

THE SECRET BEHIND OUR TRIALS

Harun Yahya- Adnan Oktar

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Abbreviations used:
(saas-sall-Allahu 'alyahi wa sallam): May Allah bless him and grant him peace (following a reference to Prophet Muhammad)
(as-'alayhi's-salam): Peace be upon him (following a reference to the prophets or angels)

*Every self will taste death. We test you with both good and evil as a trial.
And you will be returned to Us.
(Qur'an, 21:35)*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Now writing under the pen-name of HARUN YAHYA, he was born in Ankara in 1956. Having completed his primary and secondary education in Ankara, he studied arts at Istanbul's Mimar Sinan University and philosophy at Istanbul University. Since the 1980s, he has published many books on political, scientific, and faith-related issues. Harun Yahya is well-known as the author of important works disclosing the imposture of evolutionists, their invalid claims, and the dark liaisons between Darwinism and such bloody ideologies as fascism and communism.

His penname is a composite of the names Harun (Aaron) and Yahya (John), in memory of the two esteemed Prophets who fought against their people's lack of faith. The Prophet's seal on his books' covers is symbolic and is linked to their contents. It represents the Qur'an (the final scripture) and Prophet Muhammad (saas), last of the prophets. Under the guidance of the Qur'an and the Sunnah (teachings of the Prophet), the author makes it his purpose to disprove each fundamental tenet of godless ideologies and to have the "last word," so as to completely silence the objections raised against religion. He uses the seal of the final Prophet, who attained ultimate wisdom and moral perfection, as a sign of his intention to offer the last word.

All of Harun Yahya's works share one single goal: to convey the Qur'an's message, encourage readers to consider basic faith-related issues such as Allah's Existence and Unity and the Hereafter; and to expose godless systems' feeble foundations and perverted ideologies.

Harun Yahya enjoys a wide readership in many countries, from India to America, England to Indonesia, Poland to Bosnia, and Spain to Brazil. Some of his books are available in English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Urdu, Arabic, Albanian, Russian, Serbo-Croat (Bosnian), Polish, Malay, Uygur Turkish, and Indonesian.

Greatly appreciated all around the world, these works have been instrumental in many people recovering faith in Allah and gaining deeper insights into their faith. His books' wisdom and sincerity, together with a distinct style that's easy to understand, directly affect anyone who reads them. Those who seriously consider these books, can no longer advocate atheism or any other perverted ideology or materialistic philosophy, since these books are characterized by rapid effectiveness, definite results, and irrefutability. Even if they continue to do so, it will be only a sentimental insistence, since these books refute such ideologies from their very foundations. All contemporary movements of denial are now ideologically defeated, thanks to the books written by Harun Yahya.

This is no doubt a result of the Qur'an's wisdom and lucidity. The author modestly intends to serve as a means in humanity's search for Allah's right path. No material gain is sought in the publication of these works.

Those who encourage others to read these books, to open their minds and hearts and guide them to become more devoted servants of Allah, render an invaluable service.

Meanwhile, it would only be a waste of time and energy to propagate other books that create confusion in people's minds, lead them into ideological chaos, and that clearly have no strong and precise effects in removing the doubts in people's hearts, as also verified from previous experience. It is impossible for books devised to emphasize the author's literary power rather than the noble goal of saving people from loss of faith, to have such a great effect. Those who doubt this can readily see that the sole aim of Harun Yahya's books is to overcome disbelief and to disseminate the Qur'an's moral values. The success and impact of this service are manifested in the readers' conviction.

One point should be kept in mind: The main reason for the continuing cruelty, conflict, and other ordeals endured by the vast majority of people is the ideological prevalence of disbelief. This can be ended only with the ideological defeat of disbelief and by conveying the wonders of creation and Qur'anic morality so that people can live by it. Considering the state of the world today, leading into a downward spiral of violence, corruption and conflict, clearly this service must be provided speedily and effectively, or it may be too late.

In this effort, the books of Harun Yahya assume a leading role. By the will of Allah, these books will

be a means through which people in the twenty first century will attain the peace, justice, and happiness promised in the Qur'an.

TO THE READER

A special chapter is assigned to the collapse of the theory of evolution because this theory constitutes the basis of all anti-spiritual philosophies. Since Darwinism rejects the fact of creation—and therefore, Allah's Existence—over the last 140 years it has caused many people to abandon their faith or fall into doubt. It is therefore an imperative service, a very important duty to show everyone that this theory is a deception. Since some readers may find the chance to read only one of our books, we think it appropriate to devote a chapter to summarize this subject.

All the author's books explain faith-related issues in light of Qur'anic verses, and invite readers to learn Allah's words and to live by them. All the subjects concerning Allah's verses are explained so as to leave no doubt or room for questions in the reader's mind. The books' sincere, plain, and fluent style ensure that everyone of every age and from every social group can easily understand them. Thanks to their effective, lucid narrative, they can be read at one sitting. Even those who rigorously reject spirituality are influenced by the facts these books document and cannot refute the truthfulness of their contents.

This and all the other books by the author can be read individually, or discussed in a group. Readers eager to profit from the books will find discussion very useful, letting them relate their reflections and experiences to one another.

In addition, it will be a great service to Islam to contribute to the publication and reading of these books, written solely for the pleasure of Allah. The author's books are all extremely convincing. For this reason, to communicate true religion to others, one of the most effective methods is encouraging them to read these books.

We hope the reader will look through the reviews of his other books at the back of this book. His rich source material on faith-related issues is very useful, and a pleasure to read.

In these books, unlike some other books, you will not find the author's personal views, explanations based on dubious sources, styles that are unobservant of the respect and reverence due to sacred subjects, nor hopeless, pessimistic arguments that create doubts in the mind and deviations in the heart.

INTRODUCTION

There must be something in your life that you have spent a lot of time and energy to get. Think of when you were in school, a time of frequent exams taken to prepare yourself for entrance into the university of your choice. Most young people regard such exams as turning points in their lives, because these exams will determine the shape of their future. They prepare for years for this event, give up their sleep and special activities, vacations, and other entertainment. Totally focused on entering their chosen university, they remain patient and determined to achieve this goal.

Now, consider the situation of those people whose most important aim is to own a nice house. In order to afford their dream home, they must first have the financial ability to buy it. Therefore, they will work day and night to get a good job and then move on to higher positions and larger salaries. After years of self-sacrifice, they will be able to buy or build their dream house.

As these examples show, people often have to work with great determination for years in order to overcome all of the obstacles standing between them and the object or goal to which they attach such value. Furthermore, if people pursue financial power, social respect, reputation, or a particular career, they will have to exert serious effort in the face of various setbacks and, as they say, "give something of themselves."

But here we must consider an important point: The above examples are about the transitory pleasures of this worldly life, all of which will disappear with the person's death or may be lost suddenly due to some unexpected mishap. For example, a young person who spends years working assiduously to pass an exam may be killed in an accident before taking that exam. Or, a person's effort and energy expended in the quest of buying a house may be disastrously undone in an instant through fire.

All of the pleasures sought after in this earthly life, no matter how hard we may work for them, are transitory. But there is also a real and genuine life of endless pleasure, one that will never be lost or consumed, one that human beings will enjoy for eternity: the life after death that believers work so hard in this life to attain. They regard this goal as being far more important than anything else and always keep it before their eyes.

So, this worldly life is a "testing ground" that human beings must go through to determine which type

of eternal life they will experience in the Hereafter. While in this world, human beings take an exam to enter the Afterlife. In every case, the correct answer is to pursue Allah's good pleasure. In reality, life is no more than a transitory testing and training period created by Allah for each person. Throughout this period, human beings are responsible for pondering this reality in order to know our Lord, obey His commands, and seek His good pleasure. They are also responsible for showing grace, patience, and moral strength in the face of everything that happens to them while in this world. The great secret within this test is known only to believers: to be content in knowing that everything is a test from our Lord and to meet every eventuality with joyful enthusiasm.

Those who grasp this secret and live according to this hidden, but nevertheless clear, truth will gain an eternal and never-ending treasure. This book announces these truths to those who do not know this secret and so live their lives without ever thinking about reality, and reminds them that they should set for themselves a much greater goal than the things of this world.

[Have we not] shown him the two highways? But he has not braved the steep ascent. What will convey to you what the steep ascent is? It is freeing a slave or feeding on a day of hunger an orphaned relative or a poor man in the dust; then to be one of those who believe and urge each other to steadfastness and urge each other to compassion. Those are the Companions of the Right. Those who reject Our signs, they are the Companions of the Left. Above them is a sealed vault of Fire. (Surat al-Balad, 10-20)

THE WORLD IS A PLACE OF TESTING

As with all living things, Allah created human beings for a purpose and explains that purpose in the Qur'an, which He sent down to guide all people: "Did you suppose that We created you for amusement and that you would not return to Us?" (Surah Ghafir, 115) and "I only created jinn and man to worship Me" (Surat adh-Dhariyat, 56). In other words, all people were created to serve Allah.

Human beings have a lifespan of roughly 60 to 70 years. But like an hourglass, time is constantly running out. Everyone will stay in this world for a length of time that is known only to Allah, for it follows the destiny that Allah has determined for it and which no person or thing can change.

Everything in this world will end when its time comes, for "the life of this world, compared to the Hereafter, is only fleeting enjoyment" (Surat ar-Ra'd, 26). Everything here grows old and diminishes as it rushes headlong toward destruction. Time destroys everyone and everything, and those who attach themselves to this transitory life stand to lose everything. That is why our Prophet (saas) recommended to people to think about death and said: *"Those who are most aware of death and prepare themselves for it. They are the wisest of people."*¹

In his works, the great Islamic scholar Bediuzzaman Said Nursi constantly reminded his readers that this earthly life is transitory and that everyone must work hard to attain the life of the Hereafter:

The world is a guest-house, and as for man, he remains there only a short time. He is a guest with many duties and in a brief lifetime is charged with preparing all the necessities for eternal life.²

Bediuzzaman describes the shortness of human life as a temporary visit and, in another example, says that "human beings, like animals, have been given existence to perpetuate their life in the world." He then adds:

O my soul and my friend! Come to your senses! Do not spend the capital and potentialities of your life on pleasures of the flesh and this fleeting life like an animal, or even lower. Otherwise, although you are fifty times superior with regard to capital than the highest animal, you will fall fifty times lower than the lowest.³

As he says, human beings are endowed with such superior qualities as intelligence, conscience, and common sense. Thus, the purpose of their creation is clearly not to chase after the temporary pleasures of this short and highly deficient worldly life, but to attain the beauty of eternity by using their superior qualities to pass the tests in this world.

People are tested according to how they respond to what they encounter in the world, as well as how they exercise their moral characters and intentions. It is definitely not enough for them to say "I believe"; rather, they must show their faith through their actions and words. On the Day of Judgment, everything they have done, both public and private, will be revealed and they will have to give a detailed account. While doing so, they will not suffer any injustice, for the Qur'an says "They will not be wronged by so much as the smallest speck." (Surat an-Nisa', 49). Those whose good deeds weigh heavy in the balance will be received into the eternal beauties of Paradise, while those who chose the way of evil and oppression will find their reward in the eternal torment of Hell. Allah created this short life as a testing place, for:

He Who created death and life to test which of you is best in action. He is the Almighty, the Ever-Forgiving. (Surat al-Mulk, 2)

Exchanging Eternal Life for the Life of This World

One of the greatest errors of non-religious people is the idea that the life of this world is permanent. Unaware that they are being tested, this world's beautiful things mislead them into thinking that what they acquire comes about as the result of their own effort and that they are, therefore, self-sufficient. People who live in unbelieving societies forget about the life in the Hereafter and so busy themselves with trying to attain those things that they think are so beautiful and valuable. In the Qur'an, Allah tells us about the desire for these baubles that bind people to this world:

To humanity the love of worldly appetites is painted in glowing colors: women and children, and heaped-up mounds of gold and silver, horses with fine markings, livestock, and fertile farmland. All of that is merely the enjoyment of the life of this world. The best homecoming is in the presence of Allah. Say: "Shall I tell you of something better than that?" Those who guard against evil will have Gardens with their Lord, with rivers flowing under them, remaining in them timelessly, forever; purified wives; and the Pleasure of Allah. Allah sees His servants. (Surah Al `Imran, 14-15)

As this verse makes quite clear, people have many desires. But obtaining only these objects of desire is of no benefit to them, for their real life is the Hereafter, where they will remain for all eternity. The Qur'an explains this truth in the following verses:

Make a metaphor for them of the life of this world. It is like water that We send down from the sky; the plants of the ground combine with it, but then become dry chaff scattered by the winds. Allah has absolute power over everything. Wealth and sons are the embellishment of the life of this world. But, in your Lord's sight, right actions that are lasting bring a better reward and are a better basis for hope. (Surat al-Kahf, 45-46)

As this passage says, all of this world's riches, wealth, spouses, jewels, homes, fame, career, and other values are nothing more than a short and transitory dalliance, for they will end at a particular time.

But a large number of people do not realize that these things are transitory, and so immerse themselves in gathering more material goods, gaining more respect, finding the most attractive spouse, or becoming known as the most successful person in their respective professions. They are so passionately attached to these things that they completely forget about the eternal life. Perceiving death as destruction, they make no preparations for the afterlife.

However, as Bediuzzaman said, death is not a separation or a destruction; rather, it is the end of the trials of this world and the place where people receive the reward for what they have done:

Death is not terrifying as it appears to be superficially. Through the light afforded by the All-Wise Qur'an, in many parts of the Risale-i Nur we have proved in completely certain and indubitable fashion that for believers death is to be discharged from the burdensome duties of life. And for them it is a rest from worship, which is the instruction and training in the arena of trial of this world. It is also a means of their rejoining friends and relations, ninety-nine out of a hundred of whom have already departed for the next world. And it is a means of entering their true homeland and eternal abodes of happiness. It is also an invitation to the gardens of Paradise from the dungeon of this world. And it is the time to receive their wage from the munificence of the Most Compassionate Creator in return for service rendered to Him. Since the reality of death is this, it should not be regarded as terrifying, but on the contrary, as the introduction to mercy and happiness.⁴

In other words, it is a big mistake to think that this world is our true homeland. Compared to eternity, this life does not even last a minute. In another place, Bediuzzaman gives an example of how senseless it would be to choose this world instead of the world to come:

Also, he speaks truly about a future in comparison with which the future in this world is like a tiny mirage. And he tells most seriously of a happiness in comparison with which all worldly happiness is but a fleeting flash of lightning in relation to an eternal sun⁵.

So, unlike those who are far removed from the Qur'an's morality, Muslims do not rebel when confronted with death; rather, they welcome it with eager expectation, hoping to receive in the Afterlife the rewards for the good they have done in this world. They live in the joyful hope of entering Paradise, which is filled with fine and beautiful things.

