

Words of Wisdom



by Babar Ahmed

Words of Wisdom from Behind Bars

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The Messenger of Allah (sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam) said: "Some people will come on the Day of Judgement and their Imaan will be outstanding, it's light will shine from their chests and from their right hands.

So it will be said to them, 'Glad tidings for you today, Assalamu 'alaikum and Goodness for you, Enter into it (Jannah) forever!'

So the Angels and the Prophets will be jealous of the Love of Allah for them."

So the Sahabah asked, "Who are they, Ya Rasoolullah?"

He (sallahu 'alayhi wasalam) replied,

"They are not from us and they are not from you. You are my companions but they are my beloved. They will come after you and will find the Book (the Qur'an) made redundant by the people, and a Sunnah which has been killed by them. So they will grab hold of the Book and the Sunnah and revive them.

So they read them and teach them (the Qur'an and the Sunnah) to the people and they will experience in that path a punishment more severe and more ugly than what you (O Sahabah) have experienced.

Indeed the Imaan of one of them is equivalent to the Imaan of forty of you.

The Shaheed of one of them is equivalent to forty of your Shuhadaa'. Because you found a helper towards the truth (the Prophet) and they will find no helper towards the truth.

So they will be surrounded by tyrant rulers in every place, and they will be in the surroundings of Bait-ul-Maqdis (Al-Quds, Masjid al-Aqsa). The Nussrah (Help and Victory) of Allah will come to them, and they will have the honour of it on their hands."

Then he (sallahu 'alayhi wasalam) said, "O Allah, give them the Nussrah and make them my close friends in Jannah."

- Reported by Ahmad

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Introduction

Asalaam alikum.

All praise be to Allaah, the Lord of the Worlds and peace and blessings of Allaah be upon the last Prophet Muhammed salallahu alaihi wasalam.

This is a compilation of works by brother Babar Ahmed – may Allaah hasten his release. His work is presented as it is without much modification. I have inserted some headings where the author has not provided any.

I pray that this compilation will be of benefit to those of us who expect to be imprisoned someday for the sake of Allaah.

May Allaah hasten His Victory to the Muslims. Ameen.

Ibn Abdur-Raheem.

Babar Ahmad

By Wikipedia

Babar Ahmad (b. 1974) is a prisoner currently held in the UK.

Ahmad was born in London, the son of a British Civil Servant who immigrated from Pakistan in 1962. He studied for a degree in Engineering in London and after graduation got a job in IT Support at Imperial College, London.

December 2003 Arrest

In December 2003 Ahmad was arrested under the provisions of the Terrorism Act 2000. On 2nd December 2003, at 5.40 a.m., police from the Anti-Terrorist Squad raided his house. Ahmad was thrown against a wall and then to the floor. He was searched, including, Ahmad alleges, his genital area and was then handcuffed. Ahmad alleges that he was further beaten, sworn at and his religion insulted by police both in his house and on the way to the police station. In custody he demanded an X-Ray and medical attention, but the Forensic Medical Examiners who saw him did not see a need for it. Ahmad was kept in custody for six days while his house was searched, and was then released on December 8, 2003 without charge.

Complaint Against the Police

Immediately on his release Ahmad filed a complaint alleging police brutality. He was examined by M. Gavalas, a consultant in Accident and Emergency at University College Hospital, London. Mr Gavalas did not find any significant injuries but wrote "There is clearly unequivocal evidence that he [Ahmad] was subjected to a harrowing physical and psychological assault by police officers. He was clearly badly beaten up although in a reasonably controlled manner ... aimed at inflicting significant soft tissue trauma with pain, but not to cause any life-threatening injuries."

Ahmad's complaint was dismissed by the Independent Police Complaints' Commission (IPCC).

August 2004 Arrest

On 5th August 2004, Ahmad was re-arrested outside his workplace under the Extradition Act 2003 following an Extradition Warrant from the United States of America. Ahmad was taken to the Woodhill High Security Prison in Milton Keynes where he remains.

The Charges Against Ahmad

Ahmad has been charged by a Connecticut court with supporting terrorism, conspiring to kill Americans and of money laundering. The charges relate to an American-based website that Ahmad allegedly used to recruit fighters for Afghanistan and Chechnya. The American government claims that Ahmad "conspir[ed] to support terrorism", that he "sought, invited and solicited contributions" *via* websites and e-mails, and that he ran several websites urging Muslims to use "every means at their disposal" to train for jihad.

The American government also claims that Ahmad had classified military documents describing the movements and formations of a Navy battle group and was in e-mail contact with an enlisted man aboard the USS Benfold, a Navy destroyer as well as with a Chechen rebel leader.

Another site run by Ahmad is said to have carried an appeal for "tens of thousands" of gas masks and nuclear, chemical and biological warfare suits.

Ahmad denies all charges and is fighting extradition to the United States.

The Conspiracy

Ahmad and his supporters allege that he is a political prisoner who is the victim of a vast conspiracy on the part of the British and American governments as well as by the media.

Part 1

Breaking a Prison Cell

There are *three ways to leave your cell temporarily in a prison*, and you can do this almost whenever you want.

1) The first way is by reading the Qur'an, whereby Allah makes you leave your cell and embark on a journey away from the prison. Sometimes He takes you millions of years in the past, to before the Creation of the Heavens and the Earth. Sometimes, thousands of years ago, to the time of the Prophets that came before you. Sometimes he drops you into the life of Prophet Muhammad (salla Allahu alayhi was-salam) and you are living with the Sahabah¹. Sometimes He takes you to another prison, the prison of the Hellfire. Or He may take you into the future, thousands of years ahead. You might go to court on the Day of Judgment where He is the Judge and there are no barristers, solicitors, jury, nor media; there are no human rights and the only prison guards are stern, harsh angels. Frequently He will take you to meet Him and tell you about Himself.

2) The second way is to go back into your own past, as much as your memory permits. Go back 5 years, 10 years, more or less. Go back to your wedding day, graduation, the day Allah guided you to Islam, the birth of your first child, happy moments, sad moments, difficult moments, *but not moments where you say, "If only..." and question Allah's destiny.*

3) The third way into your future, having taken assumptions. What if you spend the rest of your life in prison - what will you do? What if you are released tomorrow? What if you spend three more years in prison?

¹ The Sahabah were the companions of the Prophet Muhammad.

Part 2

The chosen one

*“Put chains around my hands and burn my chest,
Yet you can never besiege my mind for a minute,
The light is in my heart,
And my heart is in the Hands of my Lord,
And my Lord is my helper and keeper.”*

Allah says in the Qur’an, 32:24:

“And We made from them leaders, guiding others with Our order, once they had patience, and possessed certainty in our signs.”

The scholars said, in relation to this: “One cannot attain leadership in the religion except after patience and constancy. **So the believing slave must know that when he is exposed to trials, not only prison, then this is an indication that Allah (subhanahu wa ta’ala) has chosen for him leadership in the religion. Therefore, he is currently being examined, so that Allah may see, and the believers may see, the truth of his iman and constancy.** Most of the awliyaa’ (beloved) of Allah were tested by this test. There is the Prophet of Allah, Yusuf (alayhis Salam) as the Qur’an does not stop at his imprisonment, and neither does it mention much about it. Allah says, *“And he remained in prison for a few more years...”* like that, as if it is no big deal, as if staying in prison is normal, routine and easy matter.”

You are in prison for two reasons:

Firstly, Allah has in store for you a great position and lofty stations in the future, that you are unaware of, and that He is currently preparing you for this position as you are not good enough for it at present.

Secondly, He is cleaning away your previous sins and mistakes to make you even more worthy of this position.

