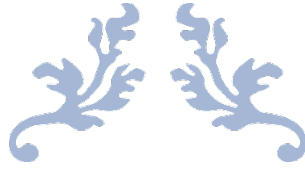


# QUR'ANIC REFLECTIONS

(SURA SABA)



Contemplations on the Meanings of the Verses



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# QUR'ANIC REFLECTIONS

## (SURA SABA)

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Contemplations on the Meanings of the Verses



IRSHAAD HUSSAIN

# Qur'anic Reflections

*Sura Saba (34:1-54)*

A Translation

&

Contemplations on the Meaning of the Verses



Irshaad Hussain

Published by i\_from\_i

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## ***Preface***

This text is divided into two sections. Use the Table of Contents to move between the sections.

The first part consists of just the English translation of the *sura* (chapter). This is for those who prefer to read through a *sura* without interruptions so they can contemplate apparent and possible meanings before turning to the interpretations of commentaries (although, by its very nature, any translation is also, to some extent, an interpretation). Also, reading uninterrupted through a *sura* imparts a flavor of the flow of the chapter and the shifts and changes in subject matter in the *sura* and allows the reader to form a mental picture of the literary geography and topography of the content. Reading through without interruption but with concentrated attention is extremely valuable as it allows not only a more neutral approach but also allows a cataloging of the questions that arise in the mind while reading. At that point turning to the various commentaries to resolve some of these questions can be a rewarding and gratifying experience. And the commentaries can, in turn, provide more food for thought and for further contemplation and deeper investigation.

The second part consists of the Arabic text (the Arabic text consists of images of the Arabic script so a larger screen will provide a clearer view of the text or you can double click or tap on the Arabic to see an enlarged version), a transliteration of the Arabic, and footnotes consisting of

thoughts, clarifications, and contemplations on possible meanings of the text. This is the section you can take more time reading through. Having other commentaries on hand to compare to the notes contained in this text can provide a more holistic and complete view of the text, although there are always deeper meanings to be unfurled within the verses of the Qur'an. I hope that readers will find something of value in the notes included in this manuscript.

*-Irshaad Hussain*

## ***Introduction***

Anyone who reads the Qur'an is likely to be struck by the unique nature of its construction, its unusual and constantly shifting rhythms and the sudden transmutations and displacements in its subject matter. At first this ever-changing literary terrain seems an obstacle to understanding, but the more time one spends with this book, the more organic, the more natural the flow of its words feel. It is almost like flying over an ever-changing landscape - rolling valleys punctuated by jagged rocks, forests and plains giving way to upthrust mountains, high plateaus broken by deep lakes, deserts sprinkled with oases and cleft by canyons. Despite the variety of the forms, despite the startling contrast of adjacent features, a complex organic beauty underlies and unites all the various elements.

Saba is likely a Meccan *sura* and deals with the attitudes of various peoples in past times as well as in the Prophet's time who have rejected the very idea of higher worlds, of the unseen, of revelation, of prophethood, of the responsibility for their actions implicit in the judgement of the hereafter, of higher ethics and principled behavior, and who have through this rejection brought calamity and disaster upon their own selves and upon their societies. This is contrasted with the civilizations of David and Solomon which were bound closely to God and which, although they built principled societies, had to maintain a constant alertness to prevent their people from losing the blessings they had been granted. The civilization of Saba is shown as an example of a civilization that was showered with blessings, but which let it all slip away by their descent away from religion and from high principles to a focus only on the material world. This slipping downwards into the morass of the material world is shown to be common among those blessed with affluence who become slaves to their affluence and who are unable to raise their intellects to recognize any truth which is not related to the material world. Any semblance of religion remaining with them is reduced to the materiality of idols or systems of control that they themselves have put into place for manipulating people. The angels are questioned by God asking if they are responsible for this state of affairs and they are cleared of wrongdoing. The guidance of the prophets is shown to be free of all self-interest and the consequences of the rejectionist attitude of those who reject higher truths is the corruption of their own souls for which they will pay the price in the hereafter.

Although there are many shifts in timeframes and scenes in this *sura*, the common thread is that disconnecting oneself from the truth of the higher realities which simultaneously stand above and encompass our material world, leads to a gradual corruption of the innate purity of our *fitra* (primordial nature) and our soul. The consequences of this descent into corruption will have far reaching implications for us as individuals and for the societies that accept this descent away from higher ethics as they move away from religion.

The reflections in this contemplation on one short *sura* (Saba) emerged from numerous scattered notes made while reading the Qur'an (along with numerous commentaries and the works of various scholars whose profound analyses strongly affected my views) and my thoughts on its content. Any mistakes or errors are mine and if there is any benefit to be found in this brief reflective commentary it is only due to God's Grace.

*Irshaad Hussain*

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## Saba (Sura 34: 1-54) English Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

*In the Name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful*

34:1

All Praise belongs to God, who is the foundation underlying and sustaining whatever is in the heavens and the earth. All Praise belongs to Him in the higher worlds, And He is the Wise, the Aware.

34:2

His knowledge completely encompasses all the depths of the earth and all that emerges from it, and all that is sent down from the heavens and all that ascends to it and He is the Most Merciful, the Forgiving.

34:3

Those who obscure and cover and flee from the truth (kafaru) say, “The Hour will never come to us.” Say (to them) “No? With absolute certainty, by my sustaining Lord, it is coming to you.” He knows the unseen in its entirety - The minutest particles in the heavens and earth are not hidden from Him. Nor is there anything less than that or greater, but it is recorded in a clear book.

34:4

So that He may honour those whose faith is joined with virtuous (righteous) deeds. For them there awaits Forgiveness and a noble sustenance.

34:5

But for those who strive against Our signs, seeking to mock them, they will face a humiliating punishment arising from (the consequences of) their own foul nature.

34:6

The people of deep knowledge clearly see that what has been sent down to you (from on high) is the Truth, and

that it is the guide to the Divine path of the One Exalted (in Might), the only One who is Worthy of all Praise.

34:7

Those who obscure and cover and flee from the truth such that they dwell in ignorance (kafaru) say (in ridicule), "Shall we point out to you a man who tells you that when you are all scattered to pieces in complete disintegration, that you shall then be raised in a New Creation?"

34:8

Do they imagine that he (the Prophet) invented a lie concerning Allah, or that there is in him a type of mental infirmity? With certainty, No! But those who reject the reality of the higher worlds (the hereafter) are in danger of encountering punishment arising from their (embracing) serious error.

34:9

Have they not then seen all that surrounds them of the heavens and the earth (and yet how little knowledge they have of it)? If We willed, We could cause the earth to swallow them up or cause deadly fragments from space (the far skies) to fall upon them. Indeed, in that is a sign for every bondsman (abidin) who turns in repentance (towards God).

34:10

Indeed, We granted David a great privilege from Us, commanding: “O mountains! Repeat his hymns of praise with him! And the birds as well.” We made iron mouldable (pliable) for him,

34:11

To create protective armour and commanded him to measure precisely the protective links. “And (warned him) use what you create only for virtuous acts. Indeed, I am all-seeing of all that you do.”

34:12

And for Solomon the wind's morning stride made a month's journey and likewise its afternoon stride. And We caused a stream of molten copper to flow for him, and the jinn to work for him by his Lord's permission. And whoever of them deviated from Our command, We made them taste the torment of the blaze.

34:13

They worked for him as he desired, making elevated arched chambers, images, basins as large as reservoirs, and (cooking) cauldrons fixed (in their places): "Work, O household of David, with gratitude! but few of My servants are truly grateful!"

34:14

When We decreed death for him nothing indicated his death except a creature of the earth eating at his staff till it crumbled and his suspended form fell down. It became clear to the jinn that if they had known what was hidden (unseen/ghayb) from them they would not have remained in their toil.

34:15

Certainly, there was, for Saba, a Sign in their homeland - two Gardens to the right and to the left. "Eat of the Sustenance provided by your Lord and be grateful to Him: a territory fair and happy, and a Lord Oft-Forgiving."

34:16

But they turned away, so We sent upon them a flood from the dam (arim). And their two gardens changed to two gardens producing only bitter fruit and tamarisks and a few thorny lote trees.

34:17

This is how We rewarded those who obscured and covered and fled from the truth (kafaru). Would We ever punish anyone in such a way except the ungrateful?

34:18

We had also placed between them (Saba) and the other cities that We showered with blessings many small towns

within sight of one another. And We set comfortable travel distances in between, saying, “Travel between them securely by day and night.”

34:19

But they said, “Our Lord, lengthen the distances between our journeys.” And in this way they wronged themselves so We made them so that nothing remained of them except cautionary tales, and We dispersed them with a total dispersion. Indeed, in that are signs for all who (do not behave like them but) are patient and thankful.

34:20

And with certainty, Iblis’ assumption was proven true for they all followed him except a (small) group who remained true to their faith (the believers or bondsmen of God).

34:21

And he had no authority over them, except that We might distinguish the one who believes in the higher

worlds from one who waffles in doubt concerning it.

And your Lord is a Guardian and the Wisest Protector (hafiz) over all things.

34:22

Say, "Call upon others about whom your fancy deludes you, besides God (Allah): They do not possess even the weight of the minutest particle in the entirety of the heavens or on earth: They have no share in either, nor can any of them be a helper to Him."

34:23

No intercession is of benefit with Him except for those to whom He grants permission. Until, when fear is removed from their hearts (the hearts of the people who receive intercession), they say (to their intercessor): What was it that your Lord said? They say, "The Truth. And He is the Most Elevated (in Sublimity), the Great (beyond reckoning)."

34:24



Say, "Who has enabled you to obtain provisions from the heavens and the earth?" Say, "God (Allah); and certain it is that one of us is on sure guidance and one of us is in clear error."

34:25

Say, "You will not be asked about our misdeeds, nor will we be asked about what you do."

34:26

Our Lord will gather us together, then He will judge between us with truth. And He is the Judge with a comprehensive all-encompassing knowledge.

34:27

Say, "Show me those whom you have joined with Him as partners. No! By no means, you cannot! He is God the Exalted in Power, the Sublimely Wise."

34:28

We have not sent you (O Prophet) except as a comprehensive bringer of profoundly glad tidings and

as a (truthful) warner to all humankind although most of them do not understand (the depth of this knowledge).

34:29

And they say, “When will this promise occur if you are truthful?”

34:30

Say, “For you there is already a day of appointment which cannot be postponed or advanced by the minutest moment of time.”

34:31

And those who obscure and cover and flee from the truth (kafaru) say, “We will never let ourselves sincerely believe in this Qur’an nor in the scriptures before it.” But if you could only see when the profoundly unjust are made to stand in front of their Lord, they hurl blame upon each other. Those who suffered oppression will say to their arrogant oppressors, “If not for you

holding us back, we would certainly have been of those who have faith (believers).”

34:32

The oppressors in their arrogance will say to those who suffered oppression, “Did we avert you away from guidance after it had come to you? No! You were the ones who behaved like guilty criminals.”

34:33

And the oppressed will say to those who were arrogant oppressors, “No! You conspired night and day, plotting and commanding us with false arguments to make us disbelieve and turn away from God or to set up rivals to Him.” They will try to conceal their profound regret when they see the bitter punishment they will face. And We will put collars of iron around the necks of those who obscured and covered and gave lies to the truth (kafaru). Will they be recompensed for anything more than what they themselves perpetrated?

34:34

We never sent a warner to a population, but the wealthy ones (who live in ease) among them said: "We have absolutely no belief in that (message) with which you have been sent."