The following verse reveals the state of those who focus only on the transitory life of this world:

Those are the ones who have sold guidance for misguidance and forgiveness for punishment. How steadfastly they will endure the Fire! (Surat al-Baqara, 175)

These people, described in another verse as having "purchased disbelief at the price of faith," have fallen into great error. We can give another example to show how much these people have lost:

Think of two individuals, each of whom is given a lot of money to spend as he or she pleases. One of

them spends this money carelessly and soon has nothing left, while the other person spends it in such a way that it provides permanent benefits for himself and humanity as a whole. When the first person is called to account, what will she feel, other than great sorrow?

So, all of the property, possessions, culture, renown, respect, beauty, and all other blessings given to human beings in this world are opportunities for a person to prepare for the afterlife. Realizing this, believers take full advantage of these opportunities.

Unbelievers are like those people who spent their money for nothing. They spend their short lifespan carelessly and then suffer a great loss in the eternal afterlife. The Qur'an describes their state, as follows:

Say: "Shall I inform you of the greatest losers in their actions? People whose efforts in the life of this world are misguided while they suppose that they are doing good." Those are the people who reject their Lord's Signs and the meeting with Him. Their actions will come to nothing and, on the Day of Resurrection, We will not assign them any weight. (Surat al-Kahf, 103-5)

Those who are not fulfilled by this life and are aware that only the life to come is eternal know that this world's pleasures are transitory and, therefore, strive to attain the beauties of Paradise. So, they gain much in the trade they make with Allah, for:

Allah has bought from the believers their souls and wealth in return for the Garden. They fight in the Way of Allah, and they kill and are killed. It is a promise binding on Him in the Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur'an, and who is truer to his contract than Allah? Rejoice, then, in the bargain you have made. That is the great victory. (Surat at-Tawba, 111)

Allah Tries People with Good and Evil

As we mentioned earlier, all people are tested throughout their lives in various ways. The Qur'an tells us that these trials may be by means of good or evil:

We did not give any human being before you immortality. And if you die, will they then be immortal? Every person will taste death. We test you with both good and evil as a trial. And you will be returned to Us. (Surat al-Anbiya', 34-35)

People may be tested by all sorts of things. For example, while enjoying the blessings of abundant wealth, they must be careful to practice the kind of morality that earns His good pleasure, turn toward Him in all of their intentions and actions, obey His commands, and follow His advice. If they become caught up in the world's transitory pleasures, wealth can make them oblivious to reality. But believers, no matter how many blessings they may enjoy, remain forever grateful to Allah.

People may also be tested by illness, disaster, pressures from the unbelievers, hurtful words, slander, entrapment, and cruel ridicule. But Muslims realize that all of these things are part of their testing, and so hold on to patience which ultimately leads to good.

As we said earlier, these individuals have made a good trade in exchanging the life of this world for the life of the Hereafter. According to the Qur'an, "Know that your wealth and children are a trial, and that there is an immense reward with Allah" (Surat al-Anfal, 28), they are aware that their lives and possessions all belong to Allah, and so any gain or loss never alters their moral character, their worldview, or their faithfulness to our Lord. Many verses describe this quality, among them the following:

But the Messenger and those who believe along with him have striven with their wealth and with themselves. They are the people who will have the good things. They are the ones who are successful. Allah has prepared Gardens for them with rivers flowing under them, remaining in them timelessly, forever. That is the great victory. (Surat at-Tawba, 88-89)

The believers are only those who have believed in Allah and His Messenger, then have had no doubt and have striven with their wealth and themselves in the Way of Allah. They are the ones who are true to their word. (Surat al-Hujurat, 15)

We see in these verses that for Muslims, this world is a place where they must strive in the way of Allah to earn His good pleasure. Bediuzzaman tells us that this world is only a place of service, that people will pass through it being tried with difficulties and enjoyments, and that the reward for those who patiently endure frustration and disaster will be great.

This worldly realm is the field of testing, the abode of service. It is not the place of pleasure, reward, and requital. Considering, then, that it is the abode of service and place of worship, sicknesses and misfortunes—as long as they do not affect belief and are patiently endured—conform fully to service and worship, and even strengthen it. Since they make each hour's worship equivalent to that of a day, one should offer thanks instead of complaining. Worship consists in fact of two kinds, positive and negative. What is meant by the

positive is obvious. As for negative worship, this is when one afflicted with misfortune or sickness perceives his own weakness and helplessness, and turning to his Compassionate Sustainer, seeks refuge in Him, meditates upon Him, petitions Him, and thus offers a pure form of worship that no hypocrisy can penetrate. If he endures patiently, thinks of the reward attendant on misfortune and offers thanks, then each hour that he passes will count as a whole day spent in worship. His brief life becomes very long. There are even cases where a single minute is counted as equal to a whole day's worship.⁶

It is very important to ponder these wise words. As we said earlier, people are responsible for serving Allah and for submitting and remaining attached to Him in all circumstances. One way to show this attachment is to be patient in all difficulties and frustrations in this world. Moreover, such times may come along when least expected and last, or seem to last, for a long time. For example, a rich person may become poor, a successful person may encounter sudden failure, and another person may lose a loved one, become ill, or handicapped. But regardless of the test, Allah promises endless good things to those of His servants who patiently endure them.

For this reason, people must make the best use of every moment of time allotted to them in this world. Before doing any act or saying any word, they must ask if what they are about to do is the best way to earn Allah's good pleasure. But most importantly, they must avoid getting caught up in this world and forgetting that there is an Afterlife, and must not trade eternity for the sake of some transitory enjoyment. The way to attain endless good things is to turn to Allah:

Everyone will taste death. You will be paid your wages in full on the Day of Resurrection. Anyone who is distanced from the Fire and admitted to the Garden has triumphed. The life of this world is just the enjoyment of delusion. You will be tested in your wealth and in yourselves, and you will hear many abusive words from those given the Book before you and from those who are idolaters. But if you are steadfast and guard against evil, that is the most resolute course to take. (Surah Al `Imran, 185-86)

THE GREAT SECRET

Allah tells us that believers will undergo many tests in this world. For example, they will be tested in their personal lives and with their possessions, or will be confronted with traps set by unbelievers and be falsely accused. In other words, they may encounter difficulties at every stage in their lives. But the important thing is that they continue to practice the Qur'an's morality in difficult times, remember Allah without ceasing, give thanks, and realize that everything will turn out well.

Of course, it is easier to do these things when one is enjoying His blessings than when one is undergoing difficult times. But one of the main things that prove the strength of the Muslims' faith is their refusal to compromise their moral character. Muslims who patiently endure poverty, hunger, fear, personal and material loss, illness, threats from unbelievers, slander, and entrapment will receive a better reward for their moral excellence.

The Qur'an gives many examples of the entrapments and tyranny suffered by the Prophets and other devout Muslims. One example of this is the tyranny that Pharaoh exercised over his people. In the Qur'an, Allah says that this was a testing from Himself:

Remember when We rescued you from the people of Pharaoh. They were inflicting an evil punishment on you—slaughtering your sons and letting your women live. In that there was a terrible trial for you from your Lord. (Surat al-Baqara, 49)

As this verse says, everything that unbelievers do to prevent good is a test for believers. Their unwavering moral character, courage, and fortitude they display while enduring these trials will increase their reward and status in Paradise. The Qur'an tells us what kind of tests believers will undergo and the fine moral character they will display, as follows:

We will test you with a certain amount of fear and hunger, and loss of wealth, life, and fruits. But give good news to the steadfast. Those who, when disaster strikes them, say: "We belong to Allah, and to Him we will return." Those are the people who will have blessings and mercy from their Lord; they are the ones who are guided. (Surat al-Baqara, 155-57)

The trust and submission described in these verses is a good example for all Muslims. But unbelievers cannot understand this patient trust, for they think that believers are just like themselves and behave according to their own misguided criteria. Thus, they think that believers will respond to abundant wealth by getting caught up in it, and will allow difficulties and frustration to make them so afraid that they will abandon their belief.

But this is a grave error on their part, for Muslims who understand the secret of this world's trials

know that one of the finest things to do in such circumstances is to be patient. For those Muslims who practice the Qur'an's morality and do their best to inculcate this fine morality in others, all such troubles are a sign that they are on the right path. As a result, they increase their eagerness, joy, and determination to continue following His path.

In the Qur'an, Allah speaks of laws that have remained unchanged throughout history. One of them is that believers will encounter difficulty and frustration and be subjected to oppression by unbelievers. However, the unbelievers will never succeed in their aims:

They were very near to scaring you from the land with the object of expelling you from it. But had they done so, they would only have remained there a short time after you. That was the pattern with those We sent before you as Our Messengers. You will not find any changing of Our pattern. (Surat al-Isra', 76-77)

This is one of the secrets of this world's trials. Allah has warned Muslims of the many things that they will face, and has revealed that they will be able to enter Paradise only if they face the same difficulties as the preceding believers did:

Or did you suppose that you would enter the Garden without facing the same as those who came before you? Poverty and illness afflicted them, and they were shaken to the point that the Messenger and those who believed with him asked: "When is Allah's help coming?" Be assured that Allah's help is very near. (Surat al-Baqara, 214)

Submission to Destiny

Another important secret is the reality of destiny. All Muslims know that Allah created everything with its own destiny and that everything happens only by His will, for He created all the varied components of human life. The Qur'an tells us that everything that occurs in the world, without exception, happens by His will:

The keys of the Unseen are in His possession. No one knows them but Him. He knows everything in the land and sea. No leaf falls without His knowing it. There is no seed in the darkness of the soil, and nothing moist or dry, that is not in a Clear Book. (Surat al-An'am, 59)

No person can know the future, because all people are bound by time and can assess events only from the standpoint of the moment in which they are currently living. As they cannot know the future, they may not always be aware of the long-term significance or usefulness of what they are facing. But Allah, Who created time, is and therefore sees all from "outside time." Here we come to the reality of destiny, defined as Allah's knowledge of all past and future events, as well as their results, in one moment. (For a detailed discussion of this topic, see Harun Yahya's *Timelessness and the Reality of Fate* [New Delhi: Goodword Publisher, 2001].)

Thus, Allah knows the beginning and the end of all human trials, the past and the future, as well as the present moment. In His sight, everything has already been accomplished. However, we learn about these events only when we experience them at the appropriate time.

Unbelievers cannot understand this "knowledge of destiny," and thus cannot be aware of it. It is this knowledge that allows Muslims to show patience in all of their difficulties and trials. As the Qur'an says: "No misfortune occurs except by Allah's permission. Whoever believes in Allah—He will guide his heart. Allah has knowledge of all things" (Surat at-Taghabun, 11), believers live in the comfort of knowing that whatever happens to them is the result of destiny.

As a mercy from Him, Allah has created various trials for believers and then made them easy to endure, provided that they remain faithful to Him and put themselves in His hands. Those Muslims who truly believe and sincerely submit to Him see a lesson in the constant change that appears to them, and they contemplate it eagerly and with thankfulness. Similar to someone who sits comfortably in a theater watching a movie, they follow with joyful trust the destiny prepared for them. Sometimes these scenes are full of activity or frightening; other times they may be pleasant and serene. But in their totality, however, there is the joy and eagerness of belief. Frightening scenes have been especially prepared and planned down to their slightest detail. But in the end, all of them are included in Allah's knowledge and under His control.

Those Muslims who understand the reality of destiny and grasp the secret of its trials see each instance of misfortune, hunger, or poverty as a good thing and take great pleasure in it, knowing that the fine moral character they display in the face of these trials is very precious in Allah's sight. This type of joy is unique to believers. When confronted by such difficulties, Muslims do not give way to melancholy, stress, pain, panic, or fear, because they know that Allah will change all of these things to their advantage. In the Qur'an, Allah says to believers:

... Allah will not give the unbelievers any way against the believers. (Surat an-Nisa', 141)

But we must understand one point here: Whatever Muslims experience in this world, whether difficulty or frustration, loss of possessions or physical strength, illness or injury, death or disability, these are not to be considered as "bad" experiences; rather, they are tests from Allah. If they are patient during their tests and so pass them, Allah will reward them greatly in this world and the next. And at the end of this short period of testing, they will receive the reward of endless life in Paradise.

Muslims who are aware of this reality become more eager when faced with difficulties. At the same time, this eagerness foils the unbelievers' traps and defeats all of their efforts. When unbelievers think that they have put believers in a difficult situation, but then see the believers' sincere joy and gladness, they understand that they can never hurt them. Moreover, the believers' words in times of difficulty demonstrate their submission and trust in Allah. The Qur'an reveals some of these words:

[Their Messengers said:] "And why, indeed, should we not put our trust in Allah, when He has guided us to our ways? We will be steadfast however much you harm us. Those who trust put their trust in Allah." Those who did not believe said to their Messengers: "We will drive you from our land unless you return to our religion." Their Lord revealed to them: "We will destroy those who do wrong. We will leave you the land to live in after them. That is the reward of those who fear My station and fear My threat." (Surah Ibrahim, 12-14)

Say: "Nothing can happen to us except what Allah has ordained for us. He is Our Master. It is in Allah that the believers should put their trust." (Surat at-Tawba, 51)

Such an attitude is the result of the believers' submission to the destiny that Allah created for them. Those who trust and rely on Allah will never experience fear or dejection, for the Qur'an proclaims:

Those who say: "Our Lord is Allah" and then go straight will feel no fear and will know no sorrow. (Surat al-Ahqaf, 13)

Not so! All who submit themselves completely to Allah and are good-doers will find their reward with their Lord. They will feel no fear and will know no sorrow. (Surat al-Baqara, 112)

Yes, the friends of Allah will feel no fear and will know no sorrow. Those who believe and have done their duty, there is good news for them in the life of this world and in the Hereafter. There is no changing the words of Allah. That is the great victory! (Surah Yunus, 62-64)

In other verses, Allah reveals that those of His servants who believe and submit to Him have taken hold of a reliable support:

Those who submit themselves completely to Allah and do good have grasped the Firmest Handhold. The end result of all affairs is with Allah. (Surah Luqman, 22)

There is no compulsion where religion is concerned. Right guidance has become distinct from error. Anyone who rejects false deities and believes in Allah has grasped the Firmest Handhold, which will never give way. Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. (Surat al-Baqara, 256)

To Look at Events from the Vantage Point of the Future

When believers realize that they are being tested in this world, they can see events from the standpoint of the future. So, what does this mean?

No matter how great the difficulty or frustration, the situation is temporary. For example, people may be falsely accused of something and suffer unjustly for it. But the truth will ultimately be revealed. Even if the injustice does not end in this world, those who caused the injustice will be punished for what they did on the Day of Judgment. In the same way, those who suffered any injustice will look forward to that Day, upon which their patience will be rewarded. Time passes quickly, and, as with every earthly event, each difficulty will come to an end in the twinkling of an eye. Moreover, the Qur'an says that Allah has promised to send ease to each Muslim after each test has ended:

For truly, with hardship comes ease; truly, with hardship comes ease. (Surat al-Inshirah, 5-6)

So, believers trust in His endless justice, wait for this promised relief, and never lose hope. They remember that something good will come after the difficulty ends, either in this world or the next. This is what it means to view events from the standpoint of the future.