Part 3

Firaasah (Intuition)

Firaasah can be translated to mean intuition, insight, sixth sense, gut feeling, deep judgment, and related terms. Although it is an ability granted by Allah, the theory of it can be studied. Imam Ash-Shafi went to Yemen to study a course in the theory of Firaasah as it used to be taught in the Islamic institutes at that time.

The concept of Firaasah was what all the Prophets of Allah were blessed with, but in their case it was divinely bestowed. For example, Prophet Ibrahim (alayhis salam) was given Firaasah to see that a star, the moon and the sun could not be his god. Likewise, Yusuf (alayhis salam) was given Firaasah in terms of his ability to look deep into dreams and interpret them. His father Yaqub (alayhis salam) also had this ability and it was manifest in him asking his sons to enter the city from different gates when they went to show Bin Yamin to their brother Yusuf (alayhis salam), as Allah describes in Surah 12:67-68. And obviously there are numerous accounts from the life of the Messenger of Allah (salallaahu 'alayhi wa salam) showing Firaasah.

Likewise some of the Sahabah were blessed with Firaasah. Abu Bakr (radhiyAllahu 'anhu), for example, when he alone knew the real meaning behind the revelation of Surah An-Nasr (110) was signaling the approaching death of the Prophet (salallaahu 'alayhi wa salam). Then there is 'Umar (radhiyAllahu 'anhu), about whom the Prophet said, *“Amongst nations before you there were inspired people (who were not Prophets) and if there was to be one from amongst my people then it would be 'Umar. Umar radhiyAllahu 'anhu , about whom revelation was sent down 19 times in the favour of his opinion as opposed to the opinion of the Messenger of Allah..*

Finally, many scholars of the early and latter generations have shown evidence of Firaasah in their lives, and indeed their writings. For instance it is reported that when Imam An-Nawawi was a boy of seven years old, he was sleeping next to his father on the 27th night of Ramadan. When half the night had passed, he woke up all of a sudden and asked his father, *“O father! What is the light which has filled the house?”* The whole family woke up but they could not see anything, whereupon Imam An-Nawawi's father said, *“I then realised it was Laylatul Qadr (the Night of Power).”*

Prison is the perfect environment to develop and be blessed with Firaasah. Ibn-Al Jawzi wrote in his book, Sayd Al-Khatir; ***“I have not seen or heard of anything that brings repose, honour and dignity as much as seclusion does. It helps one to stay away from evil, it protects one's honour and it saves time. It keeps one away from the jealous minded who take pleasure in your affliction. It promotes remembrance of the Hereafter and it allows one to reflect on the meeting with Allah. In times of seclusion, one's thoughts may roam in that which is beneficial, in that which contains wisdom...”***

Therefore, as it can be seen, in seclusion one's mind develops, views are ripened and one is able to delve into a sea of ideas and concepts. In such a state, the mind is free to

form its opinions. Isolated from the company of others, the soul is free to achieve a state of rapture and to hunt for the stimulating thought.

The ideal environment in which to develop Firaasah is prison. In prison, one is free to worship Allah to the utmost, completing both obligatory and supererogatory deeds until, as per the Hadith Qudsi, *"I become the sight with which he sees, the hearing with which he hears, the hand with which he strikes and the foot with which he walks..."* Therefore Firaasah is only developed when in an environment of vast amounts of good deeds coupled with lack of sins and plenty of forgiveness. And there is no better place for this than prison, which is why prison is also known as the 'factory of men'.

The Prophet said, *"Fear the Firaasah of a believer, for he sees with the Light of Allah."* **The strength of a believer's Firaasah is directly linked to the strength and level of his Imaan.** When his Imaan reaches a high enough level, his Firaasah increases to the extent that Allah begins to directly communicate with him in the form of righteous dreams (visions) regarding the future of both himself and others.

It is reported that many pious people realise the time of their death shortly before it happens. For example, Fatima bint Muhammad bathed on Friday, wore her best clothes and lay down on a bed in the middle of her open courtyard awaiting her death. Her noble soul was lifted a little while later.

Likewise, pious people also have dreams sometimes of significant world events that are going to take place, before they happen. The Prophet said, *"Prophecy is one forty-sixth part of prophethood."* He also said, *"Towards the end of time, the righteous dreams of believers will start to become reality."*

Yet another manifestation of Firaasah is the ability to judge or instantly form an opinion about people, in the absence of apparent evidence such as prior knowledge or information about those people. That is why some pious people can tell the sincerity or otherwise, of a new person within minutes of meeting them for the first time, even if they have no prior knowledge about that person. This is an inherent quality in many successful men and leaders, which is why prison is the university of leaders and successful men. Those who have experienced the seclusion of prison look at problems, difficulties and obstacles from a different angle, in a different light to that which others observe the same.

Part 4 Prisoners of Freedom

Every Man is a Prisoner

Ibn Al Qayyim raheemahullah said; **“Just as a slave will be in turmoil if he had many masters to serve, the heart will be in turmoil if it is occupied by the Love of anything other than Allah...”**

Depending on how one looks at it, there are many prison systems that people are imprisoned in without actually realising it. Some people are imprisoned by the routine of earning money; they have to earn money whether they like it or not. Others are imprisoned in the regime of serving their families; they have no choice in this regard as the family places continual, daily demands on them. Then there are those imprisoned by their own desires, as Ibn Taymiyyah said; **“The one imprisoned is the one who is prisoner to his desires. And the one behind bars is the one whose heart is barred from His Lord.”**

Therefore, in a sense, almost every human being on Earth is a prisoner and imprisoned to one thing or another. He is imprisoned because he is not free to worship his Lord as he wants, he is not free to practice his religion to the utmost and he is restricted in his ability to study and contemplate upon the Book of Allah, the Sunnah of his Messenger (salallaahu 'alayhi wa salam) and all other pearls of Islamic knowledge and wisdom.

On the other hand, you, O prisoner, are free from all these other prison systems. Whilst in prison, you are like a king who only has One Master to serve. You are a king because you are free to do what you want. The guards are your slaves; they are there to serve you. Your food is served to you at mealtime, you are given washed clothes to wear, your surroundings are cleaned for you and your needs are catered for, all for free and without you having to spend a single coin. You can eat when you want, sleep when you want, pray when you want, think when and how you want, and worship when you want. You have only one Master to serve and all of your material needs are taken care of so you are free to serve this One Master how he wants you to serve Him.

The Meaning of True Freedom

True freedom is not the ability to go where you want, sin when you want, disobey your Lord when you want and think how others want you to think.

Rather, true freedom is the freedom to live for one's religion, beliefs and principles. As one scholar said: “True freedom is to live with your head held up high, your forehead raised, with self dignity, each day better than before, tomorrow better than today, no matter what may come to pass.”

“Yet, those who desire to live, merely for the sake of living, without any principles to which they adhere and without any goal for which they would die; they have ceased to be anything existing on this Earth. Allah says about them, “And you will surely find them the most greedy of people for life...” (Quran 2:96).”

In this same context, Martin Luther King, a black American Civil Rights activist in the 1960's, is reported to have said: *“A man not prepared to die for his principles, is not worth living.”*

Part 5

The Straight Path

Allah says in Surah Al-Fatiha (1:6-7) *“Guide us to the Straight Path. The Path of those whom You have blessed...”* Every day, at least 17 times, every Muslim invokes Allah to guide him or her to the Straight Path. What is the Straight Path? Allah tells us in the next verse that it is the Path of those whom He has blessed. Who are the ones whom Allah has blessed? The scholars of tafseer said that the answer to this question lies in Surah An-Nisa (4:69): *“And whosoever obeys Allah and His Messenger (salallaahu 'alayhi wa salam) shall be with those WHOM ALLAH HAS BLESSED: the Prophets, the Truthful ones, the Martyrs and the Righteous. And what an excellent fellowship are they.”* **Therefore, the pre-condition for being a member of this elite group is obedience to Allah and His Messenger (salallaahu 'alayhi wa salam). But what happens in a world when everyone claims to obey Allah and His Messenger - how does one ascertain whether or not one is on the Straight Path?** The following example illustrates the answer to this dilemma.

