

Virtues of belief and pray- er

The Twenty-Third Word
From the Risale-i Nur Collection

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Second Impression

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In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

Surely We created humanity of the best pattern; then
We reduced it to the lowest of the low, save those
who believe and do good deeds. (At-Tin 95:4-5)

First chapter

There are many thousands of virtues of belief. We will explain 5 of them in the points below.

FIRST POINT: We reach the highest degree of perfection and become worthy of Paradise via the light of belief. The darkness of unbelief reduces us to the lowest level; a level at which we deserve Hell. Belief connects us to our Majestic Maker, and our value derives from using our belief to show the Divine art and manifest the Divine Names. Unbelief breaks this relationship, thereby veiling the Divine art and reducing our value to that of a mere physical entity with almost no value (a physical entity is something that has no future after it dies). We will explain this with a parable.

The value of the iron (or any other material) from which a work of art is made differs from the value of the art expressed by it. Sometimes the material and the work of art may have the same value, or the worth of the work may be far greater than that of the material that it is made of, or vice versa. For instance, an antique may be worth a million dollars, yet the material

that it is made of is not worth even a few cents. If we take a bronze or cast-iron statue to an antiques dealer, we may be given its true value, as it is a work of art by a famous artist. Yet if we take the same object to a blacksmith, it will only fetch the price of scrap metal.

Similarly, each person is a unique, priceless work of art, made by God Almighty. We are most delicate and graceful miracles of His Power, beings created to manifest all His Names and inscriptions in the form of miniature specimens of the universe. If we are illuminated with belief, these meaningful inscriptions become visible. Believers manifest these inscriptions through their connection with their Maker, for the Divine art contained in each person is revealed through such affirmations as: "I am the work of the Majestic Maker, the creature and object of His Mercy and Munificence."

As a result, and because we gain value in proportion to how well we reflect this art, we move from insignificance (in material terms) to beings ranked above all creatures. We communicate with God, we are His guests on Earth, and become qualified for Paradise.

But if unbelief is ingrained in us, all of the manifestations of the Divine Names are veiled by darkness, and thus lack expression. If the artist is unknown, how can the aspects expressing the worth of his or her art be identified? Thus the most meaningful instances of that sublime art and elevated inscriptions are concealed. In material terms, unbelievers attribute such art and inscriptions to trivial causes, nature, and chance, thereby reducing these sparkling diamonds to plain glass. Such people are no more significant than any other material entity that is self-condemned to a transient and suffocating life and they are no better than the most impotent, needy, and afflicted animal that even-

tually will turn to dust. Unbelief spoils our nature by changing our diamonds into coal.

SECOND POINT: Just as belief illuminates human beings and reveals all the messages inscribed in their being by the Eternally-Besought-of-All, it also illuminates the universe and removes darkness from the past and future. This truth will be explained by relating my experiences regarding the meaning of the following verse:

God is the Protecting Friend of those who believe. He brings them out of the layers of darkness into the light. (Al-Baqara 2:257)

I saw myself standing on an awe-inspiring bridge set over a deep valley between two mountains. The world was completely dark. Looking to my right, I imagined I could see a huge tomb. Looking to my left, I sensed that I could see violent storms and calamities being prepared amid tremendous waves of darkness. Looking down, I imagined I could see a very deep precipice. The dim light of my torch revealed a dreadful scene. All along the bridge were horrible dragons, lions, and monsters; these were so horrendous that I wished I did not have a torch. Whichever way I shed its light, I received the same fright. "This torch only brings me trouble," I exclaimed, angrily breaking it and throwing it away. Suddenly, darkness was replaced by light; it was as if I had switched on a powerful light by breaking my torch. I could see everything in its true nature.

I discovered that the bridge was a highway traversing on a smooth plain. The huge tomb was a green, beautiful green garden in which illustrious persons were leading assemblies of worship, prayer, glorification, and discourse. The stormy turbulent precipices that had been so frightening appeared as a

banqueting hall, a shaded promenade, a beautiful resting place behind lovely mountains. The horrible monsters and dragons were actually camels, sheep, and goats. “Praise and thanks be to God for the light of belief,” I said, and then awoke reciting:

God is the Protecting Friend of those who believe. He brings them out of the layers of darkness into the light. (Al-Baqara 2:257)

The two mountains are the beginning and end of this life, and the life between death and the resurrection. The bridge is the lifespan between the past (on the right) and the future (on the left). The torch is our conceited ego that, relying on its own achievements, ignores Divine Revelation. The monsters are the events and creatures of the world.