Muslims know that they are observers of their own destiny and that of others. Knowing this, they observe everything with patience, trust, and submission. In addition, they know that they cannot interfere with, prevent, or stop how an event will unfold. They keep the following words firmly in mind: "It may be that you hate something when it is good for you, and it may be that you love something when it is bad for you. Allah knows and you do not know" (Surat al-Baqara, 216). In other words, every bad thing that happens to believers will ultimately benefit them, provided that they remain faithful to Him and patient, for such tests enable them to train themselves, deepen their belief, improve their moral character, become more spiritually and intellectually

mature, and raise their status in Paradise.

Only sincere believers who have submitted wholeheartedly to Allah will experience this spiritual state. But people who do not submit to destiny and reject religion will be overcome by hopelessness, fear, and agitation, thinking that they will not be able to find any escape. Given that they have no hope or expectation with regard to the Hereafter, they live in a state of constant spiritual unhappiness and frustration. The following verse describes this spiritual state:

When Allah desires to guide someone, He expands his breast to Islam. When He desires to misguide someone, He makes his breast narrow and constricted, as if he were climbing up into the sky. That is how Allah defiles those who have no belief. (Surat al-An`am, 125)

This spiritual state of frustration is caused by people's rejection of the destiny that Allah has created for them. It is an oppressive state that they have fashioned for themselves. The fact that Allah, with His endless power and intelligence, directs each person's destiny and rules over all things is a great blessing for the believers. But those with little or no belief do not know the value of this blessing and thus cannot submit to their destiny. As a result, they end up trapping themselves in frustration until they die. Actually, this state is a spiritual punishment given in this world in return for people's lack of trust in Allah. Moreover, they deliberately bring it upon themselves:

Allah does not wrong people in any way; rather, it is people who wrong themselves. (Surah Yunus, 44)

THE MUSLIM OF DIFFICULT TIMES

The quality of a Muslim's belief and moral character is revealed in difficult times. Under such circumstances, we see their superior morality, courage, patience, trust, perception, fortitude, tolerance, willingness to forgive, self-sacrifice, mercy, humanity, appreciation, conscience, and composure.

"The Muslim of difficult times" indicates an individual who endures every difficulty, frustration, and deprivation while displaying the qualities listed above. Such people never compromise their moral character, encounter every eventuality with great maturity and trust in Allah, see the reason for everything that happens and the good in it, and exhort others to practice the same superior morality. As The Qur'an says: "... when they came at you from above and below, when your eyes rolled and your hearts rose to your throats..." (Surat al-Ahzab, 10), these difficult times are when believers undergo serious testing and are beset by frustrations.

When we speak of difficult times, some examples come to the mind of people who do not know Allah: a natural disaster, losing a job, bankruptcy, and similar events. But for those with faith, the difficult moments refer to more serious situations: a time when a person is deprived of his or her most basic requirements, and when the frustrations are far more serious than those experienced in daily life. The Qur'an defines such times when "the heart rises to the throat" as periods when every imaginable kind of difficulty, illness, and disaster falls upon a person one after another, such as when they are thrown out of their house, driven from their country, confronted with traps set just for them, as well as their family and people, and they are subject to spiritual oppression.

The Qur'an provides examples of the difficulties experienced by the Prophets and devout believers. As we said earlier, devout believers have been brought through and endured many serious trials, for:

Or did you suppose that you would enter the Garden without facing the same as those who came before you? Poverty and illness afflicted them and they were shaken to the point that the Messenger and those who believed with him asked: "When is Allah's help coming?" Be assured that Allah's help is very near. (Surat al-Baqara, 214)

In this verse, Allah announces that all people will undergo difficulties and gives the good news that those who are patient will have good things for eternity. In these times, the difference between "Muslims of moments of distress" and "fair-weather Muslims" will become evident. Members of the first group respond to their difficulties and frustrations in this way:

Those who, when disaster strikes them, say: "We belong to Allah and to Him we will return." (Surat al-Baqara, 156)

The Voice of Conscience and the Voice of the Lower Self in Times of Difficulty

When people come face to face with difficulty or frustration, they hear two inner voices. One is the conscience, which urges them to behave as Allah wants them to behave: with self-sacrifice, courage, and moral rectitude. Those who listen to this voice will choose to be patient and trust in Allah. The second voice belongs to the lower self, described as that which "commands to evil acts" (Surah Yusuf, 53). This voice, which urges rebellion, immorality, selfishness, and cowardice, causes those who listen to it great loss and attracts Satan's

"friendship." To describe to people what they will lose by making this bargain, it is necessary to know how Satan acquired his influence over them. The Qur'an gives detailed information about this and also warns people against his entrapments.

When Allah created Prophet Adam (as), He commanded the angels and Satan to bow before him. The angels did so, but in his arrogant pride, Satan refused to do so and was therefore driven out of Paradise for this rebellion. He then asked Allah to allow him to influence people until the Day of Judgment. Allah granted this request, but said that he would have no influence over His believing servants. Satan vowed that he would deceive human beings with various promises, deceptions, and entrapments, and draw them away from the true path. The Qur'an relates his oath, as follows:

He [Satan] said: "By Your misguidance of me, I will lie in ambush for them on your straight path. Then I will come at them, from in front of them and behind them, from their right and from their left. You will not find most of them thankful." He [Allah] said: "Get out of it, reviled and driven out. As for those of them who follow you, I will fill up Hell with every one of you." (Surat al-A`raf, 16-18)

He [Satan] said: "Do you see this creature you have honored over me? If You reprieve me till the Day of Resurrection, I will be the master of his descendants, except for a very few." He [Allah] said: "Go! And as for any who follow you, your repayment is Hell, repayment in full! Stir up any of them you can with your voice, rally against them your cavalry and your infantry, share with them in their children and their wealth, and make them promises! The promise of Satan is nothing but delusion." (Surat al-Isra', 62-64)

As it says in the verse, Satan will try anything to divert people from the true path and prevent them from being thankful to Allah and from living a good moral life. As a result, he will bring the majority of people over to his side by using the voice of the lower self. For this reason, when people undergo hard times, Satan will always make them think selfishly about themselves and how to secure their own advantage by presenting self-sacrifice, compassion, and mercy as negative options:

O humanity, eat what is good and lawful on Earth. Do not follow in the footsteps of Satan, for he truly is an outright enemy to you. He only commands you to do evil and indecent acts, and to say about Allah that which you do not know. (Surat al-Baqara, 168-69)

For all of these reasons, Muslims who are facing difficulties, frustration, or disaster must act according to their conscience so that they will not join Satan. By following Satan, selfishness, opportunism, addiction to pleasure, hypocrisy, and many other negative qualities are given a chance to arise and corrupt the Qur'an's morality. Sincere Muslims listen to their conscience and always follow the way of goodness. As the Qur'an says, it is important that good morals be shown when "the matter is resolved upon":

Once the matter is resolved upon, being true to Allah would be better for them. (Surah Muhammad, 21)

The majority of people know that faithfulness shown in times of trial indicates superior morality and swear that they will be faithful and strong in such times. But when the trial comes, their behavior does not match their earlier promises and they react negatively when touched by the least frustration. They become angry all of a sudden and, instead of love and compassion, display angry recrimination. In a moment, they can become suspicious, rebellious, and demanding. In such instances, the strong will be separated from the weak and corrupted morality will show itself; those whose belief is weak will reveal themselves by becoming immersed in anxiety. These people are just one step away from joining the unbelievers and their anti-Muslim activities. Occasions such as these increase by several times the value of a Muslim whose belief is sincere and strong.

All of the difficulties and frustrations encountered in daily life are both a test and a means to a happiness that can be compared to the Paradise that Muslims hope to attain in the afterlife. It is a source of great pleasure to compare the difficulties with this ease and comfort. And, for sincere Muslims, each of such difficulties brings an increase of love, respect, and appreciation from other Muslims, and is a blessing that deepens their belief. It is a divine blessing with abundant benefits and beauties that makes believers take that person as an example. In addition, it has a positive influence on the belief of those around them (by Allah's grace) and makes them worthy of the unbelievers' admiration, whether secret or open.

Someone who thinks that a particular event is outside the plan of destiny is under Satan's strong influence, which often is the cause of such doubts. Satan takes great pleasure in seeing people fall into this situation. Sometimes, under his influence, people may fall into the sickness of considering an apparently insignificant matter as being outside the sphere of destiny or beyond Allah's mercy, knowledge, and intention. Believers must be aware of and avoid this sickness, and be able to cure it if they somehow succumb to it.

For example, there is good in every event in such apparently minor things as missing a certain

television program or forgetting to order something to eat. For example, missing a television program might give them some extra time to do a good deed, think good thoughts, or might arrive at an idea that will increase their ability to serve Allah even more. Or, in that period of time they may remember Allah and understand far more than they would have gotten from the television program. Forgetting to order something to eat may be like a diet that cures an illness. People with high blood-pressure may find that it returns to normal if they forget to eat cheese one day. By putting themselves in Allah's hands, they gain merit in His sight and win His approval by striving to do good deeds. Besides, always trusting in Allah is a means for believers to attain love and contentment.

Given that many similar examples can be gleaned from daily life, it is very important to understand this matter and not let it slip our mind. Whatever people encounter, important or insignificant, is included in destiny. Satan suggests that these events are a necessary component of daily life and have nothing to do with destiny. However, believers must always be alert and aware of these suggestions, for being able to understand this and keep it in our remembrance, see reason and good in every thing and event, and realize that everything happens within Allah's good plan is a great blessing in this world and the world to come. This is a truth that gives wisdom, will, comfort, and contentment to all believers.

The Separation of Good from Evil

Allah created good and evil, help and harm, and beauty and ugliness simultaneously and made them tests on the road to Paradise or Hell. The period of testing in this earthly life clearly separates good from evil, those who are patient and those who are afraid to face difficulties, those who oppose irreligious ways of thinking and those who sit and do nothing, and those who follow their lower selves and those who listen to the voice of their conscience.

There is very good reason why good and evil are so closely connected with each other. One reason is that the value of good and evil may be understood only within this contradiction. If evil, deprivation, or disaster did not exist, people could not understand the value of good. For example, when you place a diamond among ordinary stones, its beauty and allure becomes more evident.

Another reason is found in the secret of this transitory world's trials. Here, people are tested with good and evil. In the testing, the difference in degree between the two will become evident, and the good will be separated to one side, and the evil to the other. While the Angel of Death will take the souls of evil people with great harshness, good people will be invited to enter the beauty and pleasure of Paradise. The Qur'an says that these trials are the way by which believers are distinguished from those with a disease in their hearts:

What assailed you on the day the two armies met was by Allah's permission, so that He would know the believers and the hypocrites. They were told: "Come and fight in the Way of Allah, or at least help defend us." They said: "If we knew how to fight, we would certainly follow you." They were closer to unbelief that day than to faith, saying with their mouths that which was not in their hearts. And Allah knows best what they are hiding. (Surah Al `Imran, 166-67)

As these verses say, the behavior shown by the Prophet's (saas) contemporaries in the face of difficulty was the way by which devout believers were distinguished from hypocrites.

Bediuzzaman discusses in depth how difficulties and disasters separate the good from the evil, and gives very good and wise advice on this matter. When asked what the purpose of Satan and wickedness is, he concludes that some very important reasons lie behind every frustration, deprivation, and wickedness. The most important of these is the separation between a "coal-like" disposition and a "diamond-like" disposition.

He uses this example to show that every kind of difficulty and frustration brings out the best in a person. The trials of this world bring to light each person's bad aspects and so provide the opportunity to correct them. For example, a serious illness may reveal an individual's timidity or spiritual weakness. Thus, when a woman becomes aware of her weakness, she immediately remedies it. So, the illness allowed her to see her mistakes and to correct them within this short lifetime. After this misfortune, one more impurity will be done away with, and her moral character will be improved. Take the example of a man with a life-long reputation for being honorable but then goes bankrupt and resorts to illegal means to get money. This shows how misfortune can reveal a person's bad aspects. But if this individual does not commit a sin and compromise his honor despite his need for money, then his deprivation will show that he is really pure and devout.

In his Letters, Bediuzzaman gives examples of the wisdom of showing patience in situations that will later turn out for the good. He writes: So, the creation in the universe of wickedness, hurt, trials, evil and suffering is not something bad or ugly; these things have been created for a very important purpose. ...in the world of human beings advance and decline are endless. There is a great distance between the Nimrods and

Pharaohs on one hand and the saints and prophets on the other. So to distinguish between the coal-like base spirits and diamond-like spirits above, the creation of Satan opened an arena of struggle, contest, and trial to which prophets are sent and in which the secret of responsibility is revealed. If there were no struggle and contest, the qualities within coal and diamonds would remain indistinguishable in the human ore. The exalted spirit of Abu Bakr as-Siddiq and the base spirit of Abu Jahl would remain on the same level. This means that the creation of evil and wickedness is not bad and ugly because it leads to important results.⁷

Another matter stressed here is the value of this world's trials. If there were no evil or frustration, the good qualities in human character would not come to the fore, the high moral quality of devout persons would not be displayed, and there would be no advance in one's level of spirituality. This is why every eventuality that appears to be negative in fact opens an unlimited horizon of opportunity to mature one's moral character, strengthen and deepen one's spirituality, and raise one's rank and position in Paradise.

Bediuzzaman writes further that:

Religion is an examination, a test, proposed by Allah so that in the arena of competition elevated spirits and base spirits may be distinguished from one another. Just as materials are plunged in the fire so that diamonds and coal, gold and earth, separate out from one another, so too religion is a trial concerning the obligations placed on man by Allah and a driving to competition, which is what this abode of examination consists of. In this way the elevated jewels in the mine of man's abilities become separated out from the dross. ...the Qur'an was revealed in this abode of examination for man to be perfected through trial in the arena of competition.⁸

According to this comparison, the good diamond-like qualities must be separated from the base coal-like qualities. But as this can be done only by applying fire, human beings must go through a serious testing period involving difficulties, misfortunes, and various frustrations to remove their bad qualities so that their good qualities can shine in the light of day.