Imagine a man sets out on a journey to a particular destination and follows a particular path. Then another man wants to reach the same destination and so he tries to follow the same path as the first man. How do we know if the second man took the same path as the first? We compare what they experienced on their respective journeys. Therefore, if the first man saw a particular stream, a particular rock, a particular tree, etc. and then the second man saw those same landmarks, we can say that they most probably followed the same path. However, if the second man did not see any of these milestones, or the things he saw differed from what the first man saw, then we can say that something went wrong.

If we look at the lives of the Prophets (alayhum salaam) who are the first group whom Allah has blessed, and then we look at the Prophet (salallaahu 'alayhi wa salam) then the Companions (radhiyAllahu 'anhum), then those who followed them, then the famous classical scholars (raheemahumullah), all the way until today, what do we find? What is common to all of the above?

- Prophet Nuh (alayhis salaam) was ridiculed.
- Prophet Ibrahim (alayhis salam) was thrown in the fire following which he had to leave his wife and son in the barren valley of Makkah.
- Musa (alayhis salaam) fled from Firoun and lived a life in exile for many years.
- Prophet Yusuf (alayhis salaam) was imprisoned unjustly for seven years.
- They tried to crucify Isa (alayhis salam).
- The Prophet (salallaahu 'alayhi wa salam) was abused, assaulted, evicted from his homeland, etc.
- We know from the Quran that some Prophets were even killed by their followers.

These people are the most beloved to Allah. If there were anything bad, shameful or dishonourable about these trials, then Allah would not have allowed them to happen to the best of His Creation.

Likewise, if we look at some of the Companions of the Prophet: Abu Bakr and Umar (radhiyAllahu'anhuma) beaten physically; Bilal, Khabbab, Yasir, Sumayyah and Ammar (radhiyAllahu 'anhum) tortured; Khubaib executed, etc. This means that the Companions were following the same path as the Prophet because they experienced the same things. In the same way, we find the early scholars: Abu Haneefah imprisoned, Imam Malik tortured and ridiculed, Imam Shafi kicked out, Imam Ahmad imprisoned and publicly lashed. This means that these scholars were also following the same path as the Prophets because they experienced the same things. Therefore, if you are seeing the same scenery, milestones and landmarks as they saw, then that means that you are also on the same path insha-Allah. **And being on the same path mean that you will reach the same destination, insha-Allah.**

Part 6

Worth Thinking

The Dark Cloud

Allah said in the Quran (2:260): *“And when Ibrahim (alayhis salaam) said: ‘My Lord! Show me how you give life to the dead.’ He said: ‘Do you not believe (that I can do that)?’ He replied: ‘Certainly, but just to bring satisfaction to my heart...”* The rest of the verse describes how Allah showed him a sign and brought peace to his heart something that Ibrahim already believed in. Sometimes you will feel like asking Allah to show you a sign, just to reassure you that you are on the Truth and that Allah is on your side. If, at any one time you feel like that, make wudu, pray two rakahs and ask Allah to show you a sign. Then look out of the window towards the sky. One brother describes his thoughts when he did that.

“I asked Allah to show me a sign, on one of the days when I was feeling a bit low, and then looked out of the window at the sky. I was admiring Allah’s Creation, when suddenly I saw a huge, dark cloud approaching the prison. It was massive and looked terrifying- it came and overshadowed the prison. However, as slowly as it came, it drifted away and the shadow disappeared. I thought to myself that this is Allah telling me that no matter how bad your situation is, or how big your problem is, or how terrifying your circumstances are, there will be relief. Just like the terrifying cloud did not overshadow the prison forever, similarly every bad situation will not last forever: there will be relief after every difficulty, as Allah said in the Quran (94:5-6): *“So indeed with hardship there comes ease. Indeed with hardship there comes ease.”* One hardship cannot overcome two eases. No matter how long the night is, there will always be a dawn at the end of it. And the dawn always appears after the darkest part of the night.

The Broken Foot

On the authority of Ibn Umar (radhiyAllahu anhu), the Messenger of Allah (salallaahu 'alayhi wa salam) said: **“Fear the dua (supplication) of he who has been wronged, for verily it ascends to the skies faster than the rays of light.”** (Al-Hakim, Sahih). A narration (Ahmad, Sahih) reads: *“Fear the dua of he who has been wronged, even if he is a disbeliever, for there is no veil between it (and Allah).”*

In an incident narrated in Sahih Muslim and others, a woman once accused Saeed ibn Zaid (radhiyAllahu anhu), one of the ten companions of the Prophet (salallaahu 'alayhi wa salam) promised Paradise, of stealing some of her property. They appeared before the ruler, and Saeed prayed: **“O Allah! If you know her to be lying, then make her blind and make her graveyard in her own house.”** The narrator of this incident said, *“I saw her (later on), blind. She used to walk touching the walls and say, ‘The dua of Saeed has afflicted me!’* Once, she passed by a well inside her house and fell into it, so it became her grave.”

Once in a London prison, a Muslim brother (already unjustly imprisoned) was praying in his cell. The cell was extremely small and the only way to make sujood was towards the door, such that if someone opened the door, it would cross the path of the one praying. The brother finished his food and placed his utensils next to the door so the guard could collect them whilst the brother prayed. During his prayer a huge prison guard came to collect his utensils. He saw the brother was praying, so on purpose he opened the door fully until the utensils fell onto the brother's prayer mat and he stood in front of the brother, with his big, black, steel-capped boots at the place where the brother would place his head during sujood. Knowing that the brother was praying, the guard began to rudely demand that he be given the utensils in his hand, in order to disrupt the brother's prayer. The brother refused and went into prostration with the guard standing in front of him and his boots next to the brother's head. During that same prostration, the brother pleaded to Allah; *"O Allah, you know how this thug has wronged me and tried to disrupt my prayers to you. O Allah, Break this foot!"*

After finishing his prayers the brother went straight to the room where the guards sat and complained about the guard trying to disrupt his prayer. That same guard was unrepentant and began to argue with and blame the brother so the brother said to him, *"I will leave God to deal with you."*

No sooner had he said that, there was an almighty crash and a huge steel cabinet fell on the same foot of the guard. He started to scream and wail like a baby, until all the other prisoners heard and began asking what had happened. Other guards rushed to him, put him on a stretcher and an ambulance took him to hospital. It was a number of days before that prison guard returned to work at the prison. It can safely be said as far as is known, that guard never ever stood in front of or tried to disrupt a Muslim's prayer again.

It appears that the only reason for the few minutes delay in the dua being answered was for the brother to finish his prayer and walk to the guards' room.