34:35

And they say, "We have abundance in wealth and children and no punishment will touch us."

34:36

Say, "Verily my Lord enlarges or restricts sustenance for whom He wills, but most of humankind do not seek deep understanding."

34:37

And it is not your wealth and progeny that draws you near to Us in an elevated position, but whoever has faith and acts with an upright morality. For such, there is a manifold reward, and they will be secure and safe in the highest dwellings.

34:38

And those who strive against our signs attempting futilely to frustrate them, they shall experience the punishment.

34:39

Say, Verily, my Lord enlarges or narrows provision for whom He wills of His bondsmen. But what you spend of anything, for the good, He replaces it. And He is the Best of those who provide sustenance.

34:40

And on the Day He will gather all of them together, He will then say to the angels, "Was it you that these people turned to in worship?"

34:41

They will say, "Glory belongs to You! You are our guardian and protector (Wali), not them. No, rather they worshipped the Jinns: most of them put their faith in them."

34:42

So, on that Day no power shall they have over each other, for profit or harm: and We shall say to the wrong doers, "Taste the Penalty of the Fire, which you used to deny."

34:43

And when the clear evidence of Our signs (ayat) is mentioned to them, they say, "This is nothing but a man who wants to hinder you from following (worshipping) what your ancestors followed. This (what he brings) is nothing but a lie he invented." And those who obscure and cover and flee from the truth (kafaru) say when the truth (haqq) comes to them, "This is clearly nothing but magic (to deceive you)."

34:44

And We had not given them any books which they study, nor did We send them, before you, any warner.

34:45

And those who came before them denied as well; these have not attained a tenth of what We had granted to

those: but they denied My messengers, so how was My rejection (of them).

34:46

Say, “I give you only one crucial advice. That you stand up for God (Allah) in pairs or individually, and then reflect deeply that your companion is not mad (influenced, controlled, or deluded). He is only a warner warning of a severe punishment.”

34:47

Say, “No reward do I ask of you: it is (all) for your benefit: my reward is only from God (Allah): And He is a witness over all things.”

34:48

Say, “Indeed my Lord (powerfully) hurls the truth. The complete Knower of the unseen.”

34:49

Say, “The Truth has come, and falsehood can neither create (anything of worth) nor recreate anything.”

34:50

Say, “If I err, I only err against my own soul (nafs). But if I am guided, it is by what my Lord (Rabb) reveals to me. Indeed, He is All-Hearing, All-Near.”

34:51

If you could only see when they will be gripped by fear. They will have no escape and will be seized from a station that is near.

34:52

And they will (then) say, “We have faith in it.” But how can they receive it (faith) from such a distant station.

34:53

And certainly, they entirely obscured and covered and fled from the truth (kafaru) before, and they indulged in unfounded (slandorous) conjectures about the unseen from a distant station.

34:54



And between them and that which they desire will be placed a barrier, as was done in the past with their kind: indeed, they were enmeshed in profoundly disquieting doubt.

**Saba (Sura 34: 1-54) Arabic Text,  
Transliteration, Translation, and Commentary**

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

*In the Name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful*

34:1

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَهُ الْحَمْدُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ وَهُوَ الْحَكِيمُ الْخَبِيرُ ﴿١﴾

*Alhamdu lillahi allatheelahu ma fee assamarwati wamafee al-ardi walahu alhamdu fee al-akhiratiwahuwa alhakeemu alkhabeer*

All Praise belongs to God, who is the foundation underlying and sustaining<sup>1</sup> whatever is in the heavens and the earth. All Praise belongs to Him in the higher worlds.<sup>2</sup> And He is the Wise, the Aware.

---

1) *“All Praise belongs to God, who is the foundation underlying and sustaining....”*

The common translation is *“to whom belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth.”* However, *“belong”* has certain metaphysical implications. By itself belong suggests ownership or power. But it also, less directly suggests that this ownership and power operates through God being the foundation and underlying and continuous source of sustenance for the entire superstructure of the system of existence such that His will and command irresistibly flows throughout creation. *“Lord of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them....”* (Qur’an 19:65). So, belong also suggests a deep connection such that creation has an absolute dependence on its Creator and Sustainer, and this results in a profoundly intimate relation since that which belongs to God is infused with His continuous presence, even if humans make themselves blind to this presence and the belonging that arises from it.

---

2) *“All Praise belongs to Him in the higher worlds.”*

Hereafter is rendered by the phrase *“higher worlds”*. Hereafter implies a sequel or ending which follows our worldly life, or perhaps after humanity, as a whole, ends. The metaphysical implication is a transference of the soul to a higher level of existence. So, praise for God in these higher levels shows that His praise is deserved throughout all the layers of existence since He is the foundation, master, owner, and sustainer of it all. And these higher levels are what our material level of existence derives or flows from and are present as part of the unseen layers of reality which surround us. And they are the reality to which human existence transfers after death and at the time of the judgement - that is, the sequel or the *“after”* and the simultaneously

“higher”, more intense existence that follows our earthly existence.

“Higher” conveys an existence above and beyond our worldly existence, one which subsumes and encompasses our earthly existence and which we will wake into at the completion of our time in the material realm. Also, the usage of the word “hereafter” has become common across different religions and thus has acquired connotations that don’t always convey its deeper implications which are hinted at in the Qur’anic usage of this phrase in the context of these and other verses.

---

34:2

يَعْلَمُ مَا يَلِجُ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا يَخْرُجُ مِنْهَا وَمَا يَنْزِلُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَمَا يَعْرُجُ فِيهَا وَهُوَ الرَّحِيمُ الْعَفُورُ ﴿٢﴾

*YaAAalamu ma yaliju fee al-ardi wama yakhruju minha wama yanzilu mina assama-iwama  
yaAAaraju feeha wahuwa arraheemualghafoor*

His knowledge completely encompasses all the depths of the earth and all that emerges from it, and all that is sent down<sup>3</sup> from the heavens and all that ascends to it, and He is the Most Merciful, the Forgiving.

---

3) "...and all that is sent down...."

"Sent down" suggests more than the commonly used "descends".

Descends can come across as a passive process whereas sent down implies an actively willed action such as in the sending down of revelation to the heart of the Prophet. Indeed, since God is the active sustainer of all layers of existence, all descents are a sending down from His inexhaustible treasures. Even the descents seemingly confined to our immediate earth and sky (such as the rain that falls) are symbols of metaphysical descents. The rain that revives the parched earth is like the revelation that revives a dead heart. Since God is the foundation of all existence, the congruence of symbols across hierarchical levels is a given because of the consistency and seamlessness of His creation. The lower levels originate and flow from the higher but at their heart maintain a continuous connection with the higher and thus reflect and symbolize the characteristics of the higher. Because the lower levels flow from the higher, the higher is always active within the lower, even if that is not always readily apparent to us.

---

34:3

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَا تَأْتِينَا السَّاعَةُ قُلْ بَلَىٰ وَرَبِّي لَتَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ عَنِ الْغَيْبِ لَا يُعْرَبُ عَنْهُ مُثْقَلٌ ذَرِيرٌ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا أَصْغَرُ مِنْ ذَلِكَ وَلَا أَكْبَرُ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٣﴾

*Waqala allatheena kafaroo lata/teena assaAAatu qul bala warabeeelata/tiyannakum AAalimi  
alghaybi la yaAAzubu AAanhumithqalu tharratin fee assamawatiwala fee al-ardi wala asgharu  
min thalikawala akbaru illa fee kitabin mubeen*

Those who obscure and cover and flee from the truth (kafaru)<sup>4</sup> say, “The Hour will never come to us.” Say (to them) “No?”<sup>5</sup> With absolute certainty, by my sustaining Lord, it is coming to you.” He knows the unseen<sup>6</sup> in its entirety - The minutest particles in the heavens and earth are not hidden from Him. Nor is there anything less than that or greater, but it is recorded<sup>7</sup> in a clear book.<sup>8</sup>

---

4) “...who obscure and cover and flee from the truth (kafaru)....”

Kafir can refer to a manner of thinking, and of a stubborn reaction to that which does not correspond to this manner of thought based on partial knowledge or deliberate ignorance. This can be compounded by a refusal to consider deeper viewpoints and to suppress any internal impulse that would lift them out of the limitations imposed by their own intentional ignorance. They prefer to draw a covering over their minds and heart rather than face truth and the changes that truth will require of them.

---

5) “Say (to them) “No?””

“No?” is rendered with a question mark to show that it, almost

sarcastically, counters the over-confident statement of those who cover the truth when they deny the judgement. As if to say, No you don't think so, well, think again. But it could also be rendered as “*Yés*” without the edginess of the question mark, as if to say, “*Yés, with certainty the hour is coming to you.*” The Arabic “*bala*” can support either rendering in this context, in both cases indicating an emphatic exclamation indicating that what they deny is unavoidable. The context here suggests the use of “*No?*” with a question mark as a sharper rebuke to their overly confident statement.

---

6) “*He knows the unseen in its entirety...*”

Technology can provide some generous, if severely limited, pointers and analogies to religious concepts. If we look at some of the computer worlds in which our children play, we can see a crude and feeble mechanistic parallel to some religious concepts - such as the transparency of our minds before God. In programs that create a simulacrum (an attempted partial simulation) of aspects of reality, such as some of the popular simulation games, the player is given various tasks such as constructing, administrating, and acting within a miniature world - one inhabited by sim-people. These tiny iconic characters act according to various computer-generated traits, inclinations, and behaviours. Select a sim-person and you can glimpse their simple algorithmically generated thoughts, desires, and motivations. Because everything occurs within the software generated simulacra, every detail and aspect of the generated world and its inhabitants can be monitored - everything is recorded and known - their movements, their inner states in terms of their simulated wants,

desires, or dislikes (designed to add spice to the simulation) - everything private or public is visible to the person playing the game. In the games this is done to provide information to the player so they can adjust the game environment based on the desires, motivations, and actions of the sim people. As well, the software records everything that happens in the game in such a manner that the player can replay and watch, from a myriad different angles and viewpoints, anything that happens in different parts of the simulated world.

