

The Paramount Bond with God

In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful

Those who subject the believers to hardship and act wickedly will not escape God's punishment, even though they may appear strong and victorious. This is again a true promise made by God: "Or do those who do evil deeds think that they can escape Us? How ill they judge!" (Verse 4)

No wicked or evil person should think that he can escape. If he does, then his judgment is absolutely erroneous. God, who has made tests a general rule to distinguish true believers from false claimants, is the One who has also made punishment of the perpetrators of evil a general rule that never fails. This is the second strong note at the opening of the surah, one that balances the first.

The third note the surah strikes is that of reassuring those who hope to meet with God and strengthening their bond with Him: "Whoever looks forward with hope to meeting God (let him be ready for it); for the end set by God is bound to come. He alone hears all and knows all." (Verse 5).

Those who dearly hope to meet God should rest be assured. They should wait confidently for the fulfillment of His promise. They can look forward to it, provided they do so with certitude. This is an inspiring image: a person of faith cherishing hopes and looking forward to the fulfillment of God's promise. His aspiration is answered with confirmation of its truth. This is followed by the reassurance that God is fully aware of all their hopes: "He alone hears all and knows all." (Verse 5).

Then the surah states to those believers who strive to fulfill the duties of faith, enduring all manner of hardship, that they only strive for themselves and for their own good. By doing so they have set their affairs on the right course. As for God, He needs no one: "Whoever strives hard (for God's cause) does so for his own good. For certain, God is in no need of anything in all the worlds." (Verse 6).

It is true that God has tested the believers and required them to strive hard so that they could endure adversity with patience, but all this is for their own good. It has ensured their benefit both in this world and in the life to come. Striving, or jihad, reinforces a person's good elements, expands his horizons, makes him ready to sacrifice his life and possessions, as also enhances his best qualities and abilities. It does all this for the individual who strives, before it brings further benefits to the community of believers, improving its situation, establishing the truth within it, and making goodness overcome evil in its ranks.

"Whoever strives hard (for God's cause) does so for his own good." Let no one, then, stop midway through this process. Let no one stop to demand a price from God, holding what he did as a favor and feeling that his prize is overdue. God benefits nothing by anyone's striving. He is in no need of people's efforts. After all, human beings are weak, barely significant. "God is in no need of anything in all the worlds." (Verse 6).

It is God who grants a favor to those who strive, helping them in their efforts and establishing them in a position of power on earth. Furthermore, He will reward them well in the life to come: "As for those who believe and do righteous deeds, We shall most certainly erase their bad deeds, and shall most certainly reward them in accordance with the best that they ever did." (Verse 7).

Believers should remain reassured of their great reward.

Let them, then, remain patient in adversity, fulfilling the requirements of their test, and persevering in their jihad. A great future and a goodly reward awaits them. This is sufficient for any believer, even though he may not enjoy justice in this present life. The surah then refers to a type of test which we have already mentioned: that of ties and bonds with family and loved ones. It gives clear and decisive guidance in such a difficult situation: We have enjoined upon man goodness towards his parents: yet should they endeavor to make you associate as partner with Me, something of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them. It is to Me that you shall all return, when I shall inform you about all that you were doing (in life). As for those who believe and do righteous deeds, We shall most certainly admit them among the righteous. (Verses 8-9).

Parents are the closest of all relatives. They give much to their children. Hence, to be kind to one's parents is a duty required of everyone. Indeed parents must be treated with love, respect, and care. Yet when it comes to one's duty towards God, they cannot be obeyed in opposition to Him: "We have enjoined upon man goodness towards his parents: yet should they endeavour to make you associate as partner with Me something of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them." (Verse 8).

The paramount bond is that with God. Hence, if one's parents are unbelievers, they should be treated with care and kindness, but must not be obeyed or followed. Once this present life is over, all return to God: "It is to Me that you shall all return, when I shall inform you about all that you were doing (in life)." (Verse 8).

When judgment is made between believers and unbelievers, the former find themselves to be a closely knit unit even though they may have no blood relationship: "As for those who believe and do righteous deeds, We shall most certainly admit them among the righteous." (Verse 9).