"Fear the dua of he who has been wronged, for verily it ascends to the skies faster than rays of light." (Hadith)

Power and Greatness/ The Taste of Dignity and Honour

A poet said, *"Do you consider greatness a mere morsel to be eaten like a date? Truly, until you have licked the (bitter) cactus, you will never be great."*

Imam Ash-Shafi said, ***"No one becomes powerful until he is tested."***

Sometimes, you O prisoner think about what you are missing out on whilst you are imprisoned. If you could see beyond your prison walls, you would see that this is what you are missing out on: eating, drinking, sleeping, socialising, shopping, etc. This is what the world outside is busy with: *none of which will be of any use on the Day of Judgement.*

However, you also eat and drink, but the food and drink you are tasting is not the

food and drink they taste. Even kings and princes cannot taste the food and drink you taste, because your food and drink has the taste of dignity and honour, which cannot be purchased with gold or silver. You also sleep, but you sleep in peace, knowing that your sleep carries more reward than a person outside, standing the night in prayer. You also socialise, but inside your cell you have Allah's angels for company (due to dhikr (remembrance) that you make); and outside your cell you associate with the awliyaa (friends) of Allah, when you meet your fellow brothers who have been imprisoned because of their religion. *You are also shopping, but you are shopping for Allah's Paradise and paying with your life and your wealth.* You are burning the leaves of your life in order to light the path to Paradise, as the Almighty said: *'Indeed Allah has purchased the believers and their lives and their wealth in return for Paradise.'* (Quran 9:11)

A scholar said: *"It is the great who wrestle with horrors and undertake difficulties in order to achieve nobility. They are willing to pay whatever the price, even death; for the cup of death only passes once, while their deeds and words are repeated, time after time."*

Strangers

The Prophet said: *"Islam began as something strange, and it will return, as it once began, to something strange; so give glad tidings to the strangers."* (Bukhari, Muslim). One explanation of the Ghurabaa' (strangers) is those who are estranged from their loved one because of his religion.

There used to be a Companion who used to frequent the gatherings of the Prophet with his little boy. Then the Prophet didn't see him for a while, so he enquired about him, whereupon he was told that his little boy had died. So the Prophet went to visit him and said to him words to the effect of: ***"Which do you prefer: that you spend your whole life with your son, and then you die whilst he is alive or that you have patience and on the Day of Judgment you do not come to a single gate of Paradise except that you find that your boy has already beaten you to that gate, opening it for you?"*** The man chose the second option so the Prophet said to him: *"Thus will it be for you!"* Thereupon, the other Companions asked: *"Does this apply just for this man or for all of us?"* So the Prophet replied: *"For all of you."* (Sahih)

This is the story of a Companion who lost the company of his young boy through death, and was patient. What then, of a person who lost the company of his parents, his wife, his brothers, his sisters, his children, family, etc. for the sake of the religion, and was patient? Although this hadeeth does not refer to prisoners, there is nothing to prevent you making dua to Allah that He replicates this situation for you on the Day of Judgment so that you find all your family members at the gates of Paradise, opening them for you.

Part 7

The Sale of a Soul

Allah says in the Quran, 9:111 ***“Indeed Allah has purchased from the believers their souls and their wealth, in exchange for Paradise...”***

If one man sells a garment to another man at a mutually agreed price, the transaction is complete once the seller has handed over the garment to the buyer. If both parties agreed in advance of the transaction that the buyer would make the payment at a later, specified date, then the sale is still considered complete. Once the sale is complete, does the seller have the right to impose conditions on the buyer with regards to the use of the garment? Can he, for example, say to the buyer that he cannot wear the garment on a Friday, or that he cannot wear it to sleep? Of course not. The transaction is complete and the buyer is free to use the garment however he wants. If he wants, he can keep it, or wear it, throw it, sell it, or give it away. It is now his property to do with what he pleases.

Likewise, O prisoner, if you have sold your soul to Allah at a mutually agreed price, why then do you impose conditions on the buyer after the sale? Is not Allah free to do with your soul whatever He likes? Why do you say that I wanted instant Paradise and not imprisonment? Surely, it is none of your business once you have sold your soul to Allah! So what if Allah decides to imprison you for a while before granting you Paradise? Is He not allowed to use your soul as He pleases now that you have sold it to him? Is this not what you asked Allah for at least seventeen times a day since you began to make Salah: *“Guide us to the Straight Path. The Path of those whom You have blessed... (Prophets, Martyrs, Pious, Truthful)”* Did you not ask Allah to guide you to the Path of the Prophets and the other three aforementioned groups? So why do you complain now that Allah has answered your duas and guided you to the Straight Path? **Be rest assured that Allah will never break His promise nor fail to make payment, if you have indeed sold you soul to Him.**

Part 8

Words of Pain

Allah says in Surah Ale-Imran 3:167, *“They say with their mouths that which is not in their hearts.”*

The Pious Predecessors used to say, *“Words that come from the mouth, stop at the ears. But words that come from the heart, reach the heart.”*

How many fiery sermons and eloquent speeches are delivered yet they fail to move even a hair on the bodies of the listeners? How many books and articles are written, awash with Quranic verses, sayings, quotes and evidences, yet they fail to inspire their readers to think or act? How many eloquent lines of poetry are scribed yet they fail to penetrate the hearts of people, as if they were cold drops of water dripping onto blocks of ice? And how many prayers are led, complete with beautifully recited Quranic verses, **yet they fail to moisten the eyes of the congregation with tears and melt their hearts with the flames of Iman?**

Why would Umar bin Al-Khattab recite the Quran in salah and both he and the congregation would weep excessively until those in the back rows would hear his sobs? *Was the Quran in his possession any different to the one in our possession?*

Why would Fatima Az-Zahraa, the daughter of the Prophet (salallaahu 'alayhi wa salam) bring female audiences to tears every time she spoke about Allah? *Was the Allah that she would talk about, any different to the Allah that we have today?*

Why did the oft-repeated lines of poetry, “O Worshipper of the Two Holy Sanctuaries!”, written by Imam Abdullah bin Al-Mubarak, pierce the heart of the scholar Fudail bin Ayyad and moisten his eyes, whilst thousands of, perhaps more eloquent verses fail to deserve even a mention today?

And why do the books of the likes of Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Al-Qayyim, Ibn An-Nuhaas, Syed Qutb, Abdullah Azzam, etc. continue to inspire and motivate millions around the world, whilst there are countless other books, perhaps written by more knowledgeable scholars that hardly ever leave the shelves of the booksellers?

The answer to all of the above is the pain that each of these individuals experiences in their hearts whilst speaking, writing, or reciting. The one who feels pain in his heart, in his nerves and in his blood is able to infuse the same passionate emotions, via his words, into the hearts of others. The authors and orators who have experienced no pain, no hardship, no trials and no tribulations in their lives will produce heaps upon heaps of cheap, empty and lifeless words. That is because their words were born in a dead heart accustomed to a life of luxury and comfort. That is because words pour forth from their pens or their tongues, but not from their feelings and emotions. Though they may use the most eloquent of words, the reality is that their hearts and bodies have not lived the experience. Therefore the words of such authors and orators are cold, like blocks of ice, and they fail to penetrate even the softest of hearts.

On the other hand there are the likes of true believers, such as the Companions of the Prophet, may Allah be pleased with them all, and all those who followed and follow them in righteousness until the Day of Resurrection. They felt the pains of hunger, of thirst, of poverty, of rejection, of banishment from home and country, of estrangement from loved ones, of abandonment of all material pleasures, of imprisonment, of torture, of physical and emotional wounds and death, both their own and that of others close to them. That is why they are shining beacons on the path to Paradise: *“All those are the ones whom Allah has guided, so from their guidance take an example.”* (Quran 6:90)

The ultimate feeling of pain, feeling and emotion is imparted by the words of an individual who has given his life in pursuit of his words, as per the famous quote of Syed Qutb:

“Indeed our words will remain lifeless, barren, devoid of any passion, until we die as a result of these words, whereupon our words will suddenly spring to life and live on amongst the hearts that are dead, bringing them back to life as well...”