---

7) *“...but it is recorded....”*

Continuing the limited analogy from the previous footnote, if a character in that simulated world was conscious, their reality and their sensory perception would be limited to the simulated world they inhabit and all else would be unseen to them. They would be completely oblivious to the fact that their innermost thoughts are transparently visible, and they would have no idea that all that they say or do is recorded, down to the minutest detail as the recording mechanism is built subtly and invisibly into the fabric that underlies, supports, and generates the computer universe in which they dwell. This is analogous to the verse *“All is recorded in a clear book....On the day when Allah will raise them up all together, then inform them of what they did: Allah has recorded it while they have forgotten it”* (Qur’an 78:29 and 58:6) The sim-people’s simulated senses can only perceive the simulated world in which they live and not the invisible mechanisms which underlie it and support it - their awareness is limited to perceiving the reality depicted on the screen. If another simulated character were to come and inform them that in fact their innermost thoughts are



transparent and that everything they think or do is recorded it would be a difficult thing to believe. When you dwell in a closed system, ordinary perception cannot move beyond the enclosing system. **Note:** If they were further told that after their sim-life ends they could be brought back again, their skepticism would likely increase. Their situation would be like that of the people spoken of in the last part of verse 11:7: *“Yet, if you, O Muhammad, tell them: ‘You will be raised again after death’, those who disbelieve will surely say, ‘This is nothing but open superstition.’”* (Qur’an 11:7)

---

8) *“...recorded in a clear book.”*

While the Qur’an repeatedly and powerfully emphasizes the transparency of all existence before God, it makes it clear that this type and level of knowledge is reserved for God. God’s knowledge being complete, there is no possibility of misunderstanding - He will take into account all perspectives, all contingencies, all conditions, all circumstances when dealing with His creation. Humans can never encompass all perspectives and circumstances, so the possibility of injustice, bias, and misinterpretation accompanies all unnecessary uncovering of private personal matters. For human society there are rules, principles, boundaries, and guidelines by which the society may encourage order and maintain a peaceful and harmonious existence, but the Qur’an and the hadith place definite limits on the manner in which these boundaries are to be monitored and enforced. A surveillance society, one which not only monitors its citizens but seeks to penetrate or remove their privacy, is seen as one which has sought to appropriate for its government a disproportionate leverage over its

citizens. While God has placed penetrating watchers over each human soul (“*there is by him a watcher at hand*”), he has not permitted those in positions of authority to exercise such surveillance over the people of their society in order to preserve the privacy of the people from those with leverage over them. “*We have not sent you as a watcher over them....*” (Qur’an 42:48)

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34:4

لِيَجْزِيَ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ ؕ أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ وَرِزْقٌ كَرِيمٌ ﴿٤﴾

*Liyajziya allatheena amanoowaAAamiloo assalihati ola-ika lahummaghfiratun warizqun kareem*

So that He may honour those whose faith is joined with virtuous (righteous) deeds. For them there awaits Forgiveness and a noble<sup>9</sup> sustenance.

---

9) “...a noble sustenance....”

An illustrious, generous, exalted, sustenance that embodies lofty ideals and an elevated character and state of mind. A sustenance that strengthens and elevates the soul and spirit.

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وَالَّذِينَ سَعَوْا فِي آيَاتِنَا مُعْجِزِينَ أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مِّن رَّجْزٍ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٥﴾

*Wallatheena saAAaw fee ayatinamuAAajizeena ola-ika lahum AAathabun minrijzin aleem*

But for those who strive against Our signs, seeking to mock them, they will face a humiliating punishment arising from (the consequences of) their own foul nature.<sup>10</sup>

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10) “...from (the consequences of) their own foul nature.”

“Rij’zin” refers to that which is extremely foul and putrid in nature, to the point of being painful and unbearable. Those whose actions and thoughts tend in this direction will face their own internal nature personified as an external punishment in the higher worlds (hereafter). They will dwell in a world that reflects the internal content of their character. If their character is foul, they will experience a punishment that reflects this as their inner states will manifest in outward forms that will surround and encompass them. They will come to know the dark aspects which they allowed to corrupt their own self.

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34:6

وَيَرَى الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ مِنْ رَبِّكَ هُوَ الْحَقُّ وَيَهْدِي إِلَى صِرَاطِ  
الْعَزِيزِ الْحَمِيدِ ﴿٦﴾

*Wayara allatheena ootooalAAilma allathee onzila ilyaka min rabbika huwa alhaqqawayahdee  
ila sirati alAAazeezi alhameed*

The people of deep knowledge<sup>11</sup> clearly see that what has been sent down to you (from on high) is the Truth, and that it is the guide to the Divine path of the One Exalted (in Might), the only One who is Worthy of all Praise.

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11) “...people of deep knowledge....”

Those who have a deep insight, the ability to process knowledge correctly and to differentiate truth from error. They have the ability to discriminate between false speculation and the deep philosophy underlying the revealed knowledge brought by the Qur’an.

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وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا هَلْ نَدُلُّكُمْ عَلَىٰ رَجُلٍ يَبْتَئِكُمُ إِذَا مَزَقْتُمْ كُلَّ مُمَزَقٍ إِنَّكُمْ لَفِي خَلْقٍ  
جَدِيدٍ ﴿٧﴾

*Waqala allatheena kafaroo halmadullukum AAala rajulin yunabbi-okum ithamuzziqtum kulla  
mumazzaqin innakum lafee khalqin jadeed*

Those who obscure and cover and flee from the truth such that they dwell in ignorance (kafaru)<sup>12</sup> say (in ridicule): "Shall we point out to you a man who tells you that when you are all scattered to pieces in complete disintegration, that you shall then be raised in a New Creation?"<sup>13</sup>

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12) "...who obscure and cover and flee from the truth such that they dwell in ignorance (kafaru)...."

Kafir can refer to a manner of thinking, and of a stubborn reaction to that which does not correspond to this manner of thought based on partial knowledge or deliberate ignorance. This can be compounded by a refusal to consider deeper viewpoints and to suppress any internal impulse that would lift them out of the limitations imposed by their own intentional ignorance. They prefer to draw a covering over their

minds and heart rather than face truth and the changes that truth will require of them.

---

13) “...a man who tells you that when you are all scattered to pieces in complete disintegration, that you shall then be raised in a New Creation?”

Their situation would be like that of the people spoken of in the last part of verse 11:7: “Yet, if you, O Muhammad, tell them: ‘You will be raised again after death (in a new creation)’, those who disbelieve will surely say, This is nothing but open superstition.” (Qur’an 11:7) Also see note 7.

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34:8

أَفَتَرَى عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَمْ بِهِ جِنَّةٌ بَلِ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ فِي الْعَذَابِ وَالضَّلَالِ الْبَعِيدِ ﴿٨﴾

*Aftara AAala Allahi kathibanam bihi jinnatun bali allatheena la yu/minoona bil-akhiratifee  
alAAathabi waddalali albaAAeed*

Do they imagine that he (the Prophet) invented a lie concerning Allah, or that there is in him a type of mental infirmity? With certainty, No!<sup>14</sup> But those who reject the reality of the higher worlds (the hereafter)<sup>15</sup>

are in danger of encountering punishment arising from their (embracing) serious error.

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14) *“With certainty, No!”*

With certainty they are emphatically and utterly wrong and self-deluded in their view about the nature of reality. Also see note 5.

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15) *“...who reject the reality of the higher worlds (the hereafter)....”*

Hereafter is rendered by the phrase *“higher worlds”*. Hereafter implies a sequel or ending which follows our worldly life, or perhaps after humanity as a whole ends. The metaphysical implication is a transference of the soul to a higher level of existence. So praise for God in these higher levels shows that His praise is deserved throughout all the layers of existence since He is the foundation, master, owner, and sustainer of it all. And these higher levels are what our material level of existence derives or flows from and are present as part of the unseen layers of reality which surround us. And they are the reality to which human existence transfers after death and at the time of the judgement - that is, the sequel or the *“after”* and the simultaneously *“higher”*, more intense existence that follows our earthly existence. *“Higher”* conveys an existence above and beyond our worldly existence, one which subsumes and encompasses our earthly existence and which we will wake into at the completion of our time in the material realm. Also, the usage of the word *“hereafter”* has become common across different religions and thus has acquired connotations that don't always convey its deeper implications which are hinted at in the Qur'anic usage of this phrase in the context of these and other verses.

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أَفَلَمْ يَرَوْا إِلَىٰ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۖ إِنَّ نَاشِئًا خَفِيفٌ بِهِمْ  
 الْأَرْضَ أَوْ نَسُفُطُ عَلَيْهِمْ كِسْفًا مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّكُلِّ عَبْدٍ مُّنِيبٍ ﴿٩﴾

*Afalam yaraw ila ma baynaaydeehim wama khalfahum mina assama-i wal-ardiin nasha/  
 nakhsif bihimu al-arda aw nusqitAAalayhim kisafan mina assama-i inna fee thalikalaayatan  
 likulli AAabdin muneeb*

Have they not then seen all that surrounds them of the heavens and the earth (and yet how little knowledge they have of it)? If We willed,<sup>16</sup> We could cause the earth to swallow them up or cause deadly fragments from space (the far skies) to fall upon them. Indeed, in that is a sign for every bondsman (abidin) who turns in repentance (towards God).

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16) *“If We willed, We could cause the earth to swallow them up or cause deadly fragments from space (the far skies) to fall upon them.”*

The worlds, seen and unseen, operate according to the systems created and sustained by God. His will permeates all creation and constantly



operates within it, sustaining it. Here it says that if He had so willed it, the systems could bring calamity upon certain aspects of His creation, but instead the systems operate to bring benefit or difficulty to all. That is, the systems of cause and effect are complex systems that affect and impact all of us. However, His sustaining of existence is a sign of His Mercy, for if that sustenance was withdrawn, creation would crumble. And if He partially withdrew that ongoing sustenance from limited areas of creation, then real calamity would befall those segments. In Qur'an 26:87, the people of Shuayb challenged him saying “*make fragments from the sky fall upon us...*” and they experienced the partial and temporary withdrawing or decreasing of God’s perpetual sustenance and what they requested occurred.

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34:10

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا دَاوُدَ مِنَّا فَضْلًا يَجِبَالٌ أَوْبِي مَعَهُ وَالطَّيْرُ وَالنَّارُ لَهُ الْحَدِيدَ ﴿١٠﴾

*Walaqad atayna dawoodamina fadlan ya jibalu awwibeemaAAahu wattayra waalanna lahu alhadeed*

Indeed, We granted David a great privilege<sup>17</sup> from Us, commanding: “O mountains! Repeat his hymns of

praise with him! And the birds as well.”<sup>18</sup> We made iron mouldable (pliable) for him,<sup>19</sup>

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17) “...granted David a great privilege...”

A complete confidence and trust in God permeated the character of David. This was a great grace, bounty, and privilege granted him from God. He had the receptivity of inner character to receive this gift of grace and make it active within himself.

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18) “O mountains! Repeat his hymns of praise with him! And the birds as well.”

The Qur’an says, “*Have you not seen that unto Allah glorifies whatsoever is in the heavens and the earth, and the birds with wings outspread? Each one knows its own (mode of) prayer and praise. And Allah is Aware of what they do.*” (Qur’an 6:41) And a hadith transmitted through Jaffar Sadiq states “*Verily David went out to the wilderness while he was reciting Zabur (the Psalms), and when he was reciting Zabur there was no mountain, no stone, and no bird but murmured it with him.*” Similar incidents are related about the Prophet and the awliya. When Zain al Abideen (the Prophet’s great grandson) recited a supplication with a group of people, they were stunned when the trees and stones began to recite along with him. The spiritual “*himma*” (concentrated power and intense spiritual resolve and focus) within these individuals was such that nature itself supports and responds to the spiritual force underlying the supplication. All of us derive our existence, our very being from God who sustains our being moment by moment. There are individuals whose close connection to God results in a more intense level of being manifesting within them. They exhibit a concentrated spirituality, a spiritual power which affects their

surroundings and those around them. When they further concentrate that power through a supplication that glorifies God, nature itself responds and joins and that glorification, which is normally unperceived by people, becomes temporarily perceptible by them as they are in the ambit of the spiritual “*himma*”, and the concentrated spiritual power of the one whose very being exhibits an intensity not found in us.

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19) “*We made iron mouldable (pliable) for him....*”

The knowledge of the techniques for working with iron was granted to David and his people.

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34:11

﴿١١﴾ أَنْ أَعْمَلَ سَبِغَتٍ وَقَدَّرَ فِي السَّرِّ وَأَعْمَلُوا صَلِحًا إِنِّي بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ

*Ani iAamal sabighatin waqaddirfee assardi waAamaloo salihan innee bima taAamaloona baseer*

To create protective armour and commanded him to measure precisely the protective links.<sup>20</sup> “And (warned

him) use what you create only for virtuous acts.<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, I am all-seeing of all that you do.”<sup>22</sup>

---

20) “...measure precisely the protective links.”