Thus, those who maintain their bond with God will be together in one community, as they are in reality. The bonds created by blood and marriage relations are no longer valid; they end when this present life comes to an end. Such bonds are accidental and carry no real substance because they are not linked to the strongest bond of faith.

In explaining this verse, Al-Tirmidhi reports that it was revealed in connection with Saad ibn Abi Waqqas and his mother Hamnah bint Abi Sufyan. Saad was a very dutiful son. She asked him: 'What is this religion you have embraced? By God, I will not eat or drink until you revert to your original religion, or else I die. You will then be in disgrace for the rest of time as you will be identified as 'his mother's killer.'" She did not eat or drink anything for one whole day.

Saad came to her and said: "Mother! If you had 100 souls and they die one by one, I will not abandon my religion. So you can eat or refuse to eat, as you please."

When she despaired of his response, she resumed eating. God then revealed this verse, ordering Muslims to be kind to their parents and to treat them with respect, but not to obey them in disbelief.

Thus faith overcame the test of close relations, but kindness and dutifulness remained intact. A believer may be subjected to such a test at any time. When and if, this does occur, God's directive and Saad's action provide proper guidance.

Comparing a Miser to a Charitable Person

Commentary by Adil Salahi

Charity, or sadaqah, provides protection from evil. It pleases God and wipes away one's sins. It gives protection against hell in the hereafter.

Some people are very reluctant to give away anything to charity. Even when it comes to paying zakat, which is an incumbent duty on every Muslim who owns more than the threshold of zakat, they find it hard to pay it, trying to find ways to evade it. They feel that it is a tax that reduces what they have for themselves. Such people are often looking at their bank account balance and trying to explore ways of increasing it in whatever way they can.

When the love of money becomes so keen, it is just like unquenchable thirst. Such people are oblivious of the fact that it is God who gives us whatever we have, and that He can give us from sources that we could not have ever thought available to us. People of genuine faith, on the other hand, realize this and discover that whatever they spend to help others is not merely rewarded in the hereafter, but also compensated for them. They end up increasing their money through spending it on others.

Abu Hurayrah quotes the Prophet (Pbuh), as saying: "A miserly person and the one who spends his money may be compared to two men with two robes made of iron, covering them from their breasts to their shoulders. Every time the charitable gives something, his robe extends and covers his skin, until it covers up his fore-fingers and wipes away his trace when he walks. As the miserly person wants to spend something, his robe sticks to the position it is in. He tries to extend it, but it does not." (Related by Al-Bukhari). The first thing to note about this Hadith is the unusual comparison it makes. A miserly person should normally be compared to a generous one, but the Prophet draws the comparison with 'one who spends his money'.

A robe is normally worn from the top end, with the person putting his head through its opening. Therefore, it is first gathered at the top, then it stretches downward. These two persons are about to wear their iron robes. The robes are described as being made of iron, so as to indicate their additional use as shields protecting the wearers. Their initial status covers only the top part of one's chest. As the generous person spends his money, whether on his dependents or helping strangers who are poor, the robe unfolds and covers a larger area of the wearer's body. The more he gives away, the greater it extends, until it has covered him perfectly, including his forefingers. Moreover, it stretches to the ground, so that when he walks, it wipes away his trace so that he could not be pursued.

By contrast, the one who is stingy is reluctant to spend his money, even on necessary matters for himself or his own family. Hence, whenever he has to spend something, his robe sticks in place. It covers nothing of his body, other than his top part. This is not the purpose for which robes are worn.

The Hadith stresses the fact that charity, or sadaqah, provides protection from evil. It pleases God and wipes away one's sins. It thus provides protection against hell in the hereafter.

The Prophet says: "Shield yourselves from the fire, even though it may be by half a date." Indeed the Prophet stressed these meanings in different ways. He is quoted to have said to Asma': "Do not tie your purse tight; otherwise, God will tie things hard for you." (Related by Al-Bukhari).

Jungle Monsters Nigar Ataula

We all are full of fears of something or the other, from childhood till death.