Part 9

Desires and Calamities

A Sahih hadith reported by At-Tirmidhi narrates on the authority of Abu Hurairah (radhiyAllahu anhu) that the Messenger of Allah (salallaahu 'alayhi wa salam) said: *“When Allah created Paradise, He sent Jibreel to it and said, ‘Look at it and the pleasures I have prepared for its inhabitants.’ So Jibreel came to Paradise and looked at what Allah had prepared for its inhabitants. He then returned to Allah and said, ‘I swear by Your Grandeur that not a single person will hear of it except that he will enter it (i.e he will do anything to enter it).’ Then Allah ordered Paradise to be surrounded by adversities, calamities and detestable things and He said to Jibreel, ‘Go back and look at it and what I have prepared for its inhabitants.’ **Jibreel went back to Paradise and found that it had been surrounded by adversities, calamities and detestable things**, so he returned to Allah and said, ‘I swear by Your Grandeur that I fear that no one will enter it (i.e he will do anything to avoid it).’*

Then Allah said to Jibreel, ‘Go to Hell and look at it and the punishments that I have prepared for its inhabitants.’ Jibreel looked at Hell and found it extremely horrible, so he said to Allah, ‘I swear by Your Grandeur that not a single person will hear of it except that he will avoid entering it.’ Then Allah ordered Hell to be surrounded by desires and luxuries and said to Jibreel, ‘Go back to it.’ Jibreel returned to Hell and then said, ‘I swear by Your Grandeur that no one will be able to escape from it.’”

An indicator of whether your life is leading you towards Paradise or Hell is to consider the circumstances of your life. If you are worshipping Allah and your life is full of hardships and detestable things, then this is a positive sign. What are the things that a person detests in life? Fear, hunger, poverty, thirst, lack of security, lack of shelter, imprisonment, bereavement, being estranged from loved ones, loneliness, uncertainty, etc., to name but a few. Yet these are also some of the things that Paradise is surrounded by; these are the things that indicate whether or not a believer is on the path to Paradise.

Then consider, what are the things that a person desires or loves in life? Wealth, children, spacious dwelling, safety, security, plentiful food and drink, expensive clothing, being with loved ones, etc., to name but a few. Yet these are also some of the things that Hell is surrounded by; these are the things that indicate to a believer whether or not he is going towards his eternal destruction.

For this reason, many of the wealthy Sahabah used to weep uncontrollably whilst repeating the verse in Surah Al-Ahqaf (46:20): **“And the Day, those who disbelieved are exposed to the Fire, it will be said, ‘You exhausted your pleasures during your worldly life and enjoyed them, so this Day you will be awarded the punishment of extreme humiliation because you were arrogant upon the earth without right and because you were defiantly disobedient.’”**

Umar bin Al-Khattab, Abdur-Rahman bin Awf and others, may Allah be pleased with them all, would frequently mention this verse, when they even experienced pleasures as small as a wholesome meal.

Following your desires leads to the Hell Fire. That is why many of the Pious Predecessors used to say, **“If you want to obey Allah, disobey your nafs (soul, desires, etc).”** Likewise, it is reported in a poem from Imam Ash-Shafi (Abdullah bin Al-Mubarak is also said to have mentioned it): **“The best thing for your nafs (soul) is to disobey it.”**

Therefore, if you want to obey Allah, consult your heart and do the opposite of what your soul orders you to do.

If your soul orders you to sleep instead of praying, get up and pray. If your soul orders you to only spend out of your unwanted possessions, then spend out of the things you love most, for Allah says in Surah Ale-Imran (3:92): *“Never shall you attain true piety unless you spend from that which you love.”* If your soul orders you to pray at home, go and pray in the masjid. If your soul orders you to relax at home instead of visiting your sick, fellow Muslim, get up and go visit your sick, fellow Muslim for you will find Allah with him.

Therefore, consider your life and be your own judge. If Allah is pouring upon you luxury upon luxury, wealth upon wealth, comfort upon comfort, then that is a sign that something is wrong and it is something to worry about. Moreover, if this is happening whilst you are disobedient to Allah or neglectful of His Commands, then it is a sign of your imminent destruction. Luxuries and comforts make a person forget Allah and become heedless in their duties.

On the other hand, if you are trying your best to worship Allah and be mindful of His Commands, and yet your life is fraught with adversities, hardships and detestable things, then **rejoice** for this is a good indication that you are on the path to Paradise. **Adversities and hardships make a believer remember Allah more and turn to Him with sincerity.** A well-known saying says: *“Hardship is as beneficial to the soul as it is unwelcome in life. And comfort is as harmful to the soul as it is welcome in life.”*

So O prisoner in the Path of Allah, do not be sad when you are given miserable food, when you are given ragged clothes, when you are estranged from your family and loved ones and when you see others surpass you in wealth and children. Rather, rejoice and be happy as these are all signs that you are on the path towards Paradise, which is surrounded by so many detestable things that even the Angel Jibreel feared no one would be able to enter it because of these adversities.

The 13th Century scholar Al-Izz bin Abdus-Salam said, *“The state of tribulation and affliction drives man closer to Almighty Allah, whereas the state of health and blessing drives him away from Allah, as He says in the Quran, ‘And when harm touches man, he invokes Us, lying down on his side, or sitting or standing. But when We have removed his harm from him, he passes on his way as if he has never invoked Us for a harm that touched him!...’ (Quran 10:12)”*

Hasan Al-Basri said, *“Do not detest the misfortunes that befall you, for what you detest may be the cause of your salvation and what you like may be the cause of your ruin.”*

Finally, Ali bin Abi Talib is reported to have said, may Allah be pleased with him, *“O son of Adam, do not be happy with richness and do not despair of poverty. Do not feel sad*

during affliction and do not rejoice over prosperity, for just as gold is tried by fire, the pious are tried by affliction. You will not attain what you want except by giving up what you desire, and you will not attain what you aspire to except by enduring patiently what you hate, and exerting yourself in implementing that which has been made compulsory upon you (by Allah)."

Part 10

Blessings and Trials

“And Ayub (alayhis salam) when he called upon his Lord, ‘Verily, affliction has touched me and You are the Most Merciful.’” (Quran 21:83)

Out of all the prophets of Allah mentioned in the Quran, there is only one about whom no mention is made about his call, his dawah (propagation) or his followers: that prophet is Ayub known in English as ‘Job’. This begs the question: if the purpose of the prophets was to propagate Allah’s Message, what is the point of talking about a prophet without mentioning his dawah? The answer is that everything in the Quran is mentioned for a reason; nothing is redundant. Ayub’s story is mentioned because of his sabr (patience and steadfastness) and the lessons that we can derive from it. And what is the story of Prophet Ayub?

Allah blessed Ayub with health, wealth and children, then He decided to test him by taking it all from away him. His children died, his livestock died, his farmland was destroyed and he was afflicted with all sorts of diseases, including one in which insects would eat from lesions on his skin. As the years passed and he remained in this near-vegetative state, his relatives, friends and people eventually ostracised and abandoned him. They stopped visiting him for fear of catching his disease themselves. Even his wife, who would go out and work to earn a living for herself and her husband, was marginalised by the community who feared that what afflicted her and her husband, might also afflict them. **Ayub nevertheless remained patient and thankful.**

One day, his wife felt unable to take the strain and she cried out to him, “How long is this going to go on for? When is it going to end? Why don’t you ask your Lord to relieve our suffering?...” Upon hearing this, Ayub became filled with anger and he asked his wife: “How long did we enjoy Allah’s blessings for before this trial?”

“70 years,” she replied.

“And how long have we been tested by Allah like this?” Ayub asked her.

“Seven years,” she replied (other narrations put the figure at three or eighteen years, but the point is that it was far less than 70 years).

“If we enjoyed Allah’s blessing for 70 years and now He has tested us for only seven years, I am ashamed to go to my Lord and complain to Him. As for you, your iman has suffered so go and repent to Allah,” Ayub told her.

Eventually, as the story goes, Ayub made his famous supplication (which even then, was polite and indirect) mentioned in the Quran (21:83): “Verily, affliction has touched me and You are the Most Merciful.” Allah responded to his supplication and returned to him his health, wealth and children (by bringing them back to life) and on top of that, Allah blessed him with even more, due to his patience and gratitude.