Those who have fallen into the darkness of misguidance and heedlessness because of their confidence in their egos resemble me as I was before—in the dim light of a torch. With their inadequate and misguided knowledge, they see the past as a huge tomb in the darkness of extinction and the future as a stormy place of terror, controlled by coincidence or chance. The torch reveals to them events and creatures. In reality, these events and creatures are subjugated to the All-Wise and All-Merciful, they fulfill specific functions, and serve beneficial purposes in submission to His Decree. However, such people perceive these things as harmful monsters. These are the people who are being referred to in:

As to those who do not believe, their protecting friends are false deities. They bring them out of light into layers of darkness. (Al-Baqara 2:257)

If, however, people are favored with Divine guidance so that belief enters their hearts and their Pharaoh-like egos are broken, thereby enabling them to listen to the Book of God, they will resemble me in the later state. The universe will suddenly be filled with Divine Light, demonstrating the meaning of:

God is the light of the heavens and Earth.
(An-Nur 24:35)

Through the eye of their hearts, such people see that the past is not a huge tomb; rather, each past century is the realm of authority of a Prophet or a saint, where the purified souls, having completed the duties of their lives (worship) with: "God is the Greatest," flying to higher abodes to come in the future. Looking to their left and with the light of belief, they discern behind the mountain-like revolutions of the intermediate world and the next life a banquet hall that has been set up by the All-Compassionate One in palaces of bliss in the gardens of Paradise. They understand that storms, earthquakes, epidemics, and similar events serve specific functions, just like the spring rain and the wind, despite their apparent violence, serve many agreeable purposes. They even see death as the beginning of eternal life, and the grave as the gateway to eternal happiness.

THIRD POINT: Belief is both light and power. Those who attain true belief can challenge the universe and, in proportion to the strength of their belief, be relieved of the pressure of events. Relying on God, they travel safely through the mountainous waves of events on the ship of life. They voyage comfortably through the world until their final day, having entrusted their burdens to the power of the Absolutely Powerful One. The grave will be a resting place from which they will fly to Paradise to attain eternal bliss. If they do not rely on

God their worldly life will force them down to the lowest depths.

Belief, therefore, consists of affirming Divine Unity. In order to do this one must submit to God, and in order to do this one must rely on God; doing these yields happiness in both worlds. Such reliance upon God should not be misunderstood as being the same as ignoring cause and effect. Rather, it means that one should think of the causes as a veil that secrets the hand of the Power. One attains such reliance by seeking to comply with the Divine Will; this is a form of worship through action. However, such desire and seeking is not enough to secure any chosen effect. We must understand that, in accordance with true belief, the result comes only from God, the All-Mighty. As He is the sole producer of effects, we always should be grateful to Him.

To understand the truth and meaning of trust in God, consider this parable: Once two people boarded a ship with heavy packs. One put his pack on the deck immediately after boarding and sat on it to keep it safe. The other one, even after being told to lay his pack down, refused to do so and said: "I won't put it down, because it might get lost. Besides, I'm strong enough to carry it." He was told:

"This trusty royal ship is strong and can hold the weight of your pack better. You will most probably get tired, feel dizzy, and fall into the sea with such a burden. Your strength will fail, and then how will you bear this burden that gets heavier every moment? If the captain sees you in this state, he might say you are insane and throw you from the ship. Or maybe he will think you do not trust our ship and that you are making fun of us; for this he will imprison you. Also, you will be marked out and become the butt of jokes. Your vanity reveals your weakness, your arrogance reveals your impotence, and your pretension betrays your humilia-

tion. And so you will become a laughing-stock. Look at how everybody is laughing at you.”

These words convinced him to follow the example of his companion. He told him: “May God be pleased with you. I have obtained relief and am no longer subject to imprisonment nor will I become a laughing-stock.” So, trust in God and come to your senses, as the man in the parable did. Trust in God and be delivered from begging from creation and trembling in fear at each event. This will deliver you from self-conceit, save you from being ridiculous; lighten the burdens of this life, and the torments of the Hereafter.

FOURTH POINT: Belief enables us to attain true humanity and to acquire a position above all other creatures. Thus, belief and worship are our most fundamental and most important duties. Disbelief, by contrast, reduces us to the state of a brutal, but impotent beast.