Recently, I saw a delightful film called “Alvin and the Chipmunks”. It’s all about a bunch of very naughty chipmunks (they are part of the squirrel family), led by Alvin, whose hilarious brainwave lands him and all his friends and their foster father Dave from a ship onto a lonely island. In short, they are “chip-wrecked”.

One of the chipmunks, Theodore, is a scardy-poo, always afraid of something or the other. Watching “Jungle Monsters”, a film on television, in his room, little Theodore shivers and screams. He begins to see the giant Jungle Monster everywhere—in his dreams and even if a leaf gently shakes on a tree.

Theodore has a message for all us. We all are full of fears of something or the other, from childhood till death! Any person, idea, emotion or a thing can turn into a “Jungle Monster” for us.

Kids grow up fearing their parents’ tempers. They fear that they may not come up to their expectations. The father fears the mother and vice versa. The husband fears the wife’s domination and the wife fears the husband’s mood swings and tantrums and lives in fear and insecurity of what will happen to her if he leaves her some day. Married couples fear their respective in-laws, afraid that even an innocent statement may hurt or anger them.

Grandparents fear losing their grandchildren once they grow up. There are children who watch their parents fighting constantly and so decide never to get married. They fear that they will face the same daily trauma themselves. Truly, fear leads finally to hate. You simply cannot love someone whom you fear. It also leads to a total loss of freedom.

In school, children fear teachers, and if they are reprimanded for not performing well in some subject, they develop fear for the subject. In college, youngsters fear stiff competition. Unable to bear the pressure, some take an extreme step of committing suicide.

Out of college, once their job-hunt begins, young people fear not “qualifying” for the plum post they seek. Once they land up with a job, people begin to fear their bosses and their own ability to meet targets, expectations and deadlines.

As their sunset years draw closer, people fear old age and its trials. They fear how their end may come and where. Very often, people simply do not want to talk about death. They shiver at the thought, just like Theodore, knowing very well that it’s a fundamental reality.

Some fears like fear of a cockroach, a lizard, snake, spider, tiger, lion, cat or dog, and fear of flying in a plane, sailing in a ship or crossing the road, are universal, but they seem not so threatening as the fear people have of other people! These fears can lead to enormous emotional and mental blocks, a negative outlook towards life, self-destruction and dejection.

It can even lead to self-pity, with people simply spending the whole of their precious lives wallowing in it so much so that they refuse to accept freedom from fear even if they can liberate themselves from it.

Talk to any religious scholar or personality development expert and they will tell you the same thing: 'Stop clinging to fears and move ahead.' Religious people will talk of the virtues of being on a spiritual path as the only way to deal with fears, while personality gurus will swear by their tips to conquer fear.

By the time one is slowly working towards getting over the numerous fears one has accumulated, the angel of death comes seeking our souls and then we suddenly remember God and the Hereafter.

All this while, living with the fear of people, real or imagined, we never think really why we are so fearful of them and not of God. By fear of God I do not mean, as most believe, that God is a monster, all out to throw them into hell.

Rather, I see God as someone to whom all creatures are accountable to for their deeds, thoughts, actions—their whole life. One day or the other we will have to face God, who keeps an account of all that we do in this life.

We cannot truly trust and love God if we live in fear of mere mortals, if our whole lives are controlled by our fear of how they might behave with us. Fearing others is a sure indication of a basic lack of love for and faith in God.

Is it really worth it, I ask myself, to fear people and worry about what they think of us or do to us? Is that not a total waste of life? Can we continue to run away from our fears or suppress them instead of recognizing and dealing with them creatively and boldly?

Can we allow fear of losing relationships, to overwhelm us in such a way that we have no concern if this means losing our relationship with God? The more we fear the "Jungle Monsters" around us and the more we cling to other humans rather than to God the more we lose our natural identity and true self. Does not God alone suffice for us ultimately?

The film had a happy ending....Theodore bravely crosses a shaky bridge over a fiercely gushing river because he had to reach home on the other side of the island.

The end of our own lives can, in the same way, be happy if we live life minus fears, keeping our hearts focused on the bare truth that our ultimate home is the Hereafter, and our ultimate support is God, not material possessions, relatives or friends.