Bediuzzaman gives another example: the separation of silver and copper from the ore when it is struck against a touchstone. Two valuable materials are separated from each other by striking the ore against that stone, and the valueless copper ore is eliminated. In this process of separation, the ore has to be struck violently against the stone and then passed through a fine sieve. This process reveals the silver within the ore and cleanses it of the copper ore, which reduces its value. What the master means by being "struck against the stone" is that undergoing difficulties, misfortunes, and various frustrations will cause the person's internal beauty to be revealed. The severity of the difficulties and frustrations reveal the strength of the person's belief, as well as the superiority of his or her moral character, discernment, faithfulness, and loyalty. Moreover, this testing leaves behind a maturity of character with great faith and spiritual depth. So, this process purges the believer's superior character of all qualities that weaken it, until it appears like silver. Bediuzzaman writes:

Then this morning the following was imparted to me: for us to be set this rigorous examination, and to be struck on the touchstone numerous times to see clearly whether we are gold or brass, and to be tried unfairly in every respect, and to be passed through ever finer sieves three or four times to see whether our evil-commanding souls take a share or are playing any tricks, is extremely necessary for our service, which should be purely and solely in the name of truth and reality, so that Divine Determining and dominical grace permit it. For by being exhibited in this field of trial and examination confronted by obdurate, unjust enemies and their pretexts, everyone has understood that there is no trickery, no egotism, no malice, no worldly or personal interests, nor those that look to the Hereafter, mixed in with our service, and that it is completely sincere and proceeds from truth and reality. If it had remained concealed, it could have been given numerous meanings. The mass of believers would not have had confidence in it. They would have said: "Perhaps they are deceiving us," and the elite too would have had their suspicions. Thinking that "perhaps they are acting the same as some of those who sell themselves to acquire spiritual rank for themselves and to win confidence," they would not feel completely certain about it. Now, following the examination, even the most stubborn and obdurate person is compelled to submit. If your hardship is one, your profits are a thousandfold. Allah willing.⁹

In these examples, Bediuzzaman also draws attention to other reasons for frustration and misfortune. Other people will see and be inspired by the superior moral character of those individuals who rid themselves of their negative qualities while passing through severe trials. The faithfulness of Muslims, their superior and virtuous acts on the side of righteousness, will come out as they face these serious trials, and people will see that they expect no human reward for the services they perform. Even those who harbor great doubts about Muslims will admit that every effort they make is solely for the sake of earning Allah's good pleasure, and everyone will attest to the purity of their intentions. Other people will come to recognize Muslims by the difficulties and misfortunes that they undergo, all of which confirm that they are on the right path.

Exhibiting Good Moral Qualities at Times of Difficulty and Frustration

Everyone experiences many things during the day: feelings of tiredness, hunger, weakness, and so on. This is all very natural. However, Allah says that Muslims can be chosen to suffer trials that are much harder than these as a test. The moral character revealed by believers and unbelievers in these situations is quite different.

For example, such frustration leads unbelievers to rebel, be intimidated, become aggressive, and lose hope and integrity. Since they do not believe in an afterlife, they think that everything they do is relevant only for this world:

They say: "There is nothing but our existence in this world. We die and we live, and nothing destroys us except for time." They have no knowledge of that. They are only conjecturing. (Surat al-Jathiyya, 24)

According to them, everything will end when the world comes to an end. Therefore, they want to experience comfort, peace of mind, reward for their labors, and all other good things in this world. This desire makes difficulties and frustration very painful for them. They are neither patient nor trusting, cannot forgive or give of themselves, cannot treat others humanely, or have any sense of compassion or mercy. Believing that there is no reward or profit in such things, they fall into the hopelessness of thinking that difficulties bring only loss.

But such ideas are totally wrong, because a person's real and eternal life begins only after death. On the Day of Judgment, everyone will account totally for what they have done and will receive their just reward. Those who have exhibited good moral qualities will not suffer loss; on the contrary, their gain will be great. In fact, they will receive the reward for every good word they have spoken, every pious deed they have done, and each instance of self-sacrifice, faithfulness, loyalty, and humanity they have shown. Indeed, believers remember our Prophet's (saas) hadith: "Bad conduct destroys divine service, just as condiment destroys honey"¹⁰ and meticulously avoid bad conduct.

But people far removed from religion are not aware of this reality. They are intimidated in the face of difficult situations, because they deny that everything they are experiencing is a test. Here is a point of which we must take careful note: "If you feel pain, they too are feeling it just as you are. But you hope for something from Allah, for which they cannot hope" (Surat an-Nisa', 104). As this verse says, both believers and unbelievers are struck by the same kinds of difficulties and frustrations. But because unbelievers have no faith in Allah and do not consider that every event has been created by Him, they do not expect to receive from Allah what believers hope to receive. So, the basic difference is that they remain oblivious of life's true meaning. In other words, the believers' belief in Allah totally separates them from the unbelievers in the afterlife.

For example, Allah tells us that people will be tried by hunger and poverty. While hunger is a major difficulty and frustration for unbelievers, for Muslims it is a trial in which they can show the quality of their moral character and a good opportunity that they should not miss. In such times, submission to Allah, trust, and patience gain great importance, and the fact that they do not lose hope but rather see the good in what is happening are indications that they are passing the test.

Unbelievers consider their own advantage and comfort first; however, the believers' moral quality always gives precedence to the other person. Believers freely give to other believers the best seat, the best food, and the best clothing. When it is cold, sincere Muslims will always take care of their fellow Muslims by offering them blankets and hot drinks, even when they themselves are cold. They take joy in ensuring their friend's health, safety, comfort, and happiness, for they know that the pleasure derived from these acts of self-sacrifice cannot be compared with the pleasure of drinking the hot drink themselves.

People can exhibit fine moral qualities if everything is going well amid an abundance of blessings, if their health is good and their needs are being met. But showing exemplary moral quality in times of difficulty, or displaying good treatment toward others while being shunned, slandered, or vilified by harsh words, is to respond to evil with good. Another sign of good moral character is when a person who is not hungry gives food to another and a person who is warm gives clothing to someone who is cold. Both people are very valuable in Allah's sight, but showing moral excellence in the face of difficulty and bad treatment is very important and valuable, for it displays the strength and sincerity of an individual's faith, devoutness, and superior virtue.

In addition, those who live a virtuous life listening to their conscience may hear their lower self constantly urging them toward evil, suggesting that they will find it hard to be virtuous, and trying everything to prevent them from being so. This voice makes people fear that they will be cold if they give away a sweater or that they will be hungry if they give away their food. This is one of Satan's tactics, for he uses the fear of poverty in an attempt to prevent believers from helping the poor:

O you who believe. Give away some of the good things you have earned and some of what the ground produces for you. Do not have recourse to bad things when you give, things you would only take with your eyes tight shut! Know that Allah is Rich Beyond Need, Praiseworthy. Satan promises you poverty and commands you to avarice. Allah promises you forgiveness from Him and abundance. Allah is All-Encompassing, All-Knowing. (Surat al-Baqara, 267-68)

This passage goes on to say that Allah foils this weak trick of Satan and announces to human beings the good news of His good pleasure. In return for their high moral character, Allah allows them to experience a spiritual delight that cannot be compared with any earthly pleasure. There is no limit to the joy that comes from self-sacrifice, patience, faithfulness, generosity, humanity, and loyalty. In one verse, Allah praises the superior moral character of those believers who eagerly and happily open their houses to other Muslims who migrated to their country, providing everything they need despite the fact that they are needy themselves:

Those who were already settled in the abode and in faith before they came love those who have migrated to them, do not find in their hearts any need for what they have been given, and prefer them to themselves even if they themselves are needy. It is the people who are safe-guarded from the avarice of their own selves who are successful. (Surat al-Hashr, 9)

Allah also describes the rewards granted after the trial of thirst, fatigue, and hunger to those who work in His way:

It was not for the people of Madinah and the desert Arabs around them to remain behind the Messenger of Allah, nor to prefer themselves to him. That is because no thirst or weariness or hunger will afflict them in the Way of Allah. Nor will they take a single step to infuriate the unbelievers or secure any gain from the enemy without a right action being written down for them because of it. Allah does not let the wage of the good-doers go to waste. (Surat at-Tawba, 120)

As this verse says, every frustration that a Muslim experiences on the way of Allah is, in fact, a good deed. Given that all people were created to serve Allah and do good deeds, they will receive the perfect reward for their patience and moral character, and will suffer no injustice.

The same is true of illness, and other frustrations. Believers know that only Allah will reward them and that this world is only temporary. Therefore, they are always discerning, decisive, and firm because they have read in the Qur'an that He will give spiritual strength and support to those believers who work for Him. To know the secret of this world's trials causes a great feeling of ease in the face of difficulty. People who know that whatever happens to them is a test can neither become unhappy, frustrated, or depressed nor lose hope and be overwhelmed by fear and anxiety.

The Strength that Supports Believers

The eager and joyful strength of character that believers display when they encounter difficulties and frustration is something that those who have no faith in Allah's supreme power cannot understand. Unbelievers are suspicious and wonder what power supports these people, for since they have no belief in Allah, they remain totally unaware of the truth that only He can send this supportive power. To them, people are strong because of their material means and friends. Thus, they always look for a kind of intention and a different material source that they believe is responsible for the believers' strength. However, this strength comes from the believers' belief in destiny and the Hereafter, as well as their trust and submission to Allah. The lives of the Prophets and other devout believers contain many fine examples of the power that comes from this trust.

An important example is the group of Pharaoh's magicians, who showed strength of character when Pharaoh threatened them with death. The Qur'an tells us that Pharaoh tried to intimidate them with torture and death, and kept them from following the true path that Prophet Musa (as) had brought to them. However, their answer to him showed that they feared only Allah and turned to Him in any difficulty that happened to them. Despite all of Pharaoh's threats, the magicians told him that they would hold firm to the way of submission and trust in Allah that their faith had given them:

Pharaoh said: "Do you believe in him before I have authorized you? He is your chief, the one who taught you magic. I will cut off your hands and feet alternately, and have you crucified on palm trunks. Then you will know for certain which of us has the harsher and longer-lasting punishment." They said: "We will never prefer you to the Clear Signs that have come to us, nor to Him Who brought us into being. Decide on any judgment you like. Your jurisdiction only covers the life of this world. We have believed in our Lord so that He may forgive us for our mistakes and for the magic that you forced us to perform. Allah is better and longer-lasting." (Surah Ta Ha, 71-73)

Another example concerns the young people who believed in Prophet Musa (as). Pharaoh's threats

prevented some of his people from having faith in Allah, and so they suffered a great loss. But devout believers who feared only Allah's power believed in Him and followed the way Prophet Musa (as) showed them. The oppression and assaults of Pharaoh and his company did not deter them:

No one believed in Musa, except for a few of his people, out of fear that Pharaoh and the elders would persecute them. Pharaoh was high and mighty in the land. He was one of the profligate. (Surah Yunus, 83)

Like these devout young people who believed in Prophet Musa (as), all believers displayed the same trust and courage when faced with society's hostility or serious difficulties, frustration, or need. The Qur'an tells us:

When the believers saw the Confederates, they said: "This is what Allah and His Messenger promised us. Allah and His Messenger told us the truth." It only increased them in faith and in submission. (Surat al-Ahzab, 22)

Meticulous Obedience to Allah in Times of Difficulty

One of the most notable things that distinguish devout Muslims from others is their attention to Allah's commands and recommendations. No difficulty, frustration, or restriction will lessen their resolve to obey them or lead them to compromise their moral character. No matter how much in need or trouble they may be, they will never consider doing anything forbidden by Allah. In a situation rife with illness, need, failure, or oppression, they will not compromise their honesty and sincerity.

As we said earlier, Satan wants to divert human beings from the true path and get them to listen to the negative voice of their lower self. So, he urges them to do things that Allah has forbidden and blocks them from doing what Allah has approved. This inner negative voice always works toward this goal, continually suggesting wicked things to their minds. For example, this negative voice wants to prevent people from getting up to perform their prayers; it makes them sleepy, listless, and out of sorts; and it constantly tries to make them forget why they should do this. Satan inspires them to ask themselves: "What's the difference if I don't get up just for today?"

But believers do not listen to this negative voice. They get up every morning with eager determination to perform their prayers, remembering that this is the way to true beauty and salvation. This negative voice finds every excuse to make fasting appear difficult, even though Allah has commanded that this kind of worship be performed. It tries to make it appear that hunger and thirst are difficult to endure. If they fast, this voice makes them doubt their ability to do it. But devout Muslims fast with eager determination despite their lower self's insistent pressure. They hope for reward from our Lord for the hunger, thirst, and fatigue that they have endured to gain His favor. And in this, they take great pleasure.

Similarly, in some situations where making money illegally is considered legitimate, this inner voice makes it appear easy and suggests that everyone is doing it. Even though they may be in great need and when the inner voice is pressuring them the most, Muslims would never lower themselves to do such a thing, regarding such a moral flaw as reprehensible. They would never touch money that was obtained illegally, and would never sit at a table and eat food bought with forbidden money, no matter how hungry they were. Even being in such a situation would make them very uncomfortable. They would never assert that being in need was any justification for wrong behavior, for they know that the important thing is always to carefully avoid what Allah has forbidden. They practice this precept with an inner sense of well-being and eager sincerity.

The Qur'an calls those Muslims who are eager to behave in ways that earn Allah's good pleasure "those who race each other to the good." While striving to attain Allah's promised Paradise, Muslims experience peace and well-being from giving whatever and whenever they can and from being patient in every difficulty. For example, they may have Muslim friends who are in need. So, they get up one sleepless morning and try to please their friends by supplying whatever they need. Most often the recipients of such good deeds do not know who did it, and the doers, pleased with their own moral conduct, would never let it be known if it caused them any difficulty.

Allah says that Muslims have a deep sense of pleasure in living according to the Qur'an's morality and find the opposite kind of behavior reprehensible:

However, Allah has given you love of faith and made it pleasing to your hearts, and has made disbelief, deviance, and disobedience hateful to you. People such as these are rightly guided. It is a great favor from Allah and a blessing. Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise. (Surat al-Hujurat, 7-8)

But in spite of everything, Satan tries to make it appear that all illegal activities are legitimate. To do this, Satan shows that those who do evil things are in the majority. A large number of people take forbidden money, pay no attention to what is permitted and what is not, and transgress the tenets of the Qur'an's morality.

Thus, Satan always intimates the illogical idea that the majority is right and that what it does makes sense. But the Qur'an says that those who do evil deeds are not on the right path, even though they are in the majority: "If you obeyed most of those on Earth, they would misguide you from Allah's Way. They follow nothing but conjecture..." (Surat al-An'am, 116). But, on the contrary, Allah says that only a small community of people has faith and that the majority are on the wrong path. For this reason, Satan cannot fool believers but can only influence those whose belief is weak, whose minds are open to doubt and apprehension, and who openly reject Allah.

The attentiveness of devout Muslims comes from their belief in Allah and the unwavering decisiveness that this belief brings with it, as well as from their superior moral character. Muslims know that good behavior is composed of acts that defy the lower self's voice. For example, when generosity, loyalty, patience, faithfulness, and other such high moral qualities are practiced, the lower self is disgusted. But the result of all this will be spiritual and material good. Living a life in this world and in the world to come in a state of contentment with the rewards of moral purity is much better than acquiring all of the things that belong to this world and please the lower self. For example, people who refuse to listen to the lower self's persuasive tones to enter into an illegitimate relationship, but who prefer to wait for their reward in the Hereafter, will enjoy honor and righteousness in this world. In the same way, those who go hungry or without sleep to supply the needs of a beloved Muslim friend, and who disregard the ensuing difficulties, will be joyous in their hope to win Allah's good pleasure.

Muslims who have these fine moral qualities, all of which Allah praises in the Qur'an, also earn the believers' love and respect. If they work hard for Allah's cause and gladly confront every obstacle, if they act with untiring dedication to a just cause without fear of confrontation, and if they are willing to make every kind of self-sacrifice, the love and respect that others feel for them will increase severalfold. In the Qur'an, Allah refers to those who live according to His superior morality: "Those for whom the Best from Us was preordained will be far away from it [Hell]" (Surat al-Anbiya', 101) and relates to us their fine physical and moral qualities.