O prisoner for the Sake of Allah, how long have you been in prison? One year? Five years? Ten years? Twenty years? And how many years did you enjoy Allah’s blessings?

How many years were you free to walk the streets? How many years did you enjoy with your family and friends? How many years did you eat the tastiest of foods, drink the best of drinks and wear the finest of clothes? You will find that you enjoyed Allah's blessings for a time much longer than you have spent in prison. How dare you then moan and complain to others about being in prison for the Sake of your Lord? Are you not ashamed to grumble to people about your situation? Have you already forgotten all those years in which you enjoyed Allah's blessings? "Indeed man is ever oppressive and ungrateful." (Quran 14:34). By the Lord of the Magnificent Throne, even if you were to spend 1000 years in solitary confinement for His Sake, it would not even pay Him back for the blessing of your thumb, which you use to eat, read, write, pick, grab, handle and inspect things everyday. In a narration, did the Prophet (salallaahu 'alayhi wa salam) not say, **"If a man was to be dragged upon his face for the Sake of Allah, from the day he was born to the day he died, even then he would regret on the Day of Resurrection that he had not done enough good deeds."**

Be content with Allah's decree upon you. It is when you consider everyday of your imprisonment as torture and punishment, and not as a blessing and mercy, that you will feel pain every second of it. If Prophet Ayub was ashamed even to ask his Lord to end his suffering, what gives you the right to complain to other people about your family and friends? Think of all the delicious foods you ate. Think of all the wonderful places you visited. Be grateful to Allah for those blessings and He will give you more of them: *"If you are grateful, then I will surely increase for you (My blessings)..."* (Quran 14:7)

If you wanted to make a comparison based on equality, you would at least wait in prison for the time equivalent to what you enjoyed outside prison, before asking Allah to relieve your situation. So, if you spent 30 years outside prison, you would at least want another 30 years in prison before crying to Allah. But Allah is More Merciful than that. When you feel you cannot take it any more, complain to Him and Him alone, then wait patiently until he answers your supplication. Seek solace with the supplication of Yaqub (alayhis salam) over his son, Yusuf (alayhis salam), *"Indeed I complain of my grief and sorrow only to Allah..."* (Quran 12:86)

Part 11

The Lost Camel

Allah says in the Quran (57:16) *“Has not the time arrived for the believers to humble their hearts to the Remembrance of Allah and what He has sent down from the truth...?”*

Once upon a time in Arabia a bedouin man set out on a journey through the desert. Before his departure he spent several days feeding food and water to his strong camel so that it could store necessary nutrition for the journey. He himself loaded his own provisions onto the camel and off he went. This camel had been with him since its birth and it had never let him down.

Some days into his journey, in the middle of the desert, he came across an area of shade at the foot of a crescent shaped sand mountain formed by the wind. Finding this rare strip of shade, he decided to rest for a while. He unmounted his camel, made it kneel down and tied up his legs so that it wouldn't move, then he lay down in the shade and went to sleep. He awoke a short while later and to his shock and horror, he saw that his camel had disappeared. He jumped up and began running around looking for his camel. The camel was carrying more than his journey's provisions: it was carrying his life on its back. All of the man's food and drink were with the camel.

A couple of hours passed and the man was now becoming increasingly desperate. Moreover, he could sense weakness creeping into his limbs and thirst seeping into his blood. There was no sign of his camel. The man was searching and calling in all directions for his camel but it was nowhere to be seen. Another couple of hours elapsed and by now the man was verging on the state of total collapse and exhaustion. He put his hands on his head out of despair and realised that there was no hope: it was only a matter of time before he breathed his last breath. He could already feel his life ebbing away. Having lost all hope, the man thought to himself, “If I am going to die anyway, I may as well die in the shade.” Therefore, with all his energy, he slowly crawled and dragged himself to the strip of shade in which he had first slept. With great difficulty, he managed to reach the shade whereupon he fell unconscious.

A while later the man awoke and lo and behold, he saw his camel standing in front of him! He jumped up and out of extreme happiness he lost his senses and cried, *“O Allah!! I am Your lord and You are my servant!”*

The Prophet said in an authentic hadith reported by Saheeh Muslim that ***“Allah is more pleased with the repentance of one of you than a man who loses his camel in the desert. Upon finding it, he is overjoyed and shouts, ‘O Allah!! I am Your lord and You are my servant!’”***

O prisoner, why are you in prison? Mistaken identity? Framed? Flimsy evidence? False accusations? Wrong place at the wrong time? Someone else's 'fault'? You may be innocent of the reasons behind which you find yourself in prison, but ask yourself sincerely, “Am I really innocent of all sins and crimes that I have committed against my Lord?” When you uttered obscenities, was it really someone else's fault? When you looked at the naked image, was it a case of 'mistaken identity' and it wasn't really you? When you willingly and knowingly ate or drank something that your Lord had forbidden,

were you 'framed' by someone? Why then do you complain about 'false accusations' when you are guilty of thousands of sins that your accusers do not even know about? Do you not realise that it is Allah who has put you through the trial of prison, out of His Infinite Mercy to you, so that you can repent to Him and cleanse yourself of these crimes for which you are undoubtedly guilty?

Maybe you sinned in a state of heedlessness? Maybe you now feel ashamed? Maybe you now wish that the earth would swallow you alive because of those sins? Maybe you are in despair like than man searching for his lost camel? It doesn't matter. *Turn to Allah. Repent unto Him. Open your heart and pour your eyes out to Him. And you will find Him in front of you. Furthermore, you will find Him happier at your repentance than the man who found his lost camel.*

Part 12

The Horse of Salah

Allah says in Quran 23:1-2: *“Successful are the believers. Those who humble themselves in their Salah...”* and in 2:238: *“Guard your Salah, especially in the Middle Salah (Asr) and stand before Allah in a devout frame of mind.”* The Messenger (salallaahu 'alayhi wa salam) is reported to have said: *“Salah is a pillar of Islam.”*

When Allah ordained Salah five times a day upon the Prophet during Al-Miraj (ascension to heaven), it was a gift to him and his ummah. It was not given as a means of 'rewarding' or paying Allah back, since we can never pay Allah back whether through Salah or through any other deed. It was given to us for our own selves. Salah is more than just a pillar of Islam and an obligatory duty: it is a connection between you and Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.

Salah can be likened to an emergency 'hotline' that you can pick up at any time. **That is why some of the scholars of the Salaf used to say: “If you want to talk to Allah, make Salah. And if you want Allah to talk to you, recite the Quran.”** Salah is a relief from your problems and an ease of your distress. It is a means of calming you, relaxing you, reassuring you. It is a way for you to seek Allah's help in a matter, whether as significant as a battle or as insignificant as cooking a meal or removing a stain from a piece of clothing. It is a means for seeking Allah's guidance and advice on a matter. Salah provides you with company better than the company of television and radio that people sometimes leave on in the background, without watching or listening, just to give them 'company'.

Salah gives you a means of opening your heart out to Allah and seeking His Protection. Just like a son confides in his father after a long journey, during a problem or illness, or when he returns after having lost his way, Salah is a means for you to confide in Allah and seek comfort in His Power and Awe. The benefits of Salah are endless, but for you to derive these benefits, you must pay a price and invest in your Salah.

Imagine your Salah like a horse. When your horse is young, you cannot ride on it or use it for much else. However, if you look after it well, wash it, groom it, feed it, train it, maintain it and spend money on it, even though it will be burdensome to do so, then it will mature into a strong, loyal, obedient horse. This horse will be at your service whenever you need it, whether you want it to carry you on a journey or fight in a battle or help you escape from a dangerous or problematic situation.