In general, creative activities should be performed with a focus on quality and precision especially since human creativity is a gift derived from God’s creativity. God’s creativity is perfect (He is al-Khaliq) and human creativity is a weak reflection of this but should nevertheless strive upwards towards that perfection.

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21) “...use what you create only for virtuous acts.”

As an instrument of protection in conflict, we are warned to use technological superiority only for noble and virtuous deeds. It is not only the end but the means along the way that must reflect this virtue. Virtuous acts indicate a continuous unbroken steady flow of beautiful actions done without seeking anything in return - good for the sake of good.

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22) “...I am all-seeing of all that you do.”

Mankind will be taken to task for violation of these principles. “*And remember when We took your covenant that you would neither shed each other’s blood nor expel each other from their homes, you gave your pledge and bore witness.*” (Qur’an 2:84) “*They (the angels) said (to God), Will You place upon it (the earth) one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood.*” (Qur’an 2:30) The upholding of the pledge and the breaking of the pledge both lie within human capability.

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34:12

وَلَسَلِمَنَّ الرَّيْحُ عُذُّهَا شَهْرٌ وَرَوَّاحُهَا شَهْرٌ وَأَسَلْنَا لَهُ عَيْنَ الْقَاطِرِ وَمِنَ الْجِنِّ مَن يَعْمَلُ  
بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِ وَمَن يَزِغْ مِنْهُمْ عَنَّ آمْرِنَا نَذِقْهُ مِن عَذَابِ السَّعِيرِ ﴿١٢﴾

*Walisulaymana arreehaghuduwwuha shahrun warawahuha shahrunwaasalna lahu AAayna  
alqitri wamina aljinni manyaAAamalu bayna yadayhi bi-ithni rabbihi waman yazighminhum  
AAan amrina nuthighu min AAathabi assaAAeer*

And for Solomon the wind's morning stride made a month's journey and likewise its afternoon stride.<sup>23</sup> And We caused a stream of molten copper to flow for him, and the jinn to work for him by his Lord's permission.<sup>24</sup> And whoever of them deviated from Our command, We made them taste the torment of the blaze.

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23) "...the wind's morning stride made a month's journey and likewise its afternoon stride."

Solomon was given the ability to utilize the wind to speedily direct his ships and other conveyances where he wished. "Then We subjugated the

wind for him that blew smoothly on his command to wherever he wished....”

(Qur'an 38:36)

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24) “...to work for him by his Lord's permission.”

Here, it is clarified that Solomon's gifts were from God's Grace for Solomon to use in administration of a virtuous kingdom in whatever manner he wished. “This is Our gift, so give or withhold as you wish without account.” (Qur'an 38:39)

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34:13

يَعْمَلُونَ لَهُ مَا يَشَاءُ مِنْ مَحْرَبٍ وَتَمَثِيلٍ وَجِفَانٍ كَالْجَوَابِ وَقُدُورٍ رَاسِيَتٍ أَعْمَلُوا ءَالَ  
دَاوُدَ شُكْرًا وَقَلِيلٌ مِّنْ عِبَادِيَ الشَّكُورُ ﴿١٣﴾

*YâAAlaaloona lahu ma yashao minmahareeba watamatheela wajifanin kaljawabiwaqudoorin  
rasiyatini AAlaloo ala dawoodashukran waqaleelun min AAibadiya ashshakoor*

They worked for him as he desired, making elevated arched chambers, images, basins as large as reservoirs, and (cooking) cauldrons fixed (in their places): “Work, O

household of David, with gratitude! but few of My servants are truly grateful!”

34:14

فَلَمَّا قَضَيْنَا عَلَيْهِ الْمَوْتَ مَا دَلَّهُمْ عَلَى مَوْتِهِ إِلَّا دَابَّةٌ الْأَرْضِ تَأْكُلُ مِنْسَأَتَهُ فَلَمَّا خَرَّ  
تَبَيَّنَتْ الْجِنُّ أَنْ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ الْغَيْبَ مَا لَبِثُوا فِي الْعَذَابِ الْمُهِينِ ﴿١٤﴾

*Falamma qadaynaAAalayhi almawta ma dallahum AAala marwtihi illadabbatu al-ardi ta/  
kulu minsaatahu falammakharra tabayyanati aljinnu an law kanoo yaAAalamoonaalghayba ma  
labithoo fee alAAathabi almuheen*

When We decreed death for him nothing indicated his death except a creature of the earth eating at his staff till it crumbled and his suspended form fell down.<sup>25</sup> It became clear to the jinn that if they had known what was hidden (unseen/ghayb)<sup>26</sup> from them they would not have remained in their toil.<sup>27</sup>

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25) *"...and his suspended form fell down."*

Solomon possibly commanded this (before his death) to demonstrate to the Jinn that their knowledge of the unseen was limited and lacking despite their claims to have such knowledge. And it is this way with those who deny the higher worlds, the prophets, the revelations, or who join partners with God. They believe their knowledge is complete and sufficient, not realizing that they dwell in ignorance of vast unseen realms that underlie the thin veneer of material existence. They see only the surface and reject the depths about which the prophets inform them. Just because they are Jinn, who are normally concealed from human perception, does not mean that they have a special knowledge of the unseen.

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26) *"...if they had known what was hidden (unseen/ghayb)...."*

The realization of the limits of their knowledge came to them.

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27) *"...they would not have remained in their toil."*

They would not have remained to complete the tasks Solomon had assigned them.

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34:15

لَقَدْ كَانَ لِسَبَإٍ فِي مَسْكِنِهِمْ آيَةٌ ۚ جَنَّاتٍ عَن يَمِينٍ وَشِمَالٍ كُلُوا مِن رِّزْقِ رَبِّكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوا  
لَهُ ۗ بَلَدٌ طَيِّبٌ وَرَبٌّ غَفُورٌ ﴿١٥﴾



*Laqad kana lisaba-in fee maskanihim ayatunjannatani AAan yameenin washimalin kuloo min rizqirabbikum washkuroo lahu baldatun tayyibatunwarabbun ghafoor*

Certainly, there was, for Saba, a Sign in their homeland - two Gardens to the right and to the left. "Eat of the Sustenance provided by your Lord and be grateful to Him: a territory fair and happy, and a Lord Oft-Forgiving."<sup>28</sup>

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28) *"...two Gardens to the right and to the left. "Eat of the Sustenance provided by your Lord and be grateful to Him: a territory fair and happy, and a Lord Oft-Forgiving."*

There is in the two gardens a symbolic echo of the gardens of paradise. *"And whoever is in awe of standing before their Lord will have two Gardens."* (Qur'an 55:46-47) Here it indicates that those who have true awe of the Lordship of God will be blessed with two gardens in paradise. The people of Saba initially had that awe and were rewarded with their ability, in this world, to create gardens that suggested the richness of the gardens of paradise, irrigated by a vast system of dams which fed the land. But even as they enjoyed the benefits God had enriched them with, they turned away from Him, having neither awe, respect, love, nor fear of Him, nor gratefulness for the riches with which they had been blessed. With their turning away came a withdrawing of the blessings they had received and a fall from Grace. Here were a people who had been given, in this world, the likeness of

the gardens of paradise and they cast it away out of forgetfulness driven by arrogance. With that rejection and the withering away of their faith, the similitude of their gardens to those in paradise also withered away.

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34:16

فَأَعْرَضُوا فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ سَيْلَ الْعَرِمِ وَبَدَّلْنَاهُمْ بِجَنَّتَيْهِمْ جَنَّتَيْنِ ذَوَاتِ أُكُلٍ خَمْطٍ وَأَثَلٍ  
وَشَيْءٍ مِّن سِدْرٍ قَلِيلٍ ﴿١٦﴾

*FaaAAradoo faarsalna AAalayhimsayla alAAarimi wabaddalnahum bijannatayhim jannatayni  
thawatayokulin khamtin waathlin washay-in min sidrin qaleel*

But they turned away,<sup>29</sup> so We sent upon them a flood from the dam (arim). And their two gardens changed to two gardens producing only bitter fruit and tamarisks and a few thorny lote trees.<sup>30</sup>

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29) "...they turned away..."

Turning away refers to a shunning of gratefulness, forgetfulness of the blessings received and of what it was that enabled the blessings.

Blessings can be a combination of one's own striving to achieve a goal

and the myriad fortuitous circumstances beyond one's control that make possible both the striving and the achievement of the goal. When the people lose the ability to recognize their dependence on external factors, on the blessings contained in these factors and the benefits they receive from them, they begin to grow in arrogance, imagining that it is their own independent abilities that bring them benefits.

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30) *“a few thorny lote trees”*

The lote tree is also a tree found in the highest levels of paradise and indicates the boundary beyond which the inhabitants of paradise and the angels cannot pass beyond in their approach to God. It has immense symbolic significance and the fact that they had these healthy trees in their gardens was a symbol of the blessings granted to the people of Saba. But once they turned away, all that remained was thorny undernourished and bitter lote trees, reflective of the fallen status of their two gardens and of the kingdom itself whose unbelief or ungratefulness after belief led to the sad withdrawal of blessings and their ultimate downfall. Historically, this perhaps corresponds to the severe decline in trade and prosperity due to a breakdown of the extensive irrigation systems and an increase in civil conflicts experienced in the region around Yemen as the kingdom of Saba began a long period (from about 300 to 500 AD) of decline and dissolution.

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*Thalika jazaynahum bimakafaroo wahal nujazee illa alkafoor*

This is how We rewarded those who obscured and covered and fled from the truth (kafaru).<sup>31</sup> Would We ever punish anyone in such a way except the ungrateful?

32

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31) “...those who obscured and covered and fled from the truth (kafaru).”

Kafir can refer to a manner of thinking, and of a stubborn reaction to that which does not correspond to this manner of thought based on partial knowledge or deliberate ignorance. This can be compounded by a refusal to consider deeper viewpoints and to suppress any internal impulse that would lift them out of the limitations imposed by their own intentional ignorance. They prefer to draw a covering over their minds and heart rather than face truth and the changes that truth will require of them.

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32) “Would We ever punish anyone in such a way except the ungrateful?”

Here it states that it is only those who are deliberately, obstinately, ungrateful and who blatantly refuse to recognize the complexity and subtlety with which higher principles operate in the world and sustain

and bring benefit – it is these, who, through their stubborn ignorance, bring calamity and punishment upon themselves. They either act in a way contrary to their own benefit or refuse to take action to change their course resulting in a loss of benefit. Knowledge of the true situation is put aside, and a kind of manipulative ignorance riddled with falsehoods becomes the foundation of their society. If a people are wilfully ignorant, then the resulting recompense is what their own hands have wrought or allowed – it is a punishment that is a result of intentional ignorance. An example might be looming local calamities such as famine, flooding, wildfires, or hurricanes which, if accompanied by the stubborn refusal to act with necessary speed and urgency when knowledge of the impending disaster is indisputable, could possibly result in a damaging punishment in terms of the harm that people may suffer because of inaction or wrong action. For Saba, it was the destruction of their irrigation systems and the long-term damage that resulted, a damage they were unable to prevent or recover from because of their continued stubbornness, denial, and inaction.