Muslims Are True Friends in Times of Need

There is a common saying among non-religious people: Someone who has fallen on hard times has no friends. This is a good expression of the common idea that you cannot find a real friend when you need one. However, friendship, loyalty, and faithfulness are very important in a person's life, for those who are in financial difficulty or ill, or in need of spiritual support, want a real close friend at their side—a friend who is a believer—to help them. But since all relationships in non-religious societies are based on opportunism, unbelievers can never find a true friend. Only when they are in trouble or need do people see the real face of those whom they had always considered to be their friends. Their supposed friends even give trouble to them in such difficult times. For example, people going through times of need complain that no relative calls, that they are left alone, and that no one gives them any support.

For example, a wealthy person who drives an expensive car and eats in gourmet restaurants generally has a wide circle of friends, including many close ones. But if he loses his job and starts to work in a salaried position in his own factory, how will his relationships fare? Will his circle of friends show him the same love and respect that they did when he was rich? Will he be treated with the same interest, respect, and affection as when he wore expensive clothes and drove a luxury car? How will he be treated if he dresses modestly, does not throw his money around like he used to, and does not treat his friends to dinners? Clearly, he will not enjoy the same attention. Indeed, all of those whom he thought were his friends will turn their back on him. When they meet him, they will pretend not to see him or even might ridicule him. Actually, this person's spirit has not changed; only his external appearance has changed. But because his erstwhile friends rely on outward material appearances, they abandon him in a moment, leaving him all by himself.

Take another example, that of a married couple. When they were married, they promised to stay together both in good times and bad. But what happens when the wife becomes paralyzed below the waist due to an accident and thus cannot walk or do anything for herself? What will her husband do? Perhaps he will stay with her for a while and help. But when he realizes that this is a permanent situation and one from which he will never benefit, everything suddenly changes. This example clearly shows how unbelievers regard loyalty, fidelity, and friendship: When the profit goes, the connection ends. Most of those who do not abandon their spouse in such a situation stay because they are afraid of what their friends may think, not out of love and compassion for the handicapped spouse. On the surface, they appear dedicated and loyal, but they never feel real compassion and empathy for their spouse when he or she most needs it.

Another frequently encountered situation seen in unbelieving societies that are far from the Qur'an's morality is how young people behave toward their elderly parents. For years, their families met their every need; but when their parents become old and their limbs do not support them any more, the young people do not show their parents the same loyalty and attention. They feel fettered by their elderly parents and usually put them in an old people's home.

However, as in everything else, Muslims show the same loyalty in how they treat their family members. They feed their parents but may not eat themselves, and will take great care to meet all of their needs. Allah describes how Muslims must behave toward their parents:

Your Lord has decreed that you should worship none but Him, and that you should show kindness to your parents. Whether one or both of them reach old age with you, do not say "Ugh!" to them out of irritation, and do not be harsh with them; rather, speak to them with gentleness and generosity. (Surat al-Isra', 23)

In other words, Muslims will not complain about believers who are in need; rather, they will help in every way they can, humanely and out of a good conscience. The only place you can find real friendship, sincere loyalty, and faithfulness is among devout Muslims. Muslims are friends, advocates, and helpers to one another. Obligated by their moral character to consider the good and well-being of their friends, even when they fall into desperate straits, they always do their best to fulfill their friends' needs before their own and take pleasure in their acts of self-sacrifice. When their friends are ill or in financial distress, they do not mind seeing to their every need even before they are asked to do so. Even if they lose sleep and go hungry, they will not see their Muslim friends treated unjustly or in any need. In the Qur'an, Allah tells us about the true friends of believers:

Your friend is only Allah, His Messenger, and those who have faith: those who establish prayer, pay alms, and bow. (Surat al- Ma'ida, 55)

Those who believe and have migrated and striven with their wealth and themselves in the Way of Allah, and those who have given refuge and help, they are the friends and protectors of one another. But as for those who believe but have not migrated, you are not in any way responsible for their protection until they migrate. But if they ask you for help in respect of the religion, it is your duty to help them, except against people with whom you have a treaty. Allah sees what you do. (Surat al-Anfal, 72)

With Every Difficulty There Is Some Ease

From the outset, we have been speaking about the various difficulties and frustrations that Allah uses to test believers and to reveal the superior moral character that they display in such situations. We have also spoken about the well-being, eagerness, and feelings of love and respect that they experience while acting upon their moral qualities. However, we should not neglect to emphasize that with each test, Allah also sends good and relief to His believing servants. In the Qur'an, Allah mentions this promise:

For truly with hardship comes ease; truly, with hardship comes ease. (Surat al-Inshirah, 5-6)

... Allah desires ease for you... (Surat al-Baqara, 185)

We will ease you to the Easy Way. (Surat al-A'la, 8)

... Whoever has fear [and respect] of Allah—He will make matters easy for him. That is Allah's command, which He has sent down to you. Whoever has fear [and respect] of Allah—He will erase his bad actions from him and greatly increase his reward. (Surat at-Talaq, 4-5)

He who has plenty should spend out from his plenty, but he whose provision is restricted should spend from what Allah has given him. Allah does not demand from anyone more than He has given it. Allah will appoint ease after difficulty. (Surat at-Talaq, 7)

As for him who gives out and guards against evil and confirms the good, We will pave his way to ease. But as for him who is stingy and self-satisfied, and denies the good, We will pave his way to difficulty. His wealth will not help him when he plummets to the depths. (Surat al-Layl, 5-11)

As these verses show, Allah gives relief to those believers laboring in difficulty and frustration and sends them help from His presence. The Qur'an states that Allah sends help to believers by angels, and that He does this only to encourage them with good news.

Allah helped you at Badr when you were weak, so have fear [and respect] of Allah, so that, hopefully, you will be thankful. And when you asked the believers: "Is it not enough for you that your Lord reinforced you with three thousand angels, sent down?" Yes indeed! But if you are steadfast and guard against evil and they come upon you suddenly, your Lord will reinforce you with five thousand angels, clearly identified. Allah only did this for it to be good news for you, and so that your hearts might be set at rest by it. [In any case,] there is no help except from Allah, the Almighty, the All-Wise, so that He might cut off a group of those who do not

believe or crush them, and they might be turned back in defeat. (Surah Al `Imran, 123-27)

In addition to this support by angels, Allah also defends believers by an invisible army and bestows upon them a sense of security and well-being. For example, the Qur'an describes the support Allah provided to our Prophet (saas) during a difficult period of his mission:

If you do not help him, Allah helped him when the unbelievers drove him out and there were two of them in the Cave. He said to his companion: "Do not be despondent, Allah is with us." Then Allah sent down His serenity upon him and reinforced him with troops that you could not see. He made the word of the unbelievers undermost. The word of Allah is uppermost. Allah is Almighty, All-Wise. (Surat at-Tawba, 40)

As we see in the above verse, an intense sense of relief follows each period of difficulty. Actually, the fact that Muslims act as a unit, their knowledge that every event contains a test and their awareness of the need to prepare themselves for the eternal life give them a great sense of relief during their trials. Besides this, Allah announces even gladder tidings to all believers. As we have seen in the lives of our Prophet (saas) and faithful Muslims, after the difficulties are over, Allah gives believers a definite victory. Prophet Yusuf's (as) life exemplifies this tiding.

When Yusuf (as) was very young, his brothers threw him into a well and left him there to die. Those who found him sold him as a slave to an Egyptian vizier. Later, Yusuf (as) was falsely accused by the vizier's wife, arrested, and spent several years in prison, where he suffered many difficulties without ever compromising his moral character. Whenever something happened to him, he took refuge in Allah and thus turned his time in prison into a positive experience. He became an example for all believers with his trust, loyalty, and submission to Allah in all of his misfortunes. As a reward, Allah removed him from prison at a time of His choice and gave him power and wealth in Egypt.

For this reason, his life is a good example for believers. Allah promises His servants who show trust and patience in difficulty that He will bring good out of it and give them sure relief.

... Whoever has fear [and respect] of Allah—He will give him a way out and provide for him from where he does not expect. Whoever puts his trust in Allah—He will be enough for him. Allah always achieves His aim. Allah has appointed a measure for all things. (Surat at-Talaq, 2-3)

This example reveals that Allah tests His servants from time to time with difficulties and frustration. But believers who know that they are being tested and continue to submit wholeheartedly to Allah have gained something of great importance: They know they will have their reward multiplied in the next world for the things they suffer in this life, for the high moral standards they display in all sorts of difficult situations, and for their self-sacrifice, patience, and submission. Perhaps the few minutes of difficulty they endure here will bring them millions of years of reward in Paradise. Surely, those who are aware of this great promise spend their whole lives in eager expectation and joyous hope of living in a Paradise filled with endless good things. Allah describes the state of these people in the following verses:

Those who do not bear false witness and who, when they pass by worthless talk, pass by with dignity; those who, when they are reminded of the Signs of their Lord, do not turn their backs, deaf and blind to them; those who say: "Our Lord, give us joy in our wives and children and make us a good example for those who have fear [and respect] of Allah." Such people will be repaid for their steadfastness with the Highest Paradise, where they will meet with welcome and "Peace." They will remain in it timelessly, forever. What an excellent lodging and abode! (Surat al-Furqan, 72-76)

Not distracted by trade or commerce from the remembrance of Allah and the establishment of prayer and the payment of alms; fearing a day when all hearts and eyes will be in turmoil—so that Allah can reward them for the best of what they did and give them more from His unbounded favor. Allah provides for anyone He wills without reckoning. (Surat an-Nur, 37-38)

HOW UNBELIEVERS ACT WHEN FACED WITH DIFFICULTY

Earlier, we showed that whatever internal conditions exist, there is no alteration in a Muslim's moral character. Those who have no belief or have a sickness in their heart cannot stand difficult times, for their endurance is limited and they have a low boiling point. For this reason, they become very tense when they encounter difficulties and frustrations. Sometimes the slightest thing can trigger this tension, which causes them to become furious, shout, start a fight, fling insults, become aggressive, and resort to violence. People who are usually joyful, smiling, and easy-going under normal circumstances undergo a real character change in times of difficulty. They turn into aggressive, joyless, contrary, and sullen people. While Muslims talk patiently about truth and beauty, unbelievers choose to go on the attack, thereby revealing their real face and character.

What reveals their real character may be their sudden unemployment, an illness, an accident, a

disaster, or a misfortune. If they are homeless for two days or deprived of sleep, or if their accustomed comforts are removed, they become despondent. In the Qur'an, Allah describes the ungrateful character they display in times of difficulty:

As for humanity, when his Lord tests him by honoring him and favoring him, he says: "My Lord has honored me!" But when He tests him by restricting his provision, he says: "My Lord has humiliated me!" (Surat al-Fajr, 15-16)

Thus, Allah tests also unbelievers by bestowing and then removing blessings according to His will. In such a situation, Muslims retain their trust in Allah and remain thankful to Him, whereas unbelievers react immediately with ingratitude. Unaware that they are being tested, they lose both in this world and in the next.

Unbelievers also react to these tests by becoming depressed or going so far as to commit suicide or resort to alcohol or drugs. None of them consider the reason for their difficulties or care about the good that will come out of them. However, Allah presses unbelievers with difficulties "so that, hopefully, they would turn back" (Surat az-Zukhruf, 48). In other words, He sends hard times to them so that they will turn to the right path, repent, and acquire firm belief. But most of the time, these difficulties and frustrations only harden their hearts and increase their denial of Allah.

If only they had humbled themselves when Our violent force came upon them! However, their hearts were hard and Satan made what they were doing seem attractive to them. When they forgot what they had been reminded of, We opened up for them the doors to everything, until, when they were exulting in what they had been given, We suddenly seized them. At once, they were in despair. (Surat al-An'am, 43-44)

The Inner State of Those who Are Attached to This World

The Muslims' understanding of the secret of these trials gives them a happiness and a sense of well-being, while those who are attached to this world live in great frustration, pain, and moral degeneration. While Muslims enjoy the fruits of their patience, those who are attached to what they believe is a world in which they will live forever are unaware that they are being tested and thus experience the frustration and pain of impatience, distrust, selfishness, meanness, and worldly ambition. This pain shows itself in every moment of their lives. For example, there is a barrenness and joylessness in everything they do, as well as an inability to recognize what is good and to know the joy that a fine moral character brings.

They have neither honor nor moral character, and their lives are ruled by hypocrisy. Their greatest fault is that they think about themselves all the time. As a result, they think that being mean and selfish will benefit them and cannot see the harm that will result from such behavior. In fact, those who think in this way lose a great deal in both worlds, but are unaware of this fact. Unbelievers have lost the endless blessings of Paradise; but most importantly, they have lost Allah's good pleasure and mercy. As the Qur'an states, this is truly a great loss:

It is He Who made you successors on Earth. So whoever does not believe, his unbelief is against himself. In Allah's sight, the unbelief of the unbelievers only increases their loathsomeness; the unbelief of the unbelievers only increases their loss. (Surah Fatir, 39)

This state is very instructive for Muslims observing the unbelievers objectively from outside. For example, the spiritual corruption of a person who robs an orphan or seizes a poor person's possessions and uses then this forbidden money to buy clothes does not go unnoticed. In the Qur'an, Allah describes the state of such people as: "... That is how Allah defiles those who have no faith" (Surat al-An'am, 125). This corruption may not be outwardly visible, but its spiritual aspect can be noticed by those who fear and respect Allah. These people wear a spiritual corruption: They are mean even though they have money and possessions and do not feed the poor and the needy. Even if they do help, they leave the recipient with a sense of obligation. The Qur'an's description of such people (e.g., those who are immoral, eat forbidden food, amass money without giving alms, and spend money in forbidden ways) awakens a reaction in believers.

Have you seen him who denies the religion? He is the one who harshly rebuffs the orphan and does not urge the feeding of the poor. (Surat al-Ma'un, 1-3)

We often see a portrait of these people, who became wealthy through illegal and immoral ways. They show signs that they earn their money by murder, bribery, corruption, and fraud; make unjust profits; rob orphans and give nothing to the poor and needy; and strip people of all their beauty and dignity. While they try to be beautiful, they are surrounded by spiritual corruption and a deep, ugly darkness. This is a sign of immorality, growing sinfulness, and dishonor. Allah uses the word "debasement" to describe this darkness and corruption, which is visible on such a person's face:

Those who do good will have the best and more! Neither dust nor debasement will darken their faces.

They are the Companions of the Garden, remaining in it timelessly, forever. But as for those who have earned bad actions—a bad action will be repaid with one like it. Debatement will darken them. They will have no one to protect them from Allah. It is as if their faces were covered by dark patches of night. Those are the Companions of the Fire, remaining in it timelessly, forever. (Surah Yunus, 26-27)

As these verses reveal, the beauty of those with high morality increases while immorality covers the unbelievers' faces like the darkness of night. It is a necessity of this world of trials and testing that Allah reward all people according to what they have done. Those who have done good will receive good; those who have done evil will receive evil. Believers are repulsed by all of the unbelievers' behavior and attitudes.