Likewise is your Salah. When your Salah is weak, young and immature, it will be burdensome. You will find it difficult at first: to pray it on time, to make wudu, to concentrate on saying words that you don't understand, to pray it when you are busy or tired, etc. But if you persist and persevere, if you invest in your Salah with great effort, then it will help you when you need it most. It will give you inner peace and tranquility, power, strength, happiness, optimism and encouragement. Only then will your Salah stop being a burden and become instead an enjoyment.

Some people complain that they have been making Salah for years but it has failed to benefit them. The truth is that it is not the Salah that has failed but the

one performing it. *Salah will never fail you unless you fail Salah first.* Do you find yourself as being one of those for whom Salah is a burden and not an enjoyment? If so, look at your actions before and after Salah. Do you rush to it, rush in it and rush after it? Are you impatient whilst waiting for it to finish? Do you get up and rush on your way immediately after saying ‘Salaam’? If so, this is a sign that you are not benefiting from your Salah.

Allah said in 2:238: “...and stand before Allah in a devout frame of mind.” Approach your Salah in peace, pray it in peace, finish it in peace and you will get peace. When your mind is spinning with your daily activities and thoughts, you must allow a few moments to calm down before approaching your Salah. Imagine your mind like tea in a cup that has been stirred around: when you take the stirrer out the tea does not stop spinning immediately, it takes a few moments. Likewise, before your Salah, stop what you are doing and relax for a few moments. Attend to the lavatory if you need to, and then make wudu, properly. Make sure your hair is done and clothes are tidy, free of any dirt: after all, you will be presenting yourself before the Master of the Universe in a few moments.

- Give the adhan if it has not already been given, then stand up to pray your Sunnah Salah.
- After your Sunnah Salah, stay sitting in your place for a short while and make some remembrance of Allah.
- Once you are relaxed and ready for your main, obligatory Salah, get up to pray it, slowly and taking your time between the various actions of the Salah. You should only pray your Fard (obligatory) Salah when you are physically, mentally and spiritually relaxed.
- When the Salah is over, do not get up and run, but rather stay sitting for a few moments until you have completed your after-Salah remembrance.

Once you reach this stage where you are putting a great deal of effort into your Salah, then eventually it will become a source of great joy to you rather than a burden. You will not think twice about spending even an hour on one Salah. You will not be able to wait for the next Salah time to arrive and when it does arrive, you will get up and pray it straight away, at the start of its time. Whilst in your Salah, you will wish that it continues forever and you will not want it to finish. Once you reach this stage, your Salah will be more valuable to you than food or drink or other pleasures and you will never contemplate ever abandoning it. That is when you will be able to mount your Salah like a strong, able-bodied horse and use it to carry you away whenever you want.

Part 13

The Diamond of Iman

Allah says in the (Quran 12:5): *“Indeed Satan is to man a clear enemy.”*

If someone was to ask you to write down the name of your most precious possession, what would you write? Your body? Your car? Your family? Your jewelry? Your house? Your hair? Your job? Your money? Your clothes? The reality is that all of these will not benefit you in the Hereafter and nor will you take them with you into your grave. However, there is one possession of yours, that not only will benefit you in this life, the grave and the Hereafter, but if you were to put it on one side of a scale, it would outweigh every other possession that you have or could ever wish for. That one possession is your Iman.

Iman is what Musa (alayhis salam) had so Allah parted the sea for him and saved his people. Iman is what Dawud (alayhis salam) had when he slew Jalut. Iman is what Isa (alayhis salam) had when he asked Allah to send down for his people a tablespread from the sky which thousands of them ate from twice a day. And Iman is what the Messenger of Allah (salallaahu 'alayhi wa salam) possessed, which made him and his Companions the leaders of the world at their time.

How do you protect your possessions from theft, evil, harm, damage? How do you protect your possessions from those who seek to take them from you? You would surely exert your utmost effort to protect your possessions with your life. Yet how do you protect your Iman, which is the most precious possession that you have?

Imagine that your Iman is like a huge, precious, priceless diamond. How would you protect this diamond from thieves, criminals and enemies? How would financial institutions and museums etc. protect such an expensive diamond? They would place the diamond in a locked metal box secured by an unpickable padlock. The box would be inside a locked, sturdy compartment surrounded by strengthened iron members. The compartment would be situated inside a fire-proof safe with a multiple lever locking mechanism. To get to the safe one would have to enter a vault reinforced with concrete-cladded walls and a sophisticated alarm system. Outside the vault would be invisible infra-red beams linked to an automatic CCTV camera surveillance circuit. And so on with increasing levels of security and protection, to make it as difficult as possible for a thief to penetrate the cordon.

Similarly, consider your Iman in place of this diamond. The metal box is your salah and the padlock is wudu. The sturdy compartment represents Allah's commandments and the iron members are the various obligations that He has ordained upon you. The safe represents the Sunnah of the Messenger (salallaahu 'alayhi wa salam) and the multiple levers of the locking mechanism are the different actions of the Sunnah such as the Sunnah salah, morning and evening supplications, duas throughout the day, etc. The vault takes the place of optional (nafli) supererogatory deeds such as tahajjud night prayers, sadaqah (charity), extra remembrance duas etc. and the alarm system is there to maintain regularity of these deeds. And so on with the outer layers representing higher and higher types, quantities and qualities of good deeds.

Shaytan is your biggest enemy. He is trying every hour of the day to destroy your Iman and make you renounce your faith. However, he knows that he cannot reach your Diamond of Iman instantly: he has to penetrate several layers of protection and security before he can reach that precious jewel. He patiently awaits a lapse in security that occurs when you fail to perform a regular deed which comprises a layer of your protection. Whenever you commit a sin, it is an indication of Shaytan's success in penetrating your cordon. The size and severity of the sin represents the seriousness of the breach.

The more layers of protection you have and the stronger those layers are, the less likely Shaytan is to make a hole in your security cordon and approach your Iman. If you have allowed him to affect your salah, so that you are either not performing it five times a day, or you are delaying it past its time, or you are rushing it, then it is a sign of great danger that you are extremely close to the point between Iman (faith) and Kufr (disbelief).

Your Iman is the most valuable thing that you possess. No human being or jinn or any power in the world can snatch this away from you without *your consent and your permission*. The worldly powers can take away your freedom of movement, your money, your family, your house, and the limbs of your body. *But they can never take away your Iman if you do not allow them to.*

Build your Iman.

Build it, strengthen it, and reinforce it.

And once you have built it, protect it and maintain it. Every security system requires maintenance.

If you fail to regularly keep your protection cordon in optimum condition, you will leave it open to attacks by your avowed enemy, the Shaytan. And if he succeeds in snatching away your Iman, don't blame him. ***Blame yourself.***

Part 14

The Horse and the Well

There is an Eastern fable about a farmer who lived once upon a time in a faraway land. This farmer had a strong horse which would plough the fields for him and pull his loads. In the midst of his farmland, there was an unused well. A deep, dark, dry, unused well. Since there was no benefit from the well, the farmer refused to maintain it and repair its boundary walls. One day, the horse fell into the well. Since it was a strong horse, it survived the fall without breaking any bones: it only had a few scratches and bruises. Soon thereafter, the horse tried to get out of the well: it jumped, turned around in circles and tried to climb up the sides but it was no use. Then it started to neigh and whine loudly from the bottom of the deep, dark hole.