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34:18

وَجَعَلْنَا بَيْنَهُمْ وَبَيْنَ الْقُرَىٰ الَّتِي بَرَكْنَا فِيهَا قُرَىٰ ظَاهِرَةً وَقَدَرْنَا فِيهَا السَّيْرَ سِيرُوا فِيهَا لِيَالِي وَأَيَّامًا ءَامِنِينَ ﴿١٨﴾

*Wajaaalna baynahum wabayna alquraallatee barakna feeha quran thahiratanwaqaddarna  
feeha assayra seeroo feehalayaliya waayyaman amineen*

We had also placed between them (Saba) and the other cities that We showered with blessings many small towns within sight of one another. And We set comfortable travel distances in between, saying, “Travel between them securely by day and night.”<sup>33</sup>

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33) *“Travel between them securely by day and night.”*

The region was prosperous and blessed and the small towns that acted as way stations between the larger cities facilitated trade and communication and this brought further blessings. This arrangement was either through a divine commandment or through the people adhering to the higher principles of their faith, and therefore those principles were reflected in the manner in which they conducted their affairs and in which the region expanded benefiting all the people.

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34:19

فَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا بَعْدَ بَيْنِ أَسْفَارِنَا وَظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ فَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَحَادِيثَ وَمَزَقْنَاهُمْ كُلَّ مُمَزَقٍ إِنَّ  
فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّكُلِّ صَبَّارٍ شَكُورٍ ﴿١٩﴾

*Faqaloo rabbana baAaidbayna asfarina wathalamoo anfusahumfajaAAalnahum ahadeetha  
wamazzaqnahum kullamumazzaqin inna fee thalika laayatin likullisabbarin shakoor*

But they said, “Our Lord, lengthen the distances between our journeys.”<sup>34</sup> And in this way they wronged themselves<sup>35</sup> so We made them so that nothing remained of them except cautionary tales, and We dispersed them with a total dispersion. Indeed, in that are signs for all who (do not behave like them but) are patient and thankful.

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34) “...lengthen the distances between our journeys.”

A possible alternate rendition could be “*Our Lord has made the distances of our journeys too long*.” In this case they are perhaps complaining that even though the towns are within sight of each other the convenience of the journey is still insufficient. They were not in the least thankful of the blessings they were given of these closely spaced towns that provided places of rest.

Another possible rendition is that, after their land had lost its prosperity the people of the nearby towns migrated away from the region and thus the convenience of the towns as rest stops was gone. As a result their trade journeys grew in length because the towns that acted as rest stop began to disappear.

But if we take the most common interpretation, that Saba actually wanted to lengthen the distance between them and the other towns,

perhaps this is an indication that differences and divisions were growing between communities. Or that Saba considered themselves an elite and did not want to share their blessings with others but rather wanted to separate and hoard their blessings for themselves rather than provide support for the many nearby towns that depended on the trade routes and the benefits they received from Saba. Also, Saba's intensity of focus on worldly matters increased with the decline of their faith and religion and as a result they began to see the support the nearby towns received as an unnecessary largesse. Their preference was to increase the speed of the trade journeys, to forego the stops at the small towns so that the journey was longer but quicker, and thus to keep for themselves the higher profits of trade accrued at their final trade destination. Later, when their irrigation systems failed, this backfired, because the towns which they neglected during their time of prosperity, migrated away during Saba's decline.

As well, these nearby towns were stations of rest and recuperation during a journey. In this way they symbolically corresponded to the rhythms of spiritual renewal that both nature and religion require, like the sabbath in Judaism and Christianity, or Friday for Muslims. These are periods of putting aside worldly considerations and of turning both inwards towards God and outwards to join with one's own religious and spiritual community. Ramadan and the pilgrimage of hajj are likewise rhythms of respite from worldly activities and crucial to spiritual renewal and a means of access to the contemplative dimensions of religion. They are like well spaced way-stations that interrupt the relentless demands of our mundane worldly existence.



Without these stations, these “*towns*” that allow a pause and a rest, our worldly life would come to dominate us. But the only true journey is to God and the pauses from worldly existence provided by religion and symbolized by the towns that were closely spaced, is to provide a regular renewal of faith so that the journey may bear true and useful fruit. By demanding a lengthening of the journey, it is as if the people of Saba were longing for an increase in focus on their worldly lives and a lessening of focus on the spiritual way-stations, the benefits of which they no longer recognized and which they only saw as a burden. These pauses in the flow of worldly life require some sacrifice but provide, in return, a dignity and nobility “achieved through a temporary renunciation of worldly life made with a pure intention. The “*fitra*” (primordial nature), the deep connection to the Divine embedded within human nature requires this from us. If it is denied, then there will be a price to pay, in the form of a gradual corruption of our own nature and the disasters that will spring from that corruption. In this verse, the rulers rejected the blessing of the towns that acted as way-stations and places of rest, and in their unbalanced focus on worldly gain only hastened their own downfall.

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35) “...*they wronged themselves....*”

They changed their intentions for the worse, grew arrogant in their actions, lowered their focus to material gain, lost their connection with religion and a higher ethical path, and in this way exchanged blessings for a destruction brought on by their own attitude and actions.

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وَلَقَدْ صَدَقَ عَلَيْهِمْ إِبْلِيسُ ظَنَّهُ، فَاتَّبَعُوهُ إِلَّا فَرِيقًا مِّنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٢٠﴾

*Walaqad saddaqa AAalayhim ibleesu thannahufattabaAAoohu illa fareeqan mina almu/mineen*

And with certainty, Iblis' assumption<sup>36</sup> was proven true for they all followed him except a (small) group who remained true to their faith (the believers or bondsmen of God).

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36) "...Iblis' assumption was proven true..."

Iblis says, *"I will assault them from before them and behind them, from their right and their left: Nor wilt thou find, in most of them, gratitude (for Your blessings)."*

(Qur'an 7:17) Iblis sees the dual nature in humankind, that they are a choice hovering between clay and spirit, between the higher and the lower. He assumes that the crassness of the lower nature will, with the right temptations placed before it, win out over the subtleness of the higher nature.

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وَمَا كَانَ لَهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنْ سُلْطَانٍ إِلَّا لِنَعْلَمَ مَنْ يَأْتِيهِمْ بِالْآخِرَةِ مِمَّنْ هُوَ مِنْهَا فِي شَكٍّ  
وَرَبُّكَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ حَفِيظٌ ﴿١١﴾

*Wama kana lahu AAalayhim minsultanin illa linaAAalama man yu/mino bil-akhiratimimman  
huwa minha fee shakkin warabbuka AAala kullishay-in hafeeth*

And he had no authority over them,<sup>37</sup> except that We might distinguish the one who believes in the higher worlds from one who waffles in doubt concerning it. And your Lord is a Guardian and the Wisest Protector (hafiz) over all things.

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37) "...he had no authority over them...."

Iblis' only authority is one of temptation and insinuation. "*I had no power at all over you: I but called you and you responded to me.*" (Qur'an 14:22) He lays out traps for hearts and minds, and as Shakespeare writes through the character of Banquo in Macbeth, "...oftentimes, to win us to our harm the instruments of darkness tell us truths, win us with honest trifles, only to betray us in deepest consequence." (Macbeth Act 1, Scene 3, lines 123–125) The surest protection from Iblis is our connection to God and to that which is highest within us, our internal connection to the higher realms and the truth that emanates from there and that illuminates our souls. "*Indeed, Allāh had promised you the promise of truth. And I promised you, but I betrayed you. But I had no authority over you except that I invited you, and*

*you responded to me. So do not blame me; but blame yourselves. I cannot be called to your aid, nor can you be called to my aid...Indeed, for the wrongdoers is a painful punishment." (Qur'an 14:22)*

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34:22

قُلْ اَدْعُوا الَّذِيْنَ رَعَمْتُمْ مِّنْ دُوْنِ اللّٰهِ لَا يَمْلِكُوْنَ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ فِى السَّمٰوٰتِ وَلَا فِى الْاَرْضِ وَمَا لَهُمْ فِيْهِمَا مِنْ شَرْكٍ وَمَا لَهُمْ مِنْهُمْ مِّنْ ظٰهِرٍ ﴿٢٢﴾

*Quli odAAoo allatheena zaAAamtum mindooni Allahi la yamlikoona mithqala tharratinfee assamawati wala fee al-ardiwama lahum feehima min shirkin wama lahuminhum min thaheer*

Say, "Call upon others<sup>38</sup> about whom your fancy deludes you, besides God (Allah): They do not possess even the weight of the minutest particle in the entirety of the heavens or on earth: They have no share in either, nor can any of them be a helper<sup>39</sup> to Him."

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38) "...Call upon others about whom your fancy deludes you..."

When a society does away with or downplays God and His guidance, when a society eliminates connection with the unified domain of

Spirit, it makes this whole lower world, this vast ever-shifting multiplicity into a plurality of rivals to the Divine. Focus falls away from a world beyond matter and instead many focal points emerge, all rooted in the immediacy of this world. In the absence of one God, entire pantheons of conflicting, battling, rival gods appear in the form of an endless abundance of systems and ideologies. A ceaseless, multitudinous, up-swelling of mini-idolatries, each of which have their moment of existence, their small or vast group of adherents and worshipers, their limited moment in the sun before they are displaced by other idolatries more recently born. It is like the verse which says, *“Those who have no belief set up rivals to their god (Lord)”* (Qur’an 6:1).

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39) *“...nor can any of them be a helper...”*

Some, among the Arabs of that time, who called upon idols or upon psychic forces or supposedly supernatural entities, claimed these were merely helpers who could intercede or petition with God on their behalf. They claimed they did not necessarily disbelieve in God but preferred, so to speak, to work through a kind of celestial bureaucracy. Others put their faith in systems or ideologies or in the machineries of the state, which in their own way, can become a type of idol. All these attitudes are warned against in this verse. None of these will benefit the people when they stand before God.

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وَلَا تَنْفَعُ الشَّفَعَةُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا لِمَنْ أَذِنَ لَهُ، حَتَّىٰ إِذَا فُزِعَ عَن قُلُوبِهِمْ قَالُوا مَاذَا قَالَ رَبُّكُمْ  
 قَالُوا الْحَقُّ وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْكَبِيرُ ﴿١٣﴾

*Wala tanfaAAu ashshafaAAatuAAindahu illa liman athina lahu hattaitha fuzziAAa AAan quloobihim qaloo matha qalarabbukum qaloo alhaqqa wahuwa alAAaliyyu alkabeer*

No intercession<sup>40</sup> is of benefit with Him except for those to whom He grants permission.<sup>41</sup> Until, when fear<sup>42</sup> is removed from their hearts (the hearts of the people who receive intercession), they say (to their intercessor):

What was it that your Lord said? They say, The Truth.<sup>43</sup> And He is the Most Elevated (in Sublimity), the Great (beyond reckoning).

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40) “*No intercession....*”

This cements what was said in the previous verse - that all that people turn to other than God will not benefit them in the slightest and the imagined intercession will prove to be a mirage that only exists in their fancy.

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41) “*...except for those to whom He grants permission.*”

Intercession, however, is a very real factor but it is dependent on God’s Permission and Will. There is no intercession except what He allows. And in these verses, He is making clear that those idols or systems

toward which the people turned had no real substance and no intercessory powers but were merely delusions held by the people. Intercession, when permitted, will only be through those who truly reflect and represent Divine providence through their unshakable and profoundly deep connection and unity with God's Will.

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42) "...when fear is removed from their hearts...."

This possibly refers to the fear and terror of the last hour, which is removed from them when the intercessor, who operates under God's Permission and Will, and in accord with truth, returns with God's judgement.

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43) "They say, The Truth."

With the clarity of understanding that comes in the higher worlds (the hereafter) all illusions vanish and truth is indisputably manifested.