For example, if a visitor goes to an unbelievers' home, the host's every action will make the guest uncomfortable. No matter how good the offered food may look, it does not appear so to a guest who knows his host's moral character and that his whole life is a violation of Allah's injunctions. Injustice done to orphans and the poor lie behind the food and drink offered. Believers will much prefer a stew made with legitimate money to a splendid meal paid for by money earned unlawfully. The guest may be invited to sit in an armchair. But if he knew how the money had been earned to buy that chair, he would never want to sit in it. He would realize that everything in the house was acquired through the unjust exploitation of poverty-stricken women, children, and elderly persons. Even if everything were outwardly clean, there would be a pervasive stench of spiritual corruption in the place that would make the guest uncomfortable. The Qur'an says that those who eat unlawful food and listen to liars will be humiliated in both worlds, and that other people will see their humiliation.

... If Allah desires misguidance for someone, you cannot help him against Allah in any way. Those are the people whose hearts Allah does not want to purify. They will have disgrace in this world, and in the Hereafter they will have a terrible punishment. They are people who listen to lies and consume ill-gotten gains. (Surat al-Ma'ida, 41-42)

Indeed, these people are unhappy with themselves and others like them, because they see their own cruel and immoral behavior. Since they deliberately do things that Allah has forbidden, they appear shameless. Today, those who are the most obviously shameless are those who engage in prostitution and others who profit from it. Those who work in this amoral profession quickly distance themselves from humanity and eventually reach the point where they have no beauty or dignity left. Prostitution drives both men and women to importune others, and Allah plagues them with sickness, trouble, misfortune, deprivation, humiliation, and contempt. Their spiritual debasement is clear for all to see.

In the Qur'an, Allah describes these corrupt people's state in Hell to those who understand the secret of the world's trials and whose eyes are bright with the hope they have for the life to come. Encompassed in the Fire, all they can do is catch an uncomprehending glimpse of believers who have attained Allah's endless blessings. These individuals have suffered great loss and inflict that loss on all who are close to them. The Qur'an says:

You will see them as they are exposed to it, abject in their abasement, glancing around them furtively. Those who believe will say: "Truly, the losers are those who lose themselves and their families on the Day of Resurrection." The wrongdoers are in an everlasting punishment. (Surat ash-Shura, 45)

THIS TESTING CONTINUES UNTIL DEATH

Each person is tested in this world until the day that he or she dies. For this reason, all people must make every moment of life conform to Allah's commands, remember Him, seek His good pleasure, and perform the acts of worship.

This reality brings with it another important truth: If people somehow depart from the true path and show ungratefulness to Allah at the moment of death, they may fail the test and their whole life may amount to nothing. Even if they have spent their life up until that moment in a way that earned His good pleasure, that one final moment of rebellion may render all of the earlier efforts null and void.

All Muslims must take this danger seriously, because Satan, humanity's greatest enemy, will spare no effort to exploit their weakest points and unguarded moments, even up to the moment of death, to get them to abandon the true path. Therefore, the moment of death is a very important time. A person who says: "Well, I believe in Allah. I have done this much to gain His favor. Certainly by now I have earned salvation," is under a great delusion, for the Qur'an says that a person must pray for salvation "in fear and ardent hope" until the last moment of life (Surat as-Sajda, 16). Every Muslim is invited to consider this command:

O you who believe! Fear [and respect] Allah the way He should be feared [and respected], and do not die except as Muslims. (Surah Al `Imran, 102)

Those who Come to Belief but Later Reject It

Belief is one of Allah's greatest blessings, for it leads to happiness and well-being in this world as well as to salvation in the next. Therefore, as with every blessing, we must thank Allah for belief, which He grants and withholds as He wills. Those to whom Allah does not grant belief will never be able to acquire it, even if the whole world tried to get them to believe, for the Qur'an states that:

However eager you are for them to be guided, Allah will not guide those whom He misguides. They will have no helpers. (Surat an-Nahl, 37)

So, believers are saved by His mercy from unbelief. Therefore, every Muslim must give thanks by saying this prayer, which belongs to the people of Paradise:

Praise be to Allah, Who has guided us to this! We would not have been guided had Allah not guided us. The Messengers of our Lord came with the Truth... (Surat al-A'raf, 43)

To give thanks for a blessing means to praise Allah verbally and to act in a way that earns His good pleasure. Since prayer is a thanksgiving for belief, every Muslim must say their prayers with great care and attention as a thanksgiving for this great gift, do all that they can to earn His good pleasure, and devote themselves to Him totally.

If they do not do so, mistakenly thinking that their current status as believers means that they are already on the way to Paradise, or if they forget that they are being tested, then these blessings may be removed. As the Qur'an proclaims, their hearts may be hardened and, finally, they may deny Allah. At that point, all that they have done or believed up to that point loses its value, and all rewards are cancelled. Allah reveals this reality in several verses:

... As for any of you who revert from their religion and die as an unbeliever, their actions will come to nothing in this world and the Hereafter. They are the Companions of the Fire, remaining in it timelessly, forever. (Surat al-Baqara, 217)

It has been revealed to you and those before you: "If you associate others with Allah, your actions will come to nothing and you will be among the losers." (Surat az-Zumar, 65)

... those who believe ask: "Are these the people who swore by Allah, with their most earnest oaths, that they were with you?" Their actions have come to nothing, and they now are losers. O you who believe. If any of you renounce your religion, Allah will bring forward a people whom He loves and who love Him, humble to the believers, fierce to the unbelievers, who strive in the Way of Allah and do not fear the blame of any censurer. That is the unbounded favor of Allah, which He gives to whoever He wills. Allah is Boundless, All-Knowing. (Surat al-Ma'ida, 53-54)

In the Qur'an, Allah tells us that some believers later rejected their belief and how far they deviated from the true path:

As for those who believe and then return to unbelief, and then again believe and then return to unbelief, and then increase in unbelief, Allah will not forgive them or guide them on any path. (Surat an-Nisa', 137)

Those who reject belief after believing and then increase in their unbelief, their repentance will not be accepted. They are the misguided. (Surah Al 'Imran, 90)

He also describes their state in the afterlife:

... on the Day when faces are whitened and faces are blackened. As for those whose faces are blackened: "What! Did you reject belief after having believed? Taste the punishment for your unbelief!" (Surah Al 'Imran, 106)

These verses show the danger of abandoning faith to follow the wrong path. Such people spend a part of their lives believing in His existence and living according to His commands. But later on, their lower self leads them away from Allah's religion and into denial. As a result, they become irreligious, perhaps even more irreligious than others, because they had learned what was right, accepted and lived according to Allah's religion, but then had abandoned it. For this reason, all of their good works are completely cancelled. (Allah knows best) Therefore, people should not forget for even one moment that they are being tested in this world and that Satan will try to tempt them off the right path through various suggestions and doubts that these tests will never end. To deny Allah after believing in Him is the way to endless agony.

In addition, these people who reject belief live miserable lives. Even if they have attained a certain measure of material wealth and comfort, they suffer a spiritual pain for the rest of their life. Since they know the truth, they always try to suppress their conscience; however, a sense of guilt always burns in their souls. But the pain that they experience in this life is nothing compared to what they will suffer after death. The Qur'an reveals:

As for those who do not believe and die while they are unbelievers, the whole Earth filled with gold

would not be accepted from any of them if they were to offer it as a ransom. They will have a painful punishment. They will have no helpers. (Surah Al `Imran, 91)

Since such a danger exists, believers must be aware of it up until the very last moment of their lives. They should never fall away. The moment they think that they have done enough to attain eternal life, they may begin to act with abandon. As the Qur'an says: "No indeed! Truly man is unbridled, seeing himself as self-sufficient" (Surat al-'Alaq, 6-7).

So, always remember this danger and act in such a way to gain Allah's good pleasure. The trials of this world continue up to the very last moment of life.

Those who Lag Behind in the Struggle and Those who Avoid It

People with little or no belief may live among Muslims as if nothing were wrong, apparently following the rules of religion. But Allah has created certain tests to bring out their real character. Muslims who endure being tested by difficulties, hunger, need, illness, or the loss of possessions or loved ones become strong; those with a sickness in their heart draw closer to unbelief with every passing moment.

So, once again we see the importance of every moment. Some people may spend the greater part of their life believing in Allah, promoting the religion, and doing good works. But if they stop acting according to their conscience, become lax and hard-hearted, they will not be able to show the required discernment when necessary. Worldly concerns and cares for this life may overpower their sense of the need to seek Allah's good pleasure, a development that will lead them to unbelief.

Many verses relate the Prophets' struggles to protect innocent people from an aggressive society and guard Allah's religion. In those days, this struggle was a very important act of worship. Our Prophet (saas) engaged in a very tough struggle against his unbelieving society. Every struggle undertaken at the command of Allah and the Prophet (saas) is a religious responsibility. The Qur'an says that those who try to escape this responsibility will have their hearts sealed, for this desire to escape shows that they have completely departed from belief.

Today, the Muslims' struggle against unbelievers is carried on in the realm of ideas. This struggle seeks to refute all of the arguments of those who use science to deny Allah's existence. Each Muslim has a great responsibility, and none of them can remain in the background or uninvolved. In the Qur'an, Allah says that those who choose to do so have had their hearts hardened:

When a surah is sent down saying: "Believe in Allah and strive together with His Messenger," those among them with wealth will ask you to excuse them, saying: "Let us remain with those who stay behind." They are pleased to be with those who stay behind. Their hearts have been stamped, so they do not understand. (Surat at-Tawba, 86-87)

Another example is those who make excuses when confronted with difficulty and kill their own spirit in trying to escape their responsibility, as follows:

If it had been a case of easy gains and a short journey, they would have followed you. But the distance was too great for them. They will swear by Allah: "Had we been able to, we would have gone out with you." They are destroying their own selves. Allah knows that they are lying. (Surat at-Tawba, 42)

These examples from the time of our Prophet (saas) and from earlier Prophets show a very important reality: Allah tests people continually and has created separate realms for those who tell the truth and those who lie. While Muslims show strength and determination in times of difficulty and frustration, those who are weak reveal themselves and turn away from religion. An example of this happened in the time of our Prophet (saas) when there was a war between the Muslims and the unbelievers. According to the Qur'an, some Muslims showed weakness at this time and became overwhelmed with anxious thoughts, thinking other than the truth about Allah. In this time of difficulty, Satan tried to make these Muslims leave the true path:

Those of you who turned their backs on the day the two armies clashed—it was Satan who made them slip for what they had done. But Allah has pardoned them. Allah is Ever-Forgiving, All-Forbearing. (Surah Al `Imran, 155)

This occurrence contains an important lesson for believers: Allah has promised that people must be tested in order to separate the good from the evil, and the only way to endure these difficult moments is to have a strong and sincere belief in Him. Certainly, Allah makes things easier for His devout servants, steadies their feet, and places a sense of well-being and security in their hearts in all times of difficulty. But we must not forget that His promise to test all people in this world and separate the good from the evil is sure:

Or did you suppose that you would be left without Allah knowing those of you who have strived and who have not taken anyone as their intimate friends besides Allah, His Messenger, and the believers? Allah is

aware of what you do. (Surat at-Tawba, 16)

Do people imagine that they will be left to say: "We believe" and will not be tested? We tested those before them so that Allah would know the truthful and would know the liars. (Surat al-`Ankabut, 2-3)

CONCLUSION

At this moment, every person is drawing closer to the moment of his or her death. Death does not respect a person's age, for it is just as far away from a young person as it is for an old person. A 68-year-old man on his sickbed, just waiting for death to come, is just as near for an 18 year-old woman walking down the street, for accidents involving pedestrians are rather frequent. Maybe that moment could be his or her last... This is one of the most important realities of human life.

In any case, everyone is engaged in a contest to make as many advances toward the next life as they can in their allotted time in this world. As Bediuzzaman said, "This temporary world is like a field. It is a place of instruction, a market."¹¹ In other words, people can do some very profitable trading here and receive an endless recompense in the Hereafter for what they have done in this world.

Here, all people with common sense should listen to the voice of their conscience and remember that Allah tests them continually. On this road that seems so difficult, Allah has revealed the Qur'an to guide every individual and has sent his Prophets and devout Muslims to show others the true path. No matter what difficulty they encounter, people who turn to Allah with a sincere heart will be granted relief on the road to salvation. In other words, one of the greatest secrets of these trials is that they are filled with great possibilities for each believer.

From now on, the only thing believers must do is observe destiny unfold and adopt the moral character of devout Muslims, as revealed in the Qur'an. The Qur'an described the state of those who always remain faithful to Allah and show patience and determination as they advance toward the life to come, as follows:

Many a Prophet has fought when there were many thousands with him! They did not give up in the face of what assailed them in the Way of Allah, nor did they weaken or yield. Allah loves the steadfast. All they said was: "Our Lord, forgive us our wrong actions and any excesses that we went to in what we did. Make our feet firm, and help us against these unbelieving people." So Allah gave them the reward of this world and the best reward of the Hereafter. Allah loves good-doers. (Surah Al `Imran, 146-48)

THE DECEPTION OF EVOLUTION

Darwinism, in other words the theory of evolution, was put forward with the aim of denying the fact of creation, but is in truth nothing but failed, unscientific nonsense. This theory, which claims that life emerged by chance from inanimate matter, was invalidated by the scientific evidence of clear "design" in the universe and in living things. In this way, science confirmed the fact that Allah created the universe and the living things in it. The propaganda carried out today in order to keep the theory of evolution alive is based solely on the distortion of the scientific facts, biased interpretation, and lies and falsehoods disguised as science.

Yet this propaganda cannot conceal the truth. The fact that the theory of evolution is the greatest deception in the history of science has been expressed more and more in the scientific world over the last 20-30 years. Research carried out after the 1980s in particular has revealed that the claims of Darwinism are totally unfounded, something that has been stated by a large number of scientists. In the United States in particular, many scientists from such different fields as biology, biochemistry and paleontology recognize the invalidity of Darwinism and employ the concept of intelligent design to account for the origin of life. This "intelligent design" is a scientific expression of the fact that Allah created all living things.

We have examined the collapse of the theory of evolution and the proofs of creation in great scientific detail in many of our works, and are still continuing to do so. Given the enormous importance of this subject, it will be of great benefit to summarize it here.

The Scientific Collapse of Darwinism

Although this doctrine goes back as far as ancient Greece, the theory of evolution was advanced extensively in the nineteenth century. The most important development that made it the top topic of the world of science was Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, published in 1859. In this book, he denied that Allah created different living species on Earth separately, for he claimed that all living beings had a common ancestor and had diversified over time through small changes. Darwin's theory was not based on any concrete scientific finding; as he also accepted, it was just an "assumption." Moreover, as Darwin confessed in the long chapter of his book titled "Difficulties on Theory," the theory failed in the face of many critical questions.