Eventually, the farmer arrived at the well and became distraught when he saw what had happened. Unsure as to how he could pull out this huge, heavy horse, he called his neighbours for assistance. The neighbours gathered at the well but they could not devise a plan to rescue the horse. Therefore, the farmer had a simple idea. He said, *“Let us bury the horse in the well by filling it up. If it fell into the well, it is a stupid horse and no good to me anyway. This way I will solve two problems at once: the problem of the horse and the problem of the unused well. Furthermore, if we bury it quickly it will die swiftly and not feel as much pain.”*

It seemed a workable plan, so they began to shovel dirt into the well. When the first mounds of dirt landed on the horse, it began to neigh, trying to get the crowd to stop burying it. Upon hearing its screams, they started to shovel even faster, thinking that the horse was in pain so they could silence it quicker. When the horse realised that its cries were in vain and falling on deaf ears, it had an idea. It stopped neighing, leading the shovellers to believe that it was dead. The shovelling slowed down and mounds of dirt were thrown into the well. However, instead of remaining still and allowing itself to be buried alive by the dirt, the horse shrugged off the dirt from itself and then trampled it underneath its hooves. It continued to do this with each successive mound of dirt that was thrown onto it and slowly began to rise higher and higher up the well until it eventually jumped out of the well, much to the astonishment of the onlookers.

O prisoner, do you find yourself at the bottom of a deep, dark hole? Do you find that there seems to be no way out and that your cries for help fall upon deaf ears? As if that is not enough, do you find that more and more dirt is being thrown upon you? Financial problems? Lies and allegations? ‘Friends’ and family abandoning or disowning? Miserable food and conditions? Sickness? Loneliness? Boredom? What are you going to do about it?

Are you just going to sit there and let each successive pile of dirt overcome you until it buries you alive and destroys you? Or are you going to do as the horse did: be positive, realise that you are on your own and shrug off any dirt that is thrown onto you then trample it beneath your feet until that very dirt becomes a means for your salvation?

But never be confused as to what the hole is and what the dirt is. Prison is not the hole, but the dirt. The hole is your sins and estrangement from Allah. Prison is the dirt that will either enable you to cleanse your sins and return to Allah, thereby saving you. Or it is

the dirt that will eventually bury you alive and destroy you. What you do with the dirt is your choice. The horse made the right choice. The question is, will you?

Part 15

Seize the Moment

*“By the night when it covers,
And by the day when it appears,
And by He who created the male and the female,
Indeed, your efforts are diverse.
As for he who gives and fears Allah,
And believes in the best (reward),
We will ease him towards ease,
But as for he who withholds and considers himself free of need,
And denies the best reward,
We will ease him towards difficulty.
And what will his wealth avail him when he falls?
Indeed, (incumbent) upon Us is guidance,
And indeed, to Us belongs the Hereafter and the first (life).
So I have warned you of a blazing Fire,
None will burn therein except the most wretched one,
Who had denied and turned away.
But the righteous one will avoid it:
He who gives from his wealth to purify himself,
And not giving for anyone who has done him a favour to be returned,
But only seeking the Countenance of his Lord, Most High.
And soon he is surely going to be well-satisfied.”*
(Surah Al-Lail, Quran 92:1-21)

This Surah (chapter) of the Quran was revealed in relation to a simple but wonderful incident that happened during the lifetime of the Prophet (salallaahu 'alayhi wa salam) and was recorded by Ibn Abi Hatim on the authority of Ibn Abbas (radhiallaahu anhu):

There was a Muslim man who owned an orchard full of date palm trees. The branches of one of these trees would overhang into the premises of a poor man and his family. The farmer would frequently come to the poor man's house in order to gather the dates from this tree but in doing so, a few dates would inadvertently fall onto the floor and be picked up by the children of the poor man. Whenever this would happen, the farmer would quickly descend from the tree and grab the dates from the hands of the poor children. Furthermore, if he caught one of the children having already put a date into his or her mouth, then he would forcefully insert his fingers into their mouths and wrench out the dates.

When this continued for a number of days, the poor man complained to the Prophet (salallaahu 'alayhi wa salam) about it. The Prophet (salallaahu 'alayhi wa salam) met the farmer and offered him a deal. He (salallaahu 'alayhi wa salam) said: “Give me your date palm tree whose branches overhang into the courtyard of so-and-so and in return I will guarantee you a date palm tree in Paradise.”

However the farmer replied to the Prophet (salallaahu 'alayhi wa salam): "I would have given it to you but the thing is that out of all the many date palm trees that I have, none produces dates as good as this one." He then went away.

Immediately after, the Prophet (salallaahu 'alayhi wa salam) was approached by a man who had overheard his (salallaahu 'alayhi wa salam) conversation with the farmer. He asked the Prophet (salallaahu 'alayhi wa salam): "Would you offer me the same deal as you offered that man, O Messenger of Allah?"

"Yes" replied the Prophet (salallaahu 'alayhi wa salam).

Therefore the man, who owned many date palms of his own, went to the farmer and said to him: "The Prophet (salallaahu 'alayhi wa salam) has offered me a date palm in Paradise in return for the date-palm of yours that overhangs into the courtyard of so-and-so."

The farmer replied, "I would have given it to him (salallaahu 'alayhi wa salam) but the thing is that out of all the many date palms that I have, none produces dates as good as this tree."

"Are you willing to sell it?" the man asked.

"No, except if I receive for it whatever price I ask, but I do not think that anyone will pay that much for it," replied the farmer.

"So how much do you want for it?" asked the man.

"40 date palm trees," the farmer replied.

"40 date palms just for this one tree? You are asking for a huge price!" the man exclaimed. He then fell silent for a few moments after which he added, "Ok. I will pay you 40 date palms, so sign a contract with me if you mean what you say." The farmer called some witnesses and they concluded the sale, so the man then went to the Prophet (salallaahu 'alayhi wa salam) and said, "O Messenger of Allah! I have purchased that date palm from the farmer and now it is all yours."

The Prophet (salallaahu 'alayhi wa salam) in turn went to the poor man and said to him: That date palm now belongs to you and your family!..." Then Allah the Exalted sent down from above the Seven Heavens, "By the night when it covers," to the end of the Surah. Allah is Great!

How deprived was the wretched farmer to refuse the guarantee of a place in Paradise (you cannot be guaranteed a tree in Paradise without actually being there yourself to enjoy it) in exchange for a paltry date palm tree? And how blessed was the other man who bought himself a place in Paradise by paying only 41 date palm trees? This man saw an opportunity to do a good deed that would admit him to Paradise, so he immediately seized the moment. Had he hesitated, or delayed the matter to think about it, he might have missed the opportunity and someone else could have seized it instead.

Abu Bakr (radhiallaahu anhu) encountered many such opportunities and he grabbed every single one of them. When he saw Bilal (radhiallaahu anhu), the black slave, being tortured by Umayyah bin Khalaf, he immediately bought him from Umayyah and freed him. Abu Bakr (radhiallaahu anhu) did this with many Muslim slaves who were being oppressed in Makkah because they had no tribe or family to protect them: he bought them and freed them. When Abu Bakr's father saw him doing this, he said: "My son, why are you buying these weak slaves then freeing them? Why don't you at least keep them so that you can make use out of them?"

Abu Bakr replied to his father: "My father, I am only doing this to seek the Countenance (Face) of Allah."

Allah The Almighty brings as many opportunities every day but how many of us seize them and how many of us belittle and ignore them? How do we not know that perhaps it is one of those opportunities for doing good deeds that will admit us into Paradise? Indeed, the Prophet (salallaahu 'alayhi wa salam) told us that a man was admitted into Paradise for merely removing a thorny branch from the path of the people; and a prostitute was forgiven for simply giving a thirsty dog some water to drink. And how many people have been admitted to Paradise for freeing a slave or ransoming a captive prisoner?

Never belittle or ignore any good deed, however small or insignificant. Never belittle or ignore any good deed whether it is bringing water to your brother or saying the remembrance supplications after each Salah or helping someone to carry their luggage or smiling in the face of your brother. Or if it is helping to ransom a captive prisoner. Never belittle or ignore any good deed because that could be the deed that brings you salvation and admits you into Paradise. Scholars said that there should be no hesitation in deeds concerning the Hereafter. Seize the moment today. Before it is too late.