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34:24

﴿قُلْ مَنْ يَرْزُقُكُمْ مِنَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ قُلِ اللَّهُ وَإِنَّا أَوْ إِيَّاكُمْ لَعَلَّ هُدًى أَوْ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ﴾

*Qul man yarzuqukum mina assamawatiwal-ardi quli Allahu wa-inna aw iyyakumlaAAala hudan aw fee dalalin mubeen*

Say, “Who has enabled you to obtain provisions from the heavens and the earth?” Say, “God (Allah); and certain it is that one of us is on sure guidance and one of us is in clear error.”<sup>44</sup>

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44) “...one of us is on sure guidance and one of us is in clear error.”

Rather than clearly say the other party is in error, it is inviting them to evaluate the true position of the two groups, providing an opening to embrace change and possibly overcome their error.

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34:25

قُلْ لَا تُسْأَلُونَ عَمَّا أَجْرَمْنَا وَلَا نُسْأَلُ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

*Qul la tus-aloona AAammaajramna wala nus-alu AAamma taAAamaloon*

Say, “You will not be asked about our misdeeds, nor will we be asked about what you do.”<sup>45</sup>



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45) “...nor will we be asked about what you do.”

This recalls the last verse of Sura Kafirun “*For you your way and for me mine.*” (Qur’an 109:6) Essentially, it is saying that each person will learn the truth when the veils of ignorance are lifted from their minds on the day of judgement, although it is better that a person strive sincerely to lift those veils while in this world.

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34:26

قُلْ يَجْمَعُ بَيْنَنَا رَبَّنَا ثُمَّ يَفْتَحُ بَيْنَنَا بِالْحَقِّ وَهُوَ الْفَتَّاحُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿٢٦﴾

*Qul yajmaAAu baynana rabbunathumma yaftahu baynana bilhaqqiwahuruwa alfattahu alAAaleem*

Our Lord will gather us together, then He will judge between us with truth. And He is the Judge<sup>46</sup> with a comprehensive all-encompassing knowledge.<sup>47</sup>

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46) “...He is the Judge...”

Judge here has the connotation of the fairest possible Arbiter as well as an Opener of all knowledge required to judge with the utmost impartiality and honour.

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47) “...all-encompassing knowledge.”

Since God’s knowledge encompasses all situations and all perspectives, He will judge with perfect fairness, and no one will be wronged in the least since all circumstances, even those invisible and unknown to us, will be considered.

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34:27

قُلْ أَرُونِي الَّذِينَ أَجَعْتُمْ بِهِ شُرَكَاءَ كَلَّا بَلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٢٧﴾

*Qul arooniya allatheena alhaqtumbihi shurakaa kalla bal huwa AllahualAAazeezu alhakeem*

Say, “Show me those whom you have joined with Him as partners.<sup>48</sup> No! By no means,<sup>49</sup> you cannot! He is God the Exalted in Power, the Sublimely Wise.”

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48) “...those whom you have joined with Him as partners.”

Why have humans throughout history been obsessed with joining partners with God or setting up systems, ideologies, or individuals that claim God’s authority or claim that they have power and influence with God? In Somerset Maugham’s book about those who dabble in the occult sciences he has a character lay bare the motivation

underlying this insistent desire to always place other powers ahead of or beside God. “*And what else is it that men seek in life but power? If they want money, it is but for the power that attends it, and it is power again that they strive for in all the knowledge they acquire. Fools and sots aim at happiness, but men aim only at power. The magus, the sorcerer, are seized with fascination of the unknown; and they desire a greatness that is inaccessible to mankind. They think by the science they study so patiently, by endurance and strength, by force of will and...by imagination, for these are the great weapons of the magician, they may achieve at last a power with which they can face the God of Heaven Himself.*” (Excerpt From “*The Magician*” by W. Somerset Maugham) so the partners are a means of influencing or superseding the Will of God, of contending with or “*taming*” God Himself, by bending God’s will to their own will, represented by the supposed partners they insist upon.

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49) “...By no means....”

Once again, the unreality of those idols, forces, systems, or ideologies that substitute for God or which are set up in parallel with God, is challenged as a wishful fantasy existing only in the minds of those who cling to them.

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34:28

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا كَافَّةً لِلنَّاسِ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَلَنْ كُنَّ أَكْثَرُ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

*Wama arsalnaka illa kaffatanlinnasi basheeran wanatheeran walakinnaakthara annasi la yaAlalamoon*

We have not sent you (O Prophet) except as a comprehensive bringer of profoundly glad tidings and as a (truthful) warner to all humankind<sup>50</sup> although most of them do not understand (the depth of this knowledge).

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50) “...a (truthful) warner to all humankind...”

The Prophet’s message is a universal one very much in line with and the fulfilment of the comprehensive line of prophets who have been sent to other segments of humankind from Adam down to Muhammad. Some hadiths estimate the number of prophets as 124,000 sent to all regions of the world. Although each of them bears a message with universal implications, the Prophet of Islam is the one in whom all these universal principles converge and focus, as if through a lens that sharpens and brightens the message providing an intensity and clarity not previously seen.

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34:29

And they say, “When will this promise occur if you are truthful?”<sup>51</sup>

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51) “...*When will this promise occur if you are truthful?*”

They are mocking the Prophet saying that since they have been in denial of the revelation from the beginning why has no judgement occurred yet, and when will it occur.

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34:30

قُلْ لَكُمْ مِيعَادُ يَوْمٍ لَا تَسْتَعْرُونَ عَنْهُ سَاعَةً وَلَا تَسْتَقْدِمُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

*Qul lakum meeAAadu yawmin latasta/khiroona AAanhu saAAatan wala tastaqdimoon*

Say, “For you there is already a day of appointment which cannot be postponed or advanced by the minutest moment of time.”<sup>52</sup>

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52) "...cannot be postponed or advanced by the minutest moment of time."

God's judgement cannot be coerced by their mockery. It flows from the higher worlds in which time and space have a different quality than that which we experience here. It filters down into this lower realm through multiple channels of cause and effect to achieve what it needs to achieve at the appropriate juncture. God's plan completely encompasses all other plans. *"And they have indeed planned their plan, but their plan is utterly encompassed by Allah, even if their plan is of such (complexity, duration, and power) that the mountains should pass away thereby."* (Qur'an 14:46) Though invisible and insensible to them, their fate and their appointment with that fate was in progress through myriad chains of cause and effect at work in different times and places but all converging upon them without their being aware in the least.

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34:31

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَنْ نُؤْمِنَ بِهَذَا الْقُرْآنِ وَلَا بِالَّذِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَلَوْ تَرَىٰ إِذِ الظَّالِمُونَ  
مَوْفُوقُونَ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ يَرْجِعُ بَعْضُهُمْ إِلَىٰ بَعْضٍ الْقَوْلَ يَقُولُ الَّذِينَ اسْتُضْعِفُوا لِلَّذِينَ  
اسْتَكْبَرُوا لَوْلَا أَنْتُمْ لَكُنَّا مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

*Waqala allatheena kafaroo lannu/mina bihatha alqur-ani wala billatheebayna yadayhi walaw  
tara ithi aththalimoonamawqofoona AAinda rabbihim yarjiAAu baAAduhum ilabaAAadin  
alqawla yaqoolu allatheena istudAAifoolillatheena istakbaroo lawla antum lakunnamu/mineen*

And those who obscure and cover and flee from the truth (kafaru) say, “We will never let ourselves sincerely believe in this Qur’an nor in the scriptures before it.” But if you could only see when the profoundly unjust are made to stand in front of their Lord, they hurl blame upon each other. Those who suffered oppression will say to their arrogant oppressors, “If not for you holding us back, we would certainly have been of those who have faith (believers).”<sup>53</sup>

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53) *“...If not for you holding us back, we would certainly have been of those who have faith.”*

Those who hold oppressive power engage in saturating the society with propaganda designed to maintain themselves in power. In this game, strengthening their hold on society is the goal and truth is of no consequence.

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34:32

قَالَ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَضَعِفُوا أَنَحْنُ صَدَدْنَاكُمْ عَنِ الْهُدَىٰ بَعْدَ إِذْ جَاءَكُمْ بِلَا كُفْرٍ  
تُجْرِمِينَ

*Qala allatheena istakbaroolillatheena istudAAifoo anahnu sadadnakumAAani alhuda baAAada  
ith jaakum bal kuntummujrimeen*

The oppressors in their arrogance will say to those who suffered oppression, “Did we avert you away from guidance after it had come to you? No! You were the ones who behaved like guilty criminals.”<sup>54</sup>

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54) *“You were the ones who behaved like guilty criminals.”*

The powerful in society throw blame on the weakest segments of society saying they had freedom to do as they wished when, in fact, the entire society has been structured to hold the weak in check, within a system meant to hold them down intellectually, economically, and physically.

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34:33

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ اسْتَضَعُّوْا لِلَّذِيْنَ اسْتَكْبَرُوْا بَلْ مَكْرُ الْاَيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ اِذْ تَاْمُرُوْنَ اَنْ نَّكْفُرَ بِاللّٰهِ  
وَيَجْعَلَ لَهُۥ اَنْدَادًا وَّاسْرُوْا التَّدَاْمَةَ لِمَا رَاَوْا الْعَذَابَ وَجَعَلْنَا الْاَغْلَلَ فِيْ اَعْنَاقِ الَّذِيْنَ كَفَرُوْا هَلْ  
يُحْزَوْنَ اِلَّا مَا كَانُوْا يَعْمَلُوْنَ ﴿۳۳﴾



*Waqala allatheena istudAAifoolillatheena istakbaroo bal makru allayli wannahariith ta/muroonana an nakfura billahiwanaajAAala lahu andadan waasarroo annadamatalamma raawoo alAAathaba wajaAAalna al-aghlafee aAAnaqi allatheena kafaroo hal yujzawna illama kanoo yaAAamaloon*

And the oppressed will say to those who were arrogant oppressors, “No! You conspired night and day, plotting and commanding us with false arguments to make us disbelieve and turn away from God or to set up rivals to Him.”<sup>55</sup> They will try to conceal their profound regret when they see the bitter punishment they will face. And We will put collars of iron around the necks<sup>56</sup> of those who obscured and covered and gave lies to the truth (kafaru). Will they be recompensed for anything more than what they themselves perpetrated?<sup>57</sup>

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55) “...commanding us with false arguments to make us disbelieve and turn away from God or to set up rivals to Him.”

The oppressed clarify the difference between themselves and the powerful who had vast means of coercion at their disposal. The powerful in society propagandized with false intellectual arguments as well as through every social means at their disposal to make the truth appear false so that the people began to doubt what was true. Social engineering at every level was used to accomplish this, and it led to a

society that went far astray. Although blame also falls upon the downtrodden, it is at a level distinct from the blame which falls upon the oppressor since they, unlike Iblis, don't simply lay out a temptation but engage in active coercion at every level, using every tool of intimidation and duress at their disposal.

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56) *"...collars of iron around the necks...."*

The shackles they wear in the hereafter is a symbol of the metaphorical shackles they burdened themselves with in life by corrupting their own souls and the souls of those over whom they had power. The corrupt use of power and the twisting of truth were the imprisoning collars they unknowingly placed around their own throats during their life, thinking they had freedom, when their actions and inner corruption were in fact imprisoning their souls and damaging their "*fitra*", their primordial inner nature, locking it within a cage of lies. The collars around their neck are a sign of their self-inflicted imprisonment for the sake of temporal power and fleeting material gain at the expense of a soul which is immortal.