Darwin invested all of his hopes in new scientific discoveries, which he expected to solve these difficulties. However, contrary to his expectations, scientific findings expanded the dimensions of these difficulties. The defeat of Darwinism in the face of science can be reviewed under three basic topics:

- 1) The theory cannot explain how life originated on Earth.
 - 2) No scientific finding shows that the "evolutionary mechanisms" proposed by the theory have any evolutionary power at all.
 - 3) The fossil record proves the exact opposite of what the theory suggests.
- In this section, we will examine these three basic points in general outlines:

The First Insurmountable Step: The Origin of Life

The theory of evolution posits that all living species evolved from a single living cell that emerged on the primitive Earth 3.8 billion years ago. How a single cell could generate millions of complex living species and, if such an evolution really occurred, why traces of it cannot be observed in the fossil record are some of the questions that the theory cannot answer. However, first and foremost, we need to ask: How did this "first cell" originate?

Since the theory of evolution denies creation and any kind of supernatural intervention, it maintains that the "first cell" originated coincidentally within the laws of nature, without any design, plan or arrangement. According to the theory, inanimate matter must have produced a living cell as a result of coincidences. Such a claim, however, is inconsistent with the most unassailable rules of biology.

"Life Comes From Life"

In his book, Darwin never referred to the origin of life. The primitive understanding of science in his time rested on the assumption that living beings had a very simple structure. Since medieval times, spontaneous generation, which asserts that non-living materials came together to form living organisms, had been widely accepted. It was commonly believed that insects came into being from food leftovers, and mice from wheat. Interesting experiments were conducted to prove this theory. Some wheat was placed on a dirty piece of cloth, and it was believed that mice would originate from it after a while.

Similarly, maggots developing in rotting meat was assumed to be evidence of spontaneous generation. However, it was later understood that worms did not appear on meat spontaneously, but were carried there by flies in the form of larvae, invisible to the naked eye.

Even when Darwin wrote *The Origin of Species*, the belief that bacteria could come into existence from non-living matter was widely accepted in the world of science.

However, five years after the publication of Darwin's book, Louis Pasteur announced his results after long studies and experiments, that disproved spontaneous generation, a cornerstone of Darwin's theory. In his triumphal lecture at the Sorbonne in 1864, Pasteur said: "Never will the doctrine of spontaneous generation recover from the mortal blow struck by this simple experiment."¹²

For a long time, advocates of the theory of evolution resisted these findings. However, as the development of science unraveled the complex structure of the cell of a living being, the idea that life could come into being coincidentally faced an even greater impasse.

Inconclusive Efforts of the Twentieth Century

The first evolutionist who took up the subject of the origin of life in the twentieth century was the renowned Russian biologist Alexander Oparin. With various theses he advanced in the 1930s, he tried to prove that a living cell could originate by coincidence. These studies, however, were doomed to failure, and Oparin had to make the following confession:

*Unfortunately, however, the problem of the origin of the cell is perhaps the most obscure point in the whole study of the evolution of organisms.*¹³

Evolutionist followers of Oparin tried to carry out experiments to solve this problem. The best known experiment was carried out by the American chemist Stanley Miller in 1953. Combining the gases he alleged to have existed in the primordial Earth's atmosphere in an experiment set-up, and adding energy to the mixture, Miller synthesized several organic molecules (amino acids) present in the structure of proteins.

Barely a few years had passed before it was revealed that this experiment, which was then presented as an important step in the name of evolution, was invalid, for the atmosphere used in the experiment was very different from the real Earth conditions¹⁴.

After a long silence, Miller confessed that the atmosphere medium he used was unrealistic.¹⁵

All the evolutionists' efforts throughout the twentieth century to explain the origin of life ended in failure. The geochemist Jeffrey Bada, from the San Diego Scripps Institute accepts this fact in an article published in Earth magazine in 1998:

Today as we leave the twentieth century, we still face the biggest unsolved problem that we had when we entered the twentieth century: How did life originate on Earth?¹⁶

The Complex Structure of Life

The primary reason why the theory of evolution ended up in such a great impasse regarding the origin of life is that even those living organisms deemed to be the simplest have incredibly complex structures. The cell of a living thing is more complex than all of our man-made technological products. Today, even in the most developed laboratories of the world, a living cell cannot be produced by bringing organic chemicals together.

The conditions required for the formation of a cell are too great in quantity to be explained away by coincidences. The probability of proteins, the building blocks of a cell, being synthesized coincidentally, is 1 in 10950 for an average protein made up of 500 amino acids. In mathematics, a probability smaller than 1 over 1050 is considered to be impossible in practical terms.

The DNA molecule, which is located in the nucleus of a cell and which stores genetic information, is an incredible databank. If the information coded in DNA were written down, it would make a giant library consisting of an estimated 900 volumes of encyclopedias consisting of 500 pages each.

A very interesting dilemma emerges at this point: DNA can replicate itself only with the help of some specialized proteins (enzymes). However, the synthesis of these enzymes can be realized only by the information coded in DNA. As they both depend on each other, they have to exist at the same time for replication. This brings the scenario that life originated by itself to a deadlock. Prof. Leslie Orgel, an evolutionist of repute from the University of San Diego, California, confesses this fact in the September 1994 issue of the Scientific American magazine:

It is extremely improbable that proteins and nucleic acids, both of which are structurally complex, arose spontaneously in the same place at the same time. Yet it also seems impossible to have one without the other. And so, at first glance, one might have to conclude that life could never, in fact, have originated by chemical means¹⁷.

No doubt, if it is impossible for life to have originated from natural causes, then it has to be accepted that life was "created" in a supernatural way. This fact explicitly invalidates the theory of evolution, whose main purpose is to deny creation.

Imaginary Mechanism of Evolution

The second important point that negates Darwin's theory is that both concepts put forward by the theory as "evolutionary mechanisms" were understood to have, in reality, no evolutionary power.

Darwin based his evolution allegation entirely on the mechanism of "natural selection." The importance he placed on this mechanism was evident in the name of his book: The Origin of Species, By Means of Natural Selection...

Natural selection holds that those living things that are stronger and more suited to the natural conditions of their habitats will survive in the struggle for life. For example, in a deer herd under the threat of attack by wild animals, those that can run faster will survive. Therefore, the deer herd will be comprised of faster and stronger individuals. However, unquestionably, this mechanism will not cause deer to evolve and transform themselves into another living species, for instance, horses.

Therefore, the mechanism of natural selection has no evolutionary power. Darwin was also aware of this fact and had to state this in his book The Origin of Species:

Natural selection can do nothing until favourable individual differences or variations occur.¹⁸

Lamarck's Impact

So, how could these "favorable variations" occur? Darwin tried to answer this question from the standpoint of the primitive understanding of science at that time. According to the French biologist Chevalier de Lamarck (1744-1829), who lived before Darwin, living creatures passed on the traits they acquired during their lifetime to the next generation. He asserted that these traits, which accumulated from one generation to another, caused new species to be formed. For instance, he claimed that giraffes evolved from antelopes; as they struggled to eat the leaves of high trees, their necks were extended from generation to generation.

Darwin also gave similar examples. In his book The Origin of Species, for instance, he said that some

bears going into water to find food transformed themselves into whales over time.¹⁹

However, the laws of inheritance discovered by Gregor Mendel (1822-84) and verified by the science of genetics, which flourished in the twentieth century, utterly demolished the legend that acquired traits were passed on to subsequent generations. Thus, natural selection fell out of favor as an evolutionary mechanism.

Neo-Darwinism and Mutations

In order to find a solution, Darwinists advanced the "Modern Synthetic Theory," or as it is more commonly known, Neo-Darwinism, at the end of the 1930's. Neo-Darwinism added mutations, which are distortions formed in the genes of living beings due to such external factors as radiation or replication errors, as the "cause of favorable variations" in addition to natural mutation.

Today, the model that stands for evolution in the world is Neo-Darwinism. The theory maintains that millions of living beings formed as a result of a process whereby numerous complex organs of these organisms (e.g., ears, eyes, lungs, and wings) underwent "mutations," that is, genetic disorders. Yet, there is an outright scientific fact that totally undermines this theory: Mutations do not cause living beings to develop; on the contrary, they are always harmful.

The reason for this is very simple: DNA has a very complex structure, and random effects can only harm it. The American geneticist B.G. Ranganathan explains this as follows:

First, genuine mutations are very rare in nature. Secondly, most mutations are harmful since they are random, rather than orderly changes in the structure of genes; any random change in a highly ordered system will be for the worse, not for the better. For example, if an earthquake were to shake a highly ordered structure such as a building, there would be a random change in the framework of the building which, in all probability, would not be an improvement.²⁰

Not surprisingly, no mutation example, which is useful, that is, which is observed to develop the genetic code, has been observed so far. All mutations have proved to be harmful. It was understood that mutation, which is presented as an "evolutionary mechanism," is actually a genetic occurrence that harms living things, and leaves them disabled. (The most common effect of mutation on human beings is cancer.) Of course, a destructive mechanism cannot be an "evolutionary mechanism." Natural selection, on the other hand, "can do nothing by itself," as Darwin also accepted. This fact shows us that there is no "evolutionary mechanism" in nature. Since no evolutionary mechanism exists, no such any imaginary process called "evolution" could have taken place.

The Fossil Record: No Sign of Intermediate Forms

The clearest evidence that the scenario suggested by the theory of evolution did not take place is the fossil record.

According to this theory, every living species has sprung from a predecessor. A previously existing species turned into something else over time and all species have come into being in this way. In other words, this transformation proceeds gradually over millions of years.

Had this been the case, numerous intermediary species should have existed and lived within this long transformation period.

For instance, some half-fish/half-reptiles should have lived in the past which had acquired some reptilian traits in addition to the fish traits they already had. Or there should have existed some reptile-birds, which acquired some bird traits in addition to the reptilian traits they already had. Since these would be in a transitional phase, they should be disabled, defective, crippled living beings. Evolutionists refer to these imaginary creatures, which they believe to have lived in the past, as "transitional forms."

If such animals ever really existed, there should be millions and even billions of them in number and variety. More importantly, the remains of these strange creatures should be present in the fossil record. In *The Origin of Species*, Darwin explained:

If my theory be true, numberless intermediate varieties, linking most closely all of the species of the same group together must assuredly have existed... Consequently, evidence of their former existence could be found only amongst fossil remains²¹.

Darwin's Hopes Shattered

However, although evolutionists have been making strenuous efforts to find fossils since the middle of the nineteenth century all over the world, no transitional forms have yet been uncovered. All of the fossils, contrary to the evolutionists' expectations, show that life appeared on Earth all of a sudden and fully-formed.

One famous British paleontologist, Derek V. Ager, admits this fact, even though he is an evolutionist: *The point emerges that if we examine the fossil record in detail, whether at the level of orders or of species, we find—over and over again—not gradual evolution, but the sudden explosion of one group at the expense of another*²².

This means that in the fossil record, all living species suddenly emerge as fully formed, without any intermediate forms in between. This is just the opposite of Darwin's assumptions. Also, this is very strong evidence that all living things are created. The only explanation of a living species emerging suddenly and complete in every detail without any evolutionary ancestor is that it was created. This fact is admitted also by the widely known evolutionist biologist Douglas Futuyma:

Creation and evolution, between them, exhaust the possible explanations for the origin of living things. Organisms either appeared on the earth fully developed or they did not. If they did not, they must have developed from pre-existing species by some process of modification. If they did appear in a fully developed state, they must indeed have been created by some omnipotent intelligence²³.

Fossils show that living beings emerged fully developed and in a perfect state on the Earth. That means that "the origin of species," contrary to Darwin's supposition, is not evolution, but creation.

The Tale of Human Evolution

The subject most often brought up by advocates of the theory of evolution is the subject of the origin of man. The Darwinist claim holds that modern man evolved from ape-like creatures. During this alleged evolutionary process, which is supposed to have started 4-5 million years ago, some "transitional forms" between modern man and his ancestors are supposed to have existed. According to this completely imaginary scenario, four basic "categories" are listed:

1. Australopithecus
2. Homo habilis
3. Homo erectus
4. Homo sapiens

Evolutionists call man's so-called first ape-like ancestors Australopithecus, which means "South African ape." These living beings are actually nothing but an old ape species that has become extinct. Extensive research done on various Australopithecus specimens by two world famous anatomists from England and the USA, namely, Lord Solly Zuckerman and Prof. Charles Oxnard, shows that these apes belonged to an ordinary ape species that became extinct and bore no resemblance to humans.²⁴

Evolutionists classify the next stage of human evolution as "homo," that is "man." According to their claim, the living beings in the Homo series are more developed than Australopithecus. Evolutionists devise a fanciful evolution scheme by arranging different fossils of these creatures in a particular order. This scheme is imaginary because it has never been proved that there is an evolutionary relation between these different classes. Ernst Mayr, one of the twentieth century's most important evolutionists, contends in his book *One Long Argument* that "particularly historical [puzzles] such as the origin of life or of Homo sapiens, are extremely difficult and may even resist a final, satisfying explanation."²⁵

By outlining the link chain as Australopithecus > Homo habilis > Homo erectus > Homo sapiens, evolutionists imply that each of these species is one another's ancestor. However, recent findings of paleoanthropologists have revealed that Australopithecus, Homo habilis, and Homo erectus lived at different parts of the world at the same time.²⁶

Moreover, a certain segment of humans classified as Homo erectus have lived up until very modern times. Homo sapiens neanderthalensis and Homo sapiens sapiens (modern man) co-existed in the same region.²⁷

This situation apparently indicates the invalidity of the claim that they are ancestors of one another. A paleontologist from Harvard University, Stephen Jay Gould, explains this deadlock of the theory of evolution, although he is an evolutionist himself:

What has become of our ladder if there are three coexisting lineages of hominids (A. africanus, the robust australopithecines, and H. habilis), none clearly derived from another? Moreover, none of the three display any evolutionary trends during their tenure on earth.²⁸

Put briefly, the scenario of human evolution, which is "upheld" with the help of various drawings of some "half ape, half human" creatures appearing in the media and course books, that is, frankly, by means of propaganda, is nothing but a tale with no scientific foundation.

Lord Solly Zuckerman, one of the most famous and respected scientists in the U.K., who carried out research on this subject for years and studied Australopithecus fossils for 15 years, finally concluded, despite

being an evolutionist himself, that there is, in fact, no such family tree branching out from ape-like creatures to man.

Zuckerman also made an interesting "spectrum of science" ranging from those he considered scientific to those he considered unscientific. According to Zuckerman's spectrum, the most "scientific"—that is, depending on concrete data—fields of science are chemistry and physics. After them come the biological sciences and then the social sciences. At the far end of the spectrum, which is the part considered to be most "unscientific," are "extra-sensory perception"—concepts such as telepathy and sixth sense—and finally "human evolution." Zuckerman explains his reasoning:

We then move right off the register of objective truth into those fields of presumed biological science, like extrasensory perception or the interpretation of man's fossil history, where to the faithful [evolutionist] anything is possible—and where the ardent believer [in evolution] is sometimes able to believe several contradictory things at the same time²⁹.