A proof that decisively demonstrates this truth is the difference between how human beings and animals come into existence. Almost from the very moment of birth, an animal seems to have been trained and to have perfected its faculties elsewhere. Within a few hours, or days, or months, it can lead its life according to particular rules and conditions. A sparrow or a bee is inspired with the skill and ability to be integrated into its environment within 20 days, while it would take a person 20 years to do the same.

This means that an animal’s basic duty and essential role does not include seeking perfection through learning, progress through scientific knowledge, or prayer and petitioning for help by displaying their impotence. Rather, their sole purpose is to act within the bounds of their innate faculties; this is the mode of worship specified for them.

People, however, are born knowing nothing of life and their environment and so must learn everything.

We cannot do this even after 20 years; we must continue to learn until we die. We appear to have been sent here with so many weaknesses and so much inability that we need as much as 2 years to learn how to walk. Only after 15 years can we distinguish good and evil. Only by living in a society can we become intelligent enough to choose between what is beneficial and what is harmful.

Thus, the essential and intrinsic duty of our existence is to seek perfection through learning and to proclaim our worship and servanthood to God through prayer and supplication. We should seek answers to not only the following questions, but many more as well: "Through whose compassion is my life so wisely administered? Through whose generosity am I being so affectionately trained? Through whose favors and benevolence am I being so solicitously nourished?" We should then pray and petition the Provider of Needs in humble awareness of our needs; none of these can we satisfy on our own. This understanding and confession of impotence and poverty will become two wings on which we can fly to the highest rank: that of being a servant of God.

And so our purpose here is to seek perfection through knowledge and prayer. Everything is, by its nature, essentially dependent on knowledge. And the basis, source, light, and spirit of all true knowledge is knowledge of God; belief is the very foundation of this. After belief, prayer is our essential duty and the basis of worship, for despite our infinite impotence, we are exposed to endless misfortune and innumerable enemies. And despite our infinite poverty, we suffer limitless need and demands.

Children express their need for something they cannot reach with words or tears. Both are a form of plea or prayer, in word or deed, with the language of weakness. Eventually they get what they want. We are

quite like a beloved child, for at the Court of the Most Compassionate and Merciful Being we either will weep (due to our weakness and impotence) or pray (due to our poverty and need) so that our needs may be satisfied. In return, we should perform our duty of gratitude and thanksgiving for this provision. Otherwise, the ingratitude of those who claim to have such intelligence and such a great power over everything that they can meet their own needs will finally reach the point where they resemble mischievous children who whine about irritating flies. Such ingratitude is against our essential nature and if we indulge in it we are worthy of severe punishment.

FIFTH POINT: Belief requires prayer for attainment and perfection, and this is necessary to our essence. God Almighty says:

Say (O Muhammad): "My Lord would not concern Himself with you but for your prayer."
(Al-Furqan 25:77)

Pray to Me and I will answer your (prayer).
(Al-Ghafir 40:60)

If people say that they pray many times but yet their prayers are unanswered despite the assurance given in the above verse, then tell them that an answered prayer does not necessarily mean that it has been accepted. There is an answer for every prayer. However, accepting the prayer and giving what is requested depends upon the Wisdom of the All-Mighty. Suppose a sick child asks a doctor for a certain medicine. The doctor will either give what has been asked for, something better, or nothing. It all depends upon how the medicine will affect the child. Similarly, the All-Mighty, Who is All-Hearing and All-Seeing, answers His servant's prayer and changes loneliness into

the pleasure of His company. But His answer does not depend on the desire of the individual; rather according to His Wisdom He gives what is requested, what is better, or nothing at all.

Moreover, prayer is a form of worship and worship is rewarded mainly in the Hereafter. In essence, prayers are not said for worldly purposes; rather such purposes are the causes for prayer. For example, praying for rain is a kind of worship that is occasioned by the lack of rain. If rain is the only aim of the prayer, then the prayer is unacceptable, for it is not sincere or intended to please God, or obtain His approval.

Sunset determines the time for evening prayer, while solar and lunar eclipses occasion two particular kinds of worship. Since such eclipses are two means of manifesting Divine Majesty, the All-Mighty calls His servants to perform a special form of worship for these occasions. The prayer has nothing to do with causing the eclipse to end, for when it will end has already been calculated by astronomers.