Life here is a shaky bridge and it has to be crossed without fear to reach our eternal home.

No charity for the family of the Prophet

By Adil Salah

The Prophet was keen to ensure that this rule was observed in his household. If he went to any of his wives or visited any of his married daughters and found that they had some food, he would ask who sent it or bought it. If he was told that it was sent by one of his companions, he would ask whether it was a gift or charity. If the latter, he would not touch it. He would send it to the people of Al-Suffah, who were poor, relying on whatever help the Prophet could give them. If he was told that it was sent to him as a gift, he would eat of it, and send a share of it to the people of Al-Suffah.

During the season when dates were collected as they began to ripen, his companions sent him the zakat due on their dates to the mosque. He would order its division among the poor, or he would have it stored to keep for a later date. On the occasion, the Hadith mentions, apparently a few of his companions who had farms in Madinah sent him large quantities of their zakat, as it was a plentiful harvest.

The Prophet used to sit in the mosque to teach his companions and to look into the affairs of his community. He often brought with him the children of his two daughters, Zainab and Fatimah. On this occasion, he had with him Al-Hasan and Al-Husain, sons of Fatimah. As he was busy with his companions, the two young children were playing around, and perhaps they picked up a date or two, as they were playing.

When the Prophet finished and wanted to take them home, he lifted one of the boys on his shoulder, and then felt the child's saliva dropping. He looked at him and found that he had a date in his mouth. The Prophet pulled it out with his finger, teaching the child that, as a grandchild of the Prophet, he could not eat of these dates because they were charity.

The Hadith tells us that zakat on dates becomes due when it is harvested, although some scholars suggest that the dates sent to the Prophet were not part of the obligatory zakat, but voluntary charity. In either way, the Prophet and his household are not allowed to partake of it. A question arises here: to whom does this prohibition apply? According to Imam Al-Shafie, it applies to the descendants of the two clans of Hashim and Al-Muttalib. Abu Haneefah and Malik limit it to the Hashimite clan and their descendants.

The prohibition is meant to keep the Prophet, his household, his relatives and their descendants free of dependence on charity, whether obligatory or voluntary. Instead, God gave them a share of war gains. However, in our times, when the entire Muslim world is in a position of weakness and no such gains are available, some scholars have argued that the rule forbidding the descendants of the Prophet's household to take zakat when they are poor is counter-productive. It places the poor of these descendants in a very disadvantaged position.

Therefore, they feel the prohibition must be relaxed. In my view, such people should be looked after, either by government or society, so as to ensure that the poor among them are provided for, either from the national treasury or by good people in society.

The prohibition is not meant to deprive them of an opportunity, but to address their needs without placing them in a position of dependence on charity.

Islamic View on Magic

By Adil Salah

It seems to me from the long letter this lady has written that she has been troubled so much by this problem. There is no way we can deny the existence of magic, but how far it is practised is rather unknown. There is a great deal of trickery in this respect with some people leading simple-minded persons to believe that they can exercise great powers by means of employing creatures from a different world, particularly the jinn.

All magic, however, is no more than make-believe. It has neither substance nor reality. Yet it can cause a great deal of harm, not least because of the fear magicians are keen to implant on their victims' minds. The best method to foil the attempts of such people is to turn them away and to seek God's help, reading the Qur'an [particularly Surah Al-Falaq and Al-Nas] and relying totally on God. When one does that, one demonstrates the fallacy of the claim of such people that they have special powers.

Magic flourished to an exceptional extent among the ancient Egyptians at the time of the Pharaohs, because the magicians were also the men of religion who tried to keep people's submission by raising the Pharaoh to the status of deity. When they confronted Moses with their tricks, their work was described by the Qur'an as 'great magic'. Nevertheless, God tells us that it was all a play on people's imagination, with no substance to it.

The person who practices magic is described by the Prophet, (Pbuh) as a non-believer, even though he may profess to believe. Your best resort is to persuade your father that one who resorts to magic disobeys God and, as such, is no good husband for a Muslim girl. Whatever you do, you must not give in to his designs. You can easily overcome him if you rely on God and trust Him.