The tale of human evolution boils down to nothing but the prejudiced interpretations of some fossils unearthed by certain people, who blindly adhere to their theory.

Darwinian Formula!

Besides all the technical evidence we have dealt with so far, let us now for once, examine what kind of a superstition the evolutionists have with an example so simple as to be understood even by children:

The theory of evolution asserts that life is formed by chance. According to this claim, lifeless and unconscious atoms came together to form the cell and then they somehow formed other living things, including man. Let us think about that. When we bring together the elements that are the building-blocks of life such as carbon, phosphorus, nitrogen and potassium, only a heap is formed. No matter what treatments it undergoes, this atomic heap cannot form even a single living being. If you like, let us formulate an "experiment" on this subject and let us examine on the behalf of evolutionists what they really claim without pronouncing loudly under the name "Darwinian formula":

Let evolutionists put plenty of materials present in the composition of living things such as phosphorus, nitrogen, carbon, oxygen, iron, and magnesium into big barrels. Moreover, let them add in these barrels any material that does not exist under normal conditions, but they think as necessary. Let them add in this mixture as many amino acids—which have no possibility of forming under natural conditions—and as many proteins—a single one of which has a formation probability of 10-950—as they like. Let them expose these mixtures to as much heat and moisture as they like. Let them stir these with whatever technologically developed device they like. Let them put the foremost scientists beside these barrels. Let these experts wait in turn beside these barrels for billions, and even trillions of years. Let them be free to use all kinds of conditions they believe to be necessary for a human's formation. No matter what they do, they cannot produce from these barrels a human, say a professor that examines his cell structure under the electron microscope. They cannot produce giraffes, lions, bees, canaries, horses, dolphins, roses, orchids, lilies, carnations, bananas, oranges, apples, dates, tomatoes, melons, watermelons, figs, olives, grapes, peaches, peafowls, pheasants, multicoloured butterflies, or millions of other living beings such as these. Indeed, they could not obtain even a single cell of any one of them.

Briefly, unconscious atoms cannot form the cell by coming together. They cannot take a new decision and divide this cell into two, then take other decisions and create the professors who first invent the electron microscope and then examine their own cell structure under that microscope. Matter is an unconscious, lifeless heap, and it comes to life with Allah's superior creation.

The theory of evolution, which claims the opposite, is a total fallacy completely contrary to reason. Thinking even a little bit on the claims of evolutionists discloses this reality, just as in the above example.

Technology in the Eye and the Ear

Another subject that remains unanswered by evolutionary theory is the excellent quality of perception in the eye and the ear.

Before passing on to the subject of the eye, let us briefly answer the question of how we see. Light rays coming from an object fall oppositely on the eye's retina. Here, these light rays are transmitted into electric signals by cells and reach a tiny spot at the back of the brain, the "center of vision." These electric signals are perceived in this center as an image after a series of processes. With this technical background, let us do some thinking.

The brain is insulated from light. That means that its inside is completely dark, and that no light

reaches the place where it is located. Thus, the "center of vision" is never touched by light and may even be the darkest place you have ever known. However, you observe a luminous, bright world in this pitch darkness.

The image formed in the eye is so sharp and distinct that even the technology of the twentieth century has not been able to attain it. For instance, look at the book you are reading, your hands with which you are holding it, and then lift your head and look around you. Have you ever seen such a sharp and distinct image as this one at any other place? Even the most developed television screen produced by the greatest television producer in the world cannot provide such a sharp image for you. This is a three-dimensional, colored, and extremely sharp image. For more than 100 years, thousands of engineers have been trying to achieve this sharpness. Factories, huge premises were established, much research has been done, plans and designs have been made for this purpose. Again, look at a TV screen and the book you hold in your hands. You will see that there is a big difference in sharpness and distinction. Moreover, the TV screen shows you a two-dimensional image, whereas with your eyes, you watch a three-dimensional perspective with depth.

For many years, tens of thousands of engineers have tried to make a three-dimensional TV and achieve the vision quality of the eye. Yes, they have made a three-dimensional television system, but it is not possible to watch it without putting on special 3-D glasses; moreover, it is only an artificial three-dimension. The background is more blurred, the foreground appears like a paper setting. Never has it been possible to produce a sharp and distinct vision like that of the eye. In both the camera and the television, there is a loss of image quality.

Evolutionists claim that the mechanism producing this sharp and distinct image has been formed by chance. Now, if somebody told you that the television in your room was formed as a result of chance, that all of its atoms just happened to come together and make up this device that produces an image, what would you think? How can atoms do what thousands of people cannot?

If a device producing a more primitive image than the eye could not have been formed by chance, then it is very evident that the eye and the image seen by the eye could not have been formed by chance. The same situation applies to the ear. The outer ear picks up the available sounds by the auricle and directs them to the middle ear, the middle ear transmits the sound vibrations by intensifying them, and the inner ear sends these vibrations to the brain by translating them into electric signals. Just as with the eye, the act of hearing finalizes in the center of hearing in the brain.

The situation in the eye is also true for the ear. That is, the brain is insulated from sound just as it is from light. It does not let any sound in. Therefore, no matter how noisy is the outside, the inside of the brain is completely silent. Nevertheless, the sharpest sounds are perceived in the brain. In your completely silent brain, you listen to symphonies, and hear all of the noises in a crowded place. However, were the sound level in your brain was measured by a precise device at that moment, complete silence would be found to be prevailing there.

As is the case with imagery, decades of effort have been spent in trying to generate and reproduce sound that is faithful to the original. The results of these efforts are sound recorders, high-fidelity systems, and systems for sensing sound. Despite all of this technology and the thousands of engineers and experts who have been working on this endeavor, no sound has yet been obtained that has the same sharpness and clarity as the sound perceived by the ear. Think of the highest-quality hi-fi systems produced by the largest company in the music industry. Even in these devices, when sound is recorded some of it is lost; or when you turn on a hi-fi you always hear a hissing sound before the music starts. However, the sounds that are the products of the human body's technology are extremely sharp and clear. A human ear never perceives a sound accompanied by a hissing sound or with atmospherics as does a hi-fi; rather, it perceives sound exactly as it is, sharp and clear. This is the way it has been since the creation of man.

So far, no man-made visual or recording apparatus has been as sensitive and successful in perceiving sensory data as are the eye and the ear. However, as far as seeing and hearing are concerned, a far greater truth lies beyond all this.

To Whom Does the Consciousness

That Sees and Hears Within the Brain Belong?

Who watches an alluring world in the brain, listens to symphonies and the twittering of birds, and smells the rose?

The stimulations coming from a person's eyes, ears, and nose travel to the brain as electro-chemical nerve impulses. In biology, physiology, and biochemistry books, you can find many details about how this image forms in the brain. However, you will never come across the most important fact: Who perceives these

electro-chemical nerve impulses as images, sounds, odors, and sensory events in the brain? There is a consciousness in the brain that perceives all this without feeling any need for an eye, an ear, and a nose. To whom does this consciousness belong? Of course it does not belong to the nerves, the fat layer, and neurons comprising the brain. This is why Darwinist-materialists, who believe that everything is comprised of matter, cannot answer these questions.

For this consciousness is the spirit created by Allah, which needs neither the eye to watch the images nor the ear to hear the sounds. Furthermore, it does not need the brain to think.

Everyone who reads this explicit and scientific fact should ponder on Almighty Allah, and fear and seek refuge in Him, for He squeezes the entire universe in a pitch-dark place of a few cubic centimeters in a three-dimensional, colored, shadowy, and luminous form.

A Materialist Faith

The information we have presented so far shows us that the theory of evolution is incompatible with scientific findings. The theory's claim regarding the origin of life is inconsistent with science, the evolutionary mechanisms it proposes have no evolutionary power, and fossils demonstrate that the required intermediate forms have never existed. So, it certainly follows that the theory of evolution should be pushed aside as an unscientific idea. This is how many ideas, such as the Earth-centered universe model, have been taken out of the agenda of science throughout history.

However, the theory of evolution is kept on the agenda of science. Some people even try to represent criticisms directed against it as an "attack on science." Why?

The reason is that this theory is an indispensable dogmatic belief for some circles. These circles are blindly devoted to materialist philosophy and adopt Darwinism because it is the only materialist explanation that can be put forward to explain the workings of nature.

Interestingly enough, they also confess this fact from time to time. A well-known geneticist and an outspoken evolutionist, Richard C. Lewontin from Harvard University, confesses that he is "first and foremost a materialist and then a scientist":

It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our a priori adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counter-intuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is absolute, so we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.³⁰

These are explicit statements that Darwinism is a dogma kept alive just for the sake of adherence to materialism. This dogma maintains that there is no being save matter. Therefore, it argues that inanimate, unconscious matter created life. It insists that millions of different living species (e.g., birds, fish, giraffes, tigers, insects, trees, flowers, whales, and human beings) originated as a result of the interactions between matter such as pouring rain, lightning flashes, and so on, out of inanimate matter. This is a precept contrary both to reason and science. Yet Darwinists continue to defend it just so as "not to allow a Divine Foot in the door."

Anyone who does not look at the origin of living beings with a materialist prejudice will see this evident truth: All living beings are works of a Creator, Who is All-Powerful, All-Wise, and All-Knowing. This Creator is Allah, Who created the whole universe from non-existence, designed it in the most perfect form, and fashioned all living beings.

The Theory of Evolution: The Most Potent Spell in the World

Anyone free of prejudice and the influence of any particular ideology, who uses only his or her reason and logic, will clearly understand that belief in the theory of evolution, which brings to mind the superstitions of societies with no knowledge of science or civilization, is quite impossible.

As explained above, those who believe in the theory of evolution think that a few atoms and molecules thrown into a huge vat could produce thinking, reasoning professors and university students; such scientists as Einstein and Galileo; such artists as Humphrey Bogart, Frank Sinatra and Luciano Pavarotti; as well as antelopes, lemon trees, and carnations. Moreover, as the scientists and professors who believe in this nonsense are educated people, it is quite justifiable to speak of this theory as "the most potent spell in history." Never before has any other belief or idea so taken away peoples' powers of reason, refused to allow them to think intelligently and logically and hidden the truth from them as if they had been blindfolded. This is an even worse and unbelievable blindness than the Egyptians worshipping the Sun God Ra, totem worship in some parts of

Africa, the people of Saba worshipping the Sun, the tribe of Prophet Ibrahim (as) worshipping idols they had made with their own hands, or the people of the Prophet Musa (as) worshipping the Golden Calf.

In fact, Allah has pointed to this lack of reason in the Qur'an. In many verse, He reveals in many verses that some peoples' minds will be closed and that they will be powerless to see the truth. Some of these verses are as follows:

As for those who do not believe, it makes no difference to them whether you warn them or do not warn them, they will not believe. Allah has sealed up their hearts and hearing and over their eyes is a blindfold. They will have a terrible punishment. (Surat al-Baqara, 6-7)

... They have hearts with which they do not understand. They have eyes with which they do not see. They have ears with which they do not hear. Such people are like cattle. No, they are even further astray! They are the unaware. (Surat al-A`raf, 179)

Even if We opened up to them a door into heaven, and they spent the day ascending through it, they would only say: "Our eyesight is befuddled! Or rather we have been put under a spell!" (Surat al-Hijr, 14-15)

Words cannot express just how astonishing it is that this spell should hold such a wide community in thrall, keep people from the truth, and not be broken for 150 years. It is understandable that one or a few people might believe in impossible scenarios and claims full of stupidity and illogicality. However, "magic" is the only possible explanation for people from all over the world believing that unconscious and lifeless atoms suddenly decided to come together and form a universe that functions with a flawless system of organization, discipline, reason, and consciousness; a planet named Earth with all of its features so perfectly suited to life; and living things full of countless complex systems.

In fact, the Qur'an relates the incident of Prophet Musa (as) and Pharaoh to show that some people who support atheistic philosophies actually influence others by magic. When Pharaoh was told about the true religion, he told Prophet Musa (as) to meet with his own magicians. When Musa (as) did so, he told them to demonstrate their abilities first. The verses continue:

He said: "You throw." And when they threw, they cast a spell on the people's eyes and caused them to feel great fear of them. They produced an extremely powerful magic. (Surat al-A`raf, 116)

As we have seen, Pharaoh's magicians were able to deceive everyone, apart from Musa (as) and those who believed in him. However, his evidence broke the spell, or "swallowed up what they had forged," as the verse puts it.

We revealed to Musa, "Throw down your staff." And it immediately swallowed up what they had forged. So the Truth took place and what they did was shown to be false. (Surat al-A`raf, 117-18)

As we can see, when people realized that a spell had been cast upon them and that what they saw was just an illusion, Pharaoh's magicians lost all credibility. In the present day too, unless those who, under the influence of a similar spell, believe in these ridiculous claims under their scientific disguise and spend their lives defending them, abandon their superstitious beliefs, they also will be humiliated when the full truth emerges and the spell is broken. In fact, world-renowned British writer and philosopher Malcolm Muggeridge also stated this:

I myself am convinced that the theory of evolution, especially the extent to which it's been applied, will be one of the great jokes in the history books in the future. Posterity will marvel that so very flimsy and dubious an hypothesis could be accepted with the incredible credulity that it has.³¹

That future is not far off: On the contrary, people will soon see that "chance" is not a deity, and will look back on the theory of evolution as the worst deceit and the most terrible spell in the world. That spell is already rapidly beginning to be lifted from the shoulders of people all over the world. Many people who see its true face are wondering with amazement how they could ever have been taken in by it.

*They said, "Glory be to You!
We have no knowledge except
what You have taught us. You are
the All-Knowing, the All-Wise."
(Qur'an, 2:32)*

- ¹ *Fiqh as-Sunnah*, vol. 4, no. 13.
- ² Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Collection, The Words*, The Second Station of the Twentieth Word.
- ³ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Collection, The Words*, The Eleventh Word.
- ⁴ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Collection, The Flashes*, The Twenty-Fifth Flash, Ninth Remedy.
- ⁵ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Collection, The Words*, The Nineteenth Word, Tenth Droplet.
- ⁶ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Collection, The Flashes*, The Second Flash, Third Reason.
- ⁷ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Collection, Maktubat*.
- ⁸ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Collection, The Words*, The Second Station of the Twentieth Word.
- ⁹ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *The Risale-i Nur Collection, The Rays*, The Fourteenth Ray, Letters.
- ¹⁰ Imam Ahmad, vol. 1, no. 387; Imam Ibn Kathir, *The Life of This World is Fleeting Enjoyment*.
- ¹¹ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Collection, The Words*, The Tenth Word, Twelfth Aspect.
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- ²² Derek A. Ager, "The Nature of the Fossil Record", *Proceedings of the British Geological Association*, vol 87, 1976, p. 133.
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- ²⁴ Solly Zuckerman, *Beyond The Ivory Tower*, Toplinger Publications, New York, 1970, pp. 75-14; Charles E. Oxnard, "The Place of Australopithecines in Human Evolution: Grounds for Doubt", *Nature*, vol 258, p. 389.
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