The same argument applies to drought and other calamities, for all such events occasion certain kinds of prayer. At such times, we best realize just how impotent we are and therefore feel the need to take refuge in the high Presence of the Absolutely Powerful One through prayer and supplication. If a bad situation is not alleviated despite numerous prayers, then do not say that your prayer has not been accepted. Rather, say that the time for the prayer has not yet come. God removes disasters because of His endless Grace and Munificence. The end of an event marks the end of that special occasion for prayer.

We must pursue God's good pleasure through worship, affirm our poverty and weakness in our prayer, and seek refuge with Him through prayer. We must not interfere in His Lordship, but rather let God do as

He wills and rely on His Wisdom. In addition, we should not doubt His Mercy.

Every creature offers its unique praise and worship to God. What reaches the Court of God from the universe is a kind of prayer. Some beings, like plants and animals, pray through the language of their potential to achieve a full form and then display and show certain Divine Names. Another kind of prayer is expressed in the language of natural needs. All living beings ask the Absolutely Generous One to meet their vital needs, as they cannot do so. Yet another kind of prayer is made in the language of complete helplessness. A living creature in straitened circumstances takes refuge in its Unseen Protector with genuine supplication and turns to its All-Compassionate Lord. These three kinds of prayer are always acceptable, unless they are somehow impeded.

The fourth type of prayer is the one used by humanity. This type falls into two categories: active and by disposition, and verbal and with the heart. For example, acting in accordance with causes is an active prayer. Complying with causes is a preparation for asking God's approval, for causes alone cannot produce the result—only God can do that. Another type of active prayer is plowing the soil; this is knocking at the door of the treasury of God's Compassion. Such a prayer is usually acceptable, for it is an application to the Divine Name, The All-Generous.

The second type of prayer, made with language and the heart, is the ordinary one. This means that we ask God from the heart for something we cannot reach. Its most important aspect and finest and sweetest fruit is that we know that God hears us, that He is aware of what is in our heart, that His power extends everywhere, that He can satisfy every desire, and that He

comes to our aid out of mercy for our weakness and inadequacy.

And so, O helpless and poor person. Never abandon prayer, for it is the key to the Treasury of Compassion and the means of gaining access to the Infinite Power. Hold on to it. Ascend to the highest rank of humanity and, as the most favored and superior member of creation include the whole universe's prayer in your prayer. Say, on behalf of all beings: *From You alone do we seek help* (Al-Fatiha 1:5), and become a beautiful pattern for creation.

Second chapter

(Five remarks on human happiness and misery)

[Human beings were created of the best stature, on the best pattern of creation, and given a comprehensive potential. They have been sent to an arena of trial, where they will either rise to the highest rank or descend to the lowest level. These are the ways open to humanity. We are here as a miracle of power and the apex of creation. I shall expound the mystery of humanity's ascent and descent in five remarks.]

FIRST REMARK: We have a relationship with most creatures in this world, and we are in need of them. Our needs stretch into all parts of the universe, and our desires range as far as eternity. We desire a flower and the whole spring, a garden and eternal Paradise. We long to see our friend and the Majestic, All-Beautiful One.

We knock on the door of our beloved friend to visit, and thus we must seek refuge in the presence of the Absolutely All-Powerful One. This One will close the door of this world and open that to the Hereafter, the world of wonders, replacing this world with the next so that we may be reunited with 99 percent of our friends who have left for the Intermediate World.

Given this, our true object of worship can only be the Majestic, All-Powerful One, the All-Merciful One of Infinite Beauty, the All-Wise One of Perfection, in Whose hands are the reins of all things, in Whose possession is the provision of every existence, Who sees everything and is omnipresent, unbounded by space, and free of any constraint, flaw, defect, or deficiency. As our unlimited needs can be satisfied only by the One with Infinite Power and All-Encompassing Knowledge, He is the only One worthy of worship.

If you worship Him alone, you will attain a rank above all other creatures. If you do not, you will become a disgraced slave of impotent creation. If you rely upon your self and its power instead of prayer and trust in God and claim an arrogant superiority, you will become lower than a bee or an ant and weaker than a fly or a spider in any positive acts you try to accomplish or in any constructive efforts, you attempt. However, your evil and destruction will weigh heavier than a mountain and be more harmful than a pestilence, for you have two aspects of being. One is positive and active, and has to do with constructive invention, existence, and goodness. The other is negative and passive, and concerns destruction, nonexistence, and evil.