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57) *"...recompensed for anything more than what they themselves perpetrated?"*

The recompense is in line with the corruption they worked on themselves and others.

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وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِي قَرْيَةٍ مِّن نَّذِيرٍ إِلَّا قَالَ مُتْرَفُوهَا إِنَّا بِمَا أُرْسِلْتُمْ بِهِ كَافِرُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

*Wama arsalna fee qaryatin minnatheerin illa qala mutrafooha innabima orsiltum bihi kafroon*

We never sent a warner to a population, but the wealthy ones (who live in ease) among them said: "We have absolutely no belief<sup>58</sup> in that (message) with which you have been sent."<sup>59</sup>

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58) *"We have absolutely no belief..."*

It is as if they said, "We are kafaru, those who cover and obscure and flee from the truth in order to preserve our status, our wealth, and our dominating power. We can never exchange what we already have in our possession no matter what you offer."

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59) *"...in that (message) with which you have been sent."*

Yet the power of the message was such that they were filled with fear at the possible loss of their wealth and power and terrified that the system which made possible the accumulation of that power would be overturned. Those in positions of power who have accumulated vast wealth are often the first to attack the prophets and warners in an effort to preserve the status quo. It is as if what they possess in terms of worldly goods, power, and influence, has taken possession of them.

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وَقَالُوا نَحْنُ أَكْثَرُ أَمْوَالًا وَأَوْلَادًا وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمُعَذَّبِينَ ﴿٣٥﴾

*Waqaloo nahnu aktharu amwalanwaawladan wama nahnu bimuuAAaththabeen*

And they say, “We have abundance in wealth and children and no punishment will touch us.”<sup>60</sup>

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60) “...no punishment will touch us.”

It is difficult for them to imagine that their position of authority and dominance can be undone. They have the mindset of a political power that continually plots and schemes to maintain and expand their worldly leverage and mastery. How could they face punishment from someone who speaks in terms of ethics and morality and appeals to intangibles such as unseen realms and higher worlds. It seems inconceivable to someone who is deeply rooted in the mundane world to consider anything beyond the immediacy of what surrounds them and the benefits they have accumulated for themselves within this material realm. As expressed by the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr “*One of the most pathetic aspects of human history is that every civilization expresses itself most pretentiously, compounds its partial and universal values most*

*convincingly, and claims immortality for its finite existence at the very moment when the decay which leads to death has already begun...*” (Reinhold Niebuhr in *Beyond Tragedy: Essays on the Christian Interpretation of Tragedy.*)

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34:36

قُلْ إِنَّ رَبِّي يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَن يَشَاءُ وَيَقْدِرُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

*Qul inna rabbee yabsutu arrizqaliman yashao wayaqdiru walakinna akthara annasila yaAlalmoon*

Say, "Verily my Lord enlarges or restricts sustenance for whom He wills, but most of humankind do not seek deep understanding."<sup>61</sup>

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61) "...most of humankind do not seek deep understanding."

*"And let not their abundant wealth and progeny impress you...."* (Qur'an 9:85).

Rather, let those with deep knowledge coupled with ethics, a clear faith that attaches their hearts to God, and actions that uplift humanity, impress you.

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وَمَا أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُكُمْ بِالَّتِي تُقَرِّبُكُمْ عِنْدَنَا زُلْفَىٰ إِلَّا مَنْ ءَامَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَأُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ جَزَاءُ  
 الصَّعْفِ بِمَا عَمِلُوا وَهُمْ فِي الْغُرُفَاتِ ءَامِنُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

*Wama amwalukum wala awladukumbillatee tuqarribukum AAindana zulfa illaman amana  
 waAAamila salihan faola-ikalahum jazao addiAAfi bima AAamiloowahum fee alghurufati  
 aminoon*

And it is not your wealth and progeny that draws you near to Us in an elevated position, but whoever has faith and acts with an upright morality.<sup>62</sup> For such, there is a manifold reward, and they will be secure and safe in the highest dwellings.

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62) "...has faith and acts with an upright morality."

Most of mankind, especially those who accumulate wealth and power, act according to the dictates of a system that rewards a worldly, grasping behavior. But the true system, the one that underlies the apparent system, works very differently. It operates subtly, and rewards those who act according to a higher spirit, an elevated morality. Here human actions are like a seed planted in soil and watered with water

from heaven such that a spirit comes to life within it lifting it in the higher worlds into an elevated and noble position. But this true state of affairs is concealed from those immersed in their worldly prisons due to their self-imposed blindness while those with a faith guided by the illuminating message of the revelations attain their reward.

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34:38

وَالَّذِينَ يَسْعَوْنَ فِي آيَاتِنَا مُعْجِزِينَ أُولَٰئِكَ فِي الْعَذَابِ مُحْضَرُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾

*Wallatheena yasAAawna fee ayatinamuAAajizeena ola-ika fee alAAathabi muhdaroon*

And those who strive against our signs attempting futilely<sup>63</sup> to frustrate them, they shall experience the punishment.

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63) “...attempting futilely to frustrate them....”

Futilely because “*They plot and plan, and Allah plans; but the best (and all encompassing) of planners is Allah.*” (Qur’an 8:30)

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قُلْ إِنَّ رَبِّي يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَن يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَيَقْدِرُ لَهُ، وَمَا أَنْفَقْتُمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ فَهُوَ يُخْلِفُهُ،  
 وَهُوَ خَيْرُ الرَّازِقِينَ ﴿٣٩﴾

*Qul inna rabbee yabsutu arrizqaliman yashao min AAibadihi wayaqdiru lahu wamaanfaqtum  
 min shay-in fahuwa yukhlifuhu wahuwa khayru arraziqeen*

Say, “Verily, my Lord enlarges or narrows provision<sup>64</sup> for whom He wills of His bondsmen. But what you spend of anything, for the good, He replaces it. And He is the Best of those who provide sustenance.”

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64) “...enlarges or narrows provision....”

Provision or sustenance differs from person to person depending on their circumstances, it is not necessarily to be considered as reward or punishment but rather a result of our different backgrounds, accidents of our birth, our circumstances, of the ups and downs of the societies we live in and other impinging causes beyond our control. But whatever you spend according to your means with pure intention for the benefit of others will not be a loss for you. It will be replaced with a better sustenance.

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34:40

وَيَوْمَ يَحْشُرُهُمْ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ يَقُولُ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ أَهَؤُلَاءِ إِيَّاكُمْ كَانُوا يَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٤٠﴾

*Wayawma yahshuruhum jameeAAan thummayyaqoolu lilmala-ikati ahaola-i iyyakumkanoo yaAAabudoon*

And on the Day He will gather all of them together, He will then say to the angels, "Was it you that these people turned to in worship?"<sup>65</sup>

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65) "*Was it you that these people turned to in worship?*"

On the day of judgement, the angels are asked if the people actually worshipped them.

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34:41

قَالُوا سُبْحَانَكَ أَنْتَ وَلِيِّنَا مِنْ دُونِهِمْ ۗ بَلْ كَانُوا يَعْبُدُونَ الْجِنَّ أَكْثَرُهُمْ بِهِمْ مُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٤١﴾

*Qaloo subhanaka anta waliyyunamin doonihim bal kanoo yaAAabudoona aljinna aktharuhumbihim mu/minoon*

They will say, "Glory belongs to You! You are our guardian and protector (Wali), not them."<sup>66</sup> No, rather they worshipped the Jinns: most of them put their faith in them.<sup>67</sup>

---

66) *"You are our guardian and protector (Wali), not them."*

But the angels point out that the people's intellect did not reach to that height and that God's protection (His walayat, His guardianship over them) has shielded them from such an outcome. Throughout the Qur'an, the angels are not generally shown as the focus of mistaken worship (with the possible exception of Qur'an 40:20. There, however, the people are taken to task for referring to angels as females. The following verse 40:21 talks about worshipping other deities, but that reference could likely be to idols, rather than specifically including angels). The worship has been directed to lower entities, such as the Jinn or to forces of nature, or to systems or individuals in positions of power (often given divine titles), or to idols.

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67) *"...worshipped the Jinns: most of them put their faith in them."*

Iblis is said to have been from among the Jinn.

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فَالْيَوْمَ لَا يَمْلِكُ بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ نَفْعًا وَلَا ضَرًّا وَنَقُولُ لِلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا ذُوقُوا عَذَابَ النَّارِ الَّتِي كُنتُمْ بِهَا  
تُكذِّبُونَ



*Falyawma la yamliku baAAadukumlibaAAadin nafAAan wala darran wanaqoolulillaatheena  
thalamoo thooqoo AAathabaannari allatee kuntum biha tukaththiboon*

So, on that Day no power shall they have over each other,<sup>68</sup> for profit or harm: and We shall say to the wrong doers, "Taste the Penalty of the Fire, which you used to deny."<sup>69</sup>

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68) "...no power shall they have over each other..."

With their departure from worldly life, all the trappings of wealth and power that gave them domination in that realm are gone.

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69) "...which you used to deny."

They are now confronted with a reality which the immediacy of worldly life had previously made seem unreal to them. The higher worlds are veiled by the material reality in which we dwell. So, it takes a nature sensitive to subtlety to realize that a deeper reality underlies the coarseness of the material world. They denied this reality and have now been brought face to face with it. The fire they kindled within

themselves by corrupting their own inner nature and then bringing suffering to others because of their corrupt and arrogant actions, becomes a blaze which awaits them in the higher worlds where they must face their own corrupt nature.

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34:43

وَإِذَا تُلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُنَا بِسَنَتٍ قَالُوا مَا هَذَا إِلَّا رَجُلٌ يُرِيدُ أَنْ يَصُدَّكُمْ عَمَّا كَانَ يَعْبُدُ آبَاؤَكُمْ وَقَالُوا  
مَا هَذَا إِلَّا إِفْكٌ مُّفْتَرَىٰ وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِلْحَقِّ لَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ إِنَّ هَذَا إِلَّا سِحْرٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٤٣﴾

*Wa-itha tulat AAalayhim ayatunabayyinatini qaloo ma hatha illarajulun yureedu an yasuddakum AAamma kanayaAAabudu abaokum waqaloo ma hathailla ifkun muftaran waqala allatheenakafaroo lilhaqqi lamma jaahum in hathailla sihrun mubeen*

And when the clear evidence of Our signs (ayat) is mentioned to them, they say, “This is nothing but a man who wants to hinder you from following (worshipping) what your ancestors followed.<sup>70</sup> This (what he brings) is nothing but a lie he invented.” And those who obscure and cover and flee from the truth

(kafaru) say when the truth (haqq) comes to them, “This is clearly nothing but magic (to deceive you).”<sup>71</sup>

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70) “...*what your ancestors followed.*”

Here, the power of maintaining the status quo is highlighted. Turning towards truth requires relinquishing many of the structures of power and influence which have built up over generations. So, tradition is often tied to the intricacies of political control, economic authority, and social status that has built up over time. It is difficult to allow change to enter a system that has consolidated the sway of authority over a long period of time.

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71) “...*clearly nothing but magic (to deceive you).*”

Revelation and the power of its message seems like magic or sorcery to them. Here is a message consisting simply of words, but with such power contained within both the language and the content that it becomes a manifest threat to all the existing corrupt structures of power.

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34:44

وَمَا آتَيْنَاهُمْ مِنْ كُتُبٍ يَدْرُسُونَهَا وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهِمْ قَبْلَكَ مِنْ نَذِيرٍ ﴿٤٤﴾

And We had not given them any books<sup>72</sup> which they study, nor did We send them, before you, any warner.

