him, he makes himself love Him.

Then he sees that an All-Generous Bestower is nurturing him with the delights of bounties material and immaterial, and in return he offers Him thanks and praise with his actions, conduct, words, and as far as he can, with all his senses and faculties.

Then he sees that an All-Beauteous and Glorious One is announcing His tremendousness and perfections, and glory and beauty in the mirrors of these beings, and is drawing attentive gazes to them. So in response he declares: "God is Most Great! Glory be to God!", and in humility prostrates in love and wonder.

Then he sees that a Possessor of Absolute Riches is displaying His boundless wealth and treasures amid an absolute munificence. So in response, exalting and praising Him, he entreats and asks for them, expressing his utter need.

Then he sees that the All-Glorious Creator has made the face of the earth like an exhibition and displayed on it all His antique works of art. So in response he exclaims in appreciation: "What wonders God has willed!", and in admiration: "What blessings God has bestowed!", and in wonder: "Glory be to God!", and in astonishment: "God is Most Great!"

Then he sees that in His palace of the universe a Single One of Unity has struck seals of unity on all beings with His inimitable signature, and with His stamps, signets, and cyphers particular to Him; that He inscribes the signs of His unity; and planting the banner of unity in every region of the world, He proclaims His dominicality. And he responds with assent, belief, submission, worship, and affirmation of His unity.

Thus, through worship and contemplation of this kind he becomes a true man. He shows that he is on the Most Excellent of Patterns. Through the auspiciousness of belief he becomes a reliable vicegerent of the earth worthy of bearing the Trust.

O heedless man created on the Most Excellent of Patterns, who, through the misuse of his will is descending to the lowest of the low! Listen to me! In the heedlessness induced by the intoxication of youth I, like you, thought the world was fine and lovely. Then the moment I awoke in the morning of

old age, I saw how ugly was the world's face that was not turned towards the hereafter, which I had previously imagined to be beautiful. To see this and how beautiful was its true face, which looks to the hereafter, you may refer to the two 'Signboards' in the Second Station of the Seventeenth Word, and see for yourself.

The First Signboard depicts the reality of the world of the people of neglect, which long ago, like the people of misguidance, I saw through the veil of heedlessness, but without being intoxicated.

The Second Signboard indicates the reality of the worlds of the people of guidance. I left it in the form it was written long ago. It resembles poetry, but it is not truly that...

*Glory be unto You! We have no knowledge save that which You have taught us; indeed You are All-Knowing, All-Wise.*¹³

*O My Sustainer! Expand for me my breast * Make easy for me my affair * And loosen the knot on my tongue * That they may understand my words.*¹⁴

O God! Grant blessings to the subtle unitary Muhammadan essence, the Sun in the skies of mysteries and manifestation of lights, the centre of the orbit of glory and the pole of the sphere of beauty. O God! By his mystery in Your presence and by his journeying to You, succour my fear, and right my stumbling, and dispel my grief and my greed, and be mine, and take me from myself to Yourself, and bestow on me annihilation from myself, and do not make me captivated by my soul and veiled by my senses, and reveal to me all hidden secrets, O Ever-Living and Self-Subsistent One! O Ever-Living and Self-Subsistent One! O Ever-Living and Self-Subsistent One! And grant mercy to me and to my companions and to the people of belief and the Qur'an. Amen. O Most Merciful of the Merciful and Most Generous of the Generous!

And the close of their prayer will be: All Praise be to God, the Sustainer of All the Worlds.

¹³ Qur'an, 2:32.

¹⁴ Qur'an, 20:25-8.