Numerology and Astrology

By Adil Salah

The term Ilm-e-Ghayb literally means "knowledge of what is absent". It is made of two words, the first means "knowledge", and the second, Ghayb, means "absent, hidden, kept away, concealed, etc." It is often used in the Qur'an as part of God's knowledge, who is described as "the One who knows what is absent and what is present."

Unfortunately, in Qur'anic translations, this term is often rendered as "knowledge of the unseen", which is a very narrow sense of the word, because Ghayb is not merely unseen. It could be absent or concealed in many different ways. Perhaps a better translation is "that which lies beyond the reach of human perception."

But even then, the Arabic term has a wider reference. Believers are described as those "who believe in the Ghayb and attend to their prayers..." [2: 3]. What is clear in the Qur'an is that such knowledge is clearly reserved for God and He does not give any part of it to anyone, except to some of His messengers and prophets.

Thus we read in the Qur'an: "He alone knows that which is beyond the reach of a created being's perception, and to none does He disclose anything of His unfathomable knowledge, unless it be to a messenger whom He has been pleased to choose." [the Jinn — 72: 26-27]. The statement is very clear, and it occurs in the Surah entitled the Jinn, because many fortunetellers claim that they have contacts with the jinn.

This statement refutes their claims by stating that not even the jinns have such knowledge. Because of this clear reference to knowledge of what is absent, which includes everything concerning the future, it is strictly forbidden to consult fortunetellers of any type. The Prophet describes such people as "liars even when they tell the truth." They will never be able to tell all the truth. They may hit on some aspect of it, but it is always a question of coincidence. It is never based on certainty. Hence, consulting such people is a grave sin.

The Prophet says: "Whoever goes to a fortuneteller disbelieves in what has been revealed to Muhammad." Having said that, I go back to your other point of numerology. I do not know anything about this, apart from what is taught as arithmetic and mathematics. To suggest that numbers have an effect on our lives is an exercise of fortune telling. As to how your friend was able to tell you about your past, she must have learned it from other sources. We have clear advice from the Prophet, and I repeat here what has been stated earlier here that the Prophet describes such people as "liars even when they tell the truth. They may hit on some aspect of it, but it is always a question of coincidence."

Muslims and Modesty

Islam teaches us to be modest about what we do or achieve. If you read the works of great Islamic scholars, you always find a sense of modesty running through their writings. Great scholars like the founders of the four major schools of thought have advised their students and followers to always examine what they read and to discard the opinions of those very scholars if they find them to be in conflict with an authentic Hadith. One of them is quoted to have said: "If you determine that a particular Hadith is authentic and you find my view in conflict with it, then throw my opinion out of the window." Others have said: "If you determine that a particular Hadith is authentic, then the Hadith is the view I hold." Later scholars, who have enriched their respective schools of thought, have laid down the scholarly principle, which Islam advocates, saying "Our view is correct, but it is liable to be mistaken. The views which are in conflict with it are wrong, but they may be proved right."

You see in all these a profound sense of modesty, which recognizes that no matter how well read a scholar is, he is liable to make mistakes. There is nothing surprising in this attitude since the Prophet himself has been our first teacher of modesty. Although, he was the only example of human perfection for all generations, he lived as an ordinary member of his community. He was always prepared to listen to advice, particularly in matters, which related to the Islamic state and the conduct of its affairs.

A Muslim always tries to enhance goodness in others. He recognizes their good points, praises them and encourages them to be better servants of Allah, without ever suggesting to them that his example is one to be followed. If he speaks to others who do not practice Islam about what they are missing, he certainly can state that he has actually experienced the benefits of following the Islamic way of life, but a good Muslim will always say that this has been a manifestation of Allah's grace bestowed on him. It is nothing that he has earned by his own work, but Allah's compassion and grace have been bestowed because of Allah's generosity.

An attitude claiming that anything a person enjoys of Allah's grace has been earned, is alien to Islamic behavior. Muslims today have not only forgotten the Prophetic behavior, but God too.

So naturally they think, they are better than the others around them and have developed the 'holier than thou attitude'.