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72) “... *We had not given them any books....*”

They had not received or inherited any scriptures. Here it highlights the importance of revelation as opposed to simply following traditions passed down from generation to generation. A book that is sent down provides a connection with the principles and truths that originate in the higher worlds and then manifest in our earthly existence. The Qur’an asks elsewhere, “*Or did We give them a book, so that they stand upon a clear proof from it.*” (Qur’an 35:40)

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34:45

وَكَذَّبَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ وَمَا بَلَّغُوا مِعْشَارَ مَا آتَيْنَاهُمْ فَكَذَّبُوا رُسُلِي فَكَيْفَ كَانَ نَكِيرِ ﴿٤٥﴾

*Wakaththaba allatheena minqablihim wama balaghoo miAAashara ma ataynahum fakaththaboo rusulee fakayfa kana nakeer*

And those who came before them denied as well; these have not attained a tenth of what We had granted to those:<sup>73</sup> but they denied My messengers, so how was My rejection (of them).

---

73) "...a tenth of what We had granted to those...."

The current generation has not attained even a tenth of the power, wealth, and capability of those who preceded them. Despite this they still act as if their achievements are like a fortress that will protect them from any erosion of their power and from what the prophet brings.

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34:46

﴿ قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَعْظَمُكُمْ بَوَاحِدَةٍ أَنْ تَقُومُوا لِلَّهِ مِثْلِي وَفَرْدِي ثُمَّ تَنْفَكُوا مَا بِصَاحِبِكُمْ مِّنْ جَنَّةٍ إِنَّ هُوَ إِلَّا نَذِيرٌ لَّكُمْ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ عَذَابٍ شَدِيدٍ ﴾

*Qul innama AAithukumbiwahidatin an taqoomoo lillahi mathna wafuradathumma tatafakkaroo ma bisahibikum min jinnatin inhuwa illa natheerun lakum bayna yaday AAathabinshadeed*

Say, “I give you only one crucial advice. That you stand up<sup>74</sup> for God (Allah) in pairs or individually,<sup>75</sup> and then reflect deeply that your companion<sup>76</sup> is not mad (influenced, controlled, or deluded). He is only a warner warning of a severe punishment.”

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74) “...*stand up*...”

That you participate actively and ethically in the affairs that will affect the future of your society. That you do so by rising above the tribal and generational biases which blind people to the truth that manifests through the prophet.

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75) “...*in pairs or individually*...”

In consultation with others or through consultation with your own individual intellect and “*fitra*” (primordial nature).

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76) “...*your companion*...”

The use of companion indicates that they are familiar with the character of the Prophet who has been well known among them before the declaration of his prophethood. So, they should know his trustworthiness and not be influenced by spurious false accusations made against him in order to bias the minds of the people.

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قُلْ مَا سَأَلْتُكُمْ مِنْ أَجْرٍ فَهُوَ لَكُمْ إِنَّ أَجْرِي إِلَّا عَلَى اللَّهِ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ ﴿٤٧﴾

*Qul ma saaltukum min ajrin fahuwalakum in ajriya illa AAala Allahi wahuwaAAala kulli shay-in shaheed*

Say, “No reward do I ask of you: it is (all) for your benefit:<sup>77</sup> my reward is only from God (Allah):<sup>78</sup> And He is a witness over all things.”

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77) “...it is (all) for your benefit...”

There is no self-interest involved among prophets. They bring what they bring to avert self-imposed disaster from a society that has lost its way and to guide it to a felicitous path and a beneficial future.

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78) “...reward is only from God...”

If there is a reward it is one that pertains to the higher worlds and is entirely in the hands of God.

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34:48

قُلْ إِنَّ رَبِّي يَبْدُفُ بِالْحَقِّ عِلْمَ الْغُيُوبِ ﴿٤٨﴾

Say, “Indeed my Lord (powerfully) hurls the truth.<sup>79</sup>

The complete Knower of the unseen.”

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79) “...hurls the truth.”

Truth originates in a higher level of existence and has a force of reality against which falsehood is ephemeral, illusory, and vanishing. The higher overwhelms the lower.

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34:49

قُلْ جَاءَ الْحَقُّ وَمَا يُبْدِيُ الْبَاطِلُ وَمَا يُعِيدُ ﴿٤٩﴾

*Qul jaa alhaqqu wamayubdi-o albatilu wama yuAAeed*

Say, “The Truth has come, and falsehood can neither create (anything of worth) nor recreate anything.”<sup>80</sup>

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80) “...neither create (anything of worth) nor recreate anything.”

Falsehood is like a weak parody of truth. It cannot originate anything

of value but perhaps only make a feeble and twisted counterfeit or facsimile of the truth in order to deceive those who do not use their intellects and do not attach themselves to the protection and guidance of revelations. When a prophet, within whose heart God has placed the truth and whose revelation manifests this truth in words, arrives to deliver the message, falsehood crumbles before the force of the message put into sincere action.

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34:50

قُلْ إِنْ ضَلَلْتُ فَإِنَّمَا أَضِلُّ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِي وَإِنِ اهْتَدَيْتُ فِيمَا يُوحَىٰ إِلَيَّ رَبِّي إِنَّهُ سَمِيعٌ قَرِيبٌ ﴿٥٠﴾

*Qul in dalaltu fa-innama adilluAAala nafsee wa-ini ihtadaytu fabima yooheelayya rabbee innahu sameeAAun qareeb*

Say, “If I err, I only err against my own soul (nafs).<sup>81</sup>

But if I am guided, it is by what my Lord (Rabb) reveals to me.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, He is All-Hearing, All-Near.”

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81) “...against my own soul (nafs).”

The soul (nafs) is the place where the higher and lower worlds both manifest within the human framework. Both the physical, animal

(bashar) aspect of humans and the spiritual (insan) aspect meet within the arena of the nafs. “Surely We created humans in the highest and most beautiful of statures and then sent them to the lowest of the low.” (Qur’an 14:4–5) The low and the high exist together and contend with one another. The implication is that when one acts without consideration of the higher aspects which are the true origin, then they will reduce themselves to less than what their reality contains and will inevitably err. And their error will be due to their own self since they act against the higher aspects of their self.

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82) “...by what my Lord (Rabb) reveals to me.”

What God provides is from a high, elevated perspective and position that encompasses all that is lower and therefore reduces or prevents the likelihood of self-caused error.

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34:51

وَلَوْ نَرَىٰ إِذْ فَرَعُوا فَلَا قَوَّةَ وَأُخِذُوا مِنْ مَّكَانٍ قَرِيبٍ ﴿٥١﴾

*Walaw tara ith faziAAoo falafawta waokhithoo min makanin qareeb*

If you could only see when they will be gripped by fear. They will have no escape and will be seized from a station that is near.<sup>83</sup>

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83) *“...seized from a station that is near.”*

As emphasized in Qur’an 34:50, God is All-Near. He is near to His creation with a nearness that surpasses our understanding. If we perceive that we are distant from Him this is our error that arises from our limitations and our immersion in the intricate detail of the created world and our inability or unwillingness to penetrate beyond the surface of existence to become aware of the vast unseen structures that support existence. So, we exist, at every instant, in a station of nearness to the One who is All-Near. Our lack of awareness of this, or our complete oblivion towards it, or our denial of it, does not alter this metaphysical fact of existence. Death is when the veils which blocked this reality from us are lifted and the position of nearness, which may have been denied by us in life, becomes manifest. Then we will become aware of the true implications and meaning of all that occurred in life, and how close or far off the mark we were in what we believed and what we rejected. This is the fearful moment when sudden realization of the true state of affairs dawns upon those who obscured and covered and fled from the truth (kafaru) and they are gripped with fear because now they have full knowledge of the reality of their situation. They have been seized from a station that is near, that was always near, but in their worldly life they put all their effort into fleeing from the blessing of that nearness, into distancing themselves from that nearness that was woven into their very being.

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وَقَالُوا ءَامَنَّا بِهِءِ وَأَنَّى لَهُمُ التَّنَاطُشُ مِن مَّكَانٍ بَعِيدٍ ﴿٥٢﴾

*Waqaloo amanna bihiwaanna lahumu attanawushu min makaninbaAAeed*

And they will (then) say, “We have faith in it.” But how can they receive it (faith) from such a distant station.<sup>84</sup>

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84) “...from such a distant station.”

During their lives they spent their efforts, their energy, their hearts and minds pursuing all that distanced them from the One who is All-Near. In this pursuit they generated veils that covered their minds, degenerated their intellect, rusted their hearts, and removed themselves from the elevated higher aspects of their own selves (nafs). They made themselves distant from the One who offered nearness and thus created, for themselves, a distant station, a self-imposed distant position cutting off the possibility of faith, of knowledgeable belief. And once they passed the threshold of death and the true situation became apparent to them, they declared their faith. But they have passed a final threshold and they cannot return to their worldly life. That world has now become a distant station from which they are cut off and the

opportunities that were available to them there have been left behind forever. Now they are in the world of the harvest, where the implications of their actions and their inner state will manifest outwardly and the consequences of these will be felt.

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34:53

وَقَدْ كَفَرُوا بِهِ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَيَقْذِفُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ مِنْ مَّكَانٍ بَعِيدٍ ﴿٥٣﴾

*Waqad kafaroo bihi min qablu wayaqthifoonabilghaybi min makanin baAAeed*

And certainly, they entirely obscured and covered and fled from the truth (kafaru) before, and they indulged in unfounded (slandering) conjectures about the unseen from a distant station.<sup>85</sup>

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85) "...conjectures about the unseen from a distant station."

Their hostility to the truth or to even acknowledging the possibility of unseen higher worlds was such that their arrogance took them to a distant station far removed from truth and ultimate reality. The distant station is a place where deep knowledge is cast aside for ignorance, and the position they base themselves on is a benighted one shrouded in

darkness, devoid of real comprehension, leading them to cast aspersions on that about which they knew nothing.

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34:54

وَحِيلَ بَيْنَهُمْ وَبَيْنَ مَا يَشْتَهُونَ كَمَا فُعِلَ بِأَشْيَاعِهِمْ مِّن قَبْلُ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا فِي شَكٍّ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٥٤﴾

*Waheela baynahum wabayna mayashtahoona kama fuAAila bi-ashyaAAihim min qabluinnahum kanoo fee shakkin mureeb*

And between them and that which they desire will be placed a barrier,<sup>86</sup> as was done in the past with their kind: indeed, they were enmeshed in profoundly disquieting doubt.<sup>87</sup>

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86) "...will be placed a barrier..."

The barrier of death which makes it impossible for them to return to their earthly life to correct their errors, and the higher world of the hereafter which has a structure of truth that prevents them from attaining the amoral desires or goals they lusted after when they were alive. Now they are cut off from achieving any of their desires, either in the world of material existence or in the higher world they enter



upon after death. What they sow in their worldly life, they reap in the life to come, and for those that reject or believe themselves to be above all moral postulates, the likely outcome is that they will reap a bitter harvest.

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87) “...*enmeshed in profoundly disquieting doubt.*”

They relentlessly and amorally pursued their advantage and their desires during their lifetimes and regarded the moral structure of existence as a hinderance or a complete fiction. They exhibited a disturbing doubt that caused them to cast aspersions on anything that would hinder their pursuit of worldly power, wealth, advantage, and desire. Now they are hemmed in by a barrier that consists of the realities that they doubted and denied, prisoners in a cage constructed out of their own debased inner reality.

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