As for the first aspect of your being, you cannot compete with a bee or a sparrow, you are weaker than a fly or a spider, and cannot achieve what they can. However, as for the second aspect of your being, you can surpass the mountains, the Earth, and the heavens, for you can bear a burden that they cannot. Thus your acts have a wider impact than theirs. When you do something good or build something, its impact is only as far as your hand and strength can reach. But your evil and destructive acts are aggressive and will expand.

Unbelief is an evil, an act of destruction, an absence of affirmation. It may look like a single sin, but it implies an insult to creation, the debasement of all Divine

Names, and the degradation of humanity. Creation has a sublime rank and important role, for each part of it is a missive of the Lord, a mirror of His Glory, and a servant of His Divinity. Unbelief denies these creations the rank bestowed by these functions and reduces them to play-things of chance, to being insignificant, useless, and worthless objects doomed to decay and decomposition.

Unbelief insults the Divine Names, Whose beautiful inscriptions and manifestations are seen in the mirrors of all created forms throughout the universe. It also casts us down to a level more wretched and weak, helpless and destitute, than the lowliest animal. It reduces us to an ordinary, perishable banner that has no meaning, that is confused and that swiftly disappears. And this happens when humanity, in reality, is a poetic work of Wisdom manifesting all Divine Names; a great miracle of Power containing, like a seed, the Tree of Creation; and, as God's vicegerent, is superior to all of creation because we agreed to bear the trust (the human ego).

Let us sum up here. As regards evil and destruction, the soul—the evil-commanding self—may commit countless crimes and cause unlimited destruction, yet its capacity to do good is greatly limited. This soul can destroy a house in a day but cannot rebuild it in 100 days. But if it abandons self-reliance and vanity in order to rely upon Divine aid to do good and be constructive, if it abandons evil and destruction and seeks Divine forgiveness and so becomes a perfect servant of God, then it becomes the referent of:

God will change their evil deeds into good
deeds. (An-Naml 27:50)

Our infinite capacity for evil is then changed into an infinite ability for good. We attain the worth of “the

best pattern of creation” and rise to the “highest of the high.”

Consider then, O heedless one, the All-Mighty’s Grace and Munificence. In reality, it would be completely just to record one sin as being 1,000 sins, due to the consequences and effects of this one sin, while good act counts only as one act. But God does the reverse: He records a sinful act as one and an act of goodness as being the equivalent of 10 acts, 70 acts, 700 acts, or, in some cases, even 7,000. From this we can understand that if one enters Hell then this is the result of one’s deeds and is pure justice, while if one enters Paradise then this is the result of His absolute Grace.

SECOND REMARK: Human beings have two faces. The first face looks to this worldly life because of our selfhood. Here we are poor creatures indeed. Human will is as feeble as a hair, human power is restricted to a most limited talent, human life is as short as a flash of light compared to the world’s life, and our material existence is that of a tiny thing bound to decompose. In this state, we are no more than a feeble member of one species among countless others spread throughout the universe.

The second face looks to the eternal life due to our nature as God’s servants. Our perception of helplessness and insufficiency as God’s servants make us important, inclusive beings. The All-Wise Creator has implanted an infinite impotence and poverty in our nature so that each of us may be a comprehensive mirror reflecting the infinite manifestations of God’s Compassion and Power, Richness and Generosity. Through belief and worship, therefore, we gain infinite power and limitless riches.

We resemble seeds, for each of us has the potential to engender and attain perfection. A seed is endowed by the Powerful One with great potential and is des-

tined to put this into effect. According to Destiny's subtle program, it should germinate underground to grow into a "perfect" tree; this is done via worship according to the language of the seed's potential. If the seed abuses its potential with attract harmful substances, it will soon rot away in its confined place. If it uses its potential properly, however, and in compliance with the laws of *Him Who splits the seed for sprouting* (Al-An'am 6:95), it will emerge from its narrow place and grow into an awesome, fruit-bearing tree. In addition, its tiny and special nature will come to represent a great and universal truth.

Our essence is also equipped by the Powerful One with great potential and is inscribed by Destiny with important programs. If we use our potential and spiritual faculties in this narrow world under the soil of the worldly life to satisfy the fancies of our carnal, evil-commanding self, we will become corrupt—a rotten seed—merely to indulge in an insignificant pleasure during this short life. Thus, we will depart from this world with a heavy spiritual burden on our unfortunate souls.

But if we germinate the seed of our potential under the "soil of worship" with the "water of Islam" and the "light of belief" according to the decrees of the Qur'an, and if we use our spiritual faculties for their true purposes, we will grow into eternal, majestic trees whose branches extend into the Intermediate World as well as the world where our deeds take on the forms specific to the Hereafter. This will yield countless, perfect fruit in the next world. We will become the fruit of the Tree of Creation, which will be favored in Paradise with infinite perfection and countless blessings.

We can make true progress only when we turn our faculties (e.g., intellect, heart, spirit, and imagination) toward the eternal life; every being will be occupied with its own kind of worship. What the misguided con-

sider progress—subjecting our faculties to the carnal, evil-commanding selfhood to taste all worldly pleasures—is nothing but decline and degradation. I once observed this truth in a dream, which was as follows:

I reached a huge city full of large palaces. Outside some of them, I noticed that spectacles and shows had been put on to amuse and entertain. As I drew near to one of the palaces, I saw that its owner was playing with a dog at the door. Women were chatting with young strangers, and girls were organizing children's games. The doorman was behaving as if he were their master. I realized that the palace was empty, with all the important tasks having been left unattended, for its corrupted inhabitants were pursuing useless affairs.

I then came across another palace. A faithful dog was lying at the door, and beside it was a doorman with a stern, serious, and sober expression. The palace seemed so quiet that I entered in wonder and amazement. Inside was a scene of great activity, for the inhabitants were engaged in different, important tasks. The men on the first floor were managing the palace. On the second floor, girls and boys were studying. The women on the third floor were producing beautiful works of art and delicate embroidery. On the top floor, the owner was in constant communication with the king to secure his household's well-being and so that he could perform noble duties for his own progress and perfection. As they did not see me, I walked about unhindered.

Once outside, I saw that the city was full of similar palaces. I asked and was told that palaces like the first one belonged to the foremost unbelievers and misguided, while those of the second type belonged to upright Muslim notables. In one corner, I came across a palace on which my name was written: "Said." As I looked at it closely, I felt as if I saw my image in it. Crying in bewilderment, I came to my senses and awoke.

The city is our social life and the terrain of human civilization. Each palace is a human being, and the inhabitants are human senses and faculties (e.g., eyes, ears, intellect, heart and spirit, and powers of anger and lust). Each sense and faculty has a particular duty of worship, as well as particular pleasures and pains. The self and fancies, as well as the powers of anger and lust, correspond to the dog and the doorman. Thus, subjugating the sublime senses and faculties to carnal desires and fancies so that they forget their essential duties leads to decline and corruption. It certainly is not progress. You may interpret the other details for yourself.

THIRD REMARK: In our actions and bodily endeavors, we are like weak animals and helpless creatures. The realm at our disposal is so limited that our fingers can only touch its circumference. Our weakness, impotence, and indolence are so great that they influence domesticated animals. Comparing a domesticated animal to its undomesticated counterpart reveals great differences.

But as passive, recipient beings who need to pray and petition we are worthy travelers allowed to stay for a while in the guest-house of this world. We are guests of a Generous One, Who has put the treasures of His infinite Compassion at our disposal and subjugated His peerless works of creative power and special servants to us. Also, He has prepared for our use and pleasure such a vast arena that its radius stretches as far as sight or even imagination can reach.

If we rely on our physical and innate abilities, taking the worldly life as our goal and focusing on its pleasures, we will suffocate within a very restricted circle. Moreover, our bodily parts, senses, and faculties will bring suit and be witnesses against us in the Hereafter. But if we know that we are guests here and so spend our lives within the limits of the Generous Host,

we will then lead happy and peaceful lives and reach the highest rank. We will be rewarded with an everlasting life of bliss in the Hereafter, and all of our bodily members and faculties will testify in our favor.

Our wonderful faculties are not meant for this trivial worldly life; rather, they are for our eternal life. We have many more faculties and senses than animals, but the pleasure we derive from our physical lives is much less than what animals derive. Every worldly pleasure bears traces of pain, is spoiled with past sorrows and fears of the future, and the knowledge that this fleeting pleasure will ultimately disappear. Animals experience pleasure without pain, enjoyment without anxiety, and have no past sorrows or anxiety about the future. They enjoy comfortable lives and praise their Creator.

We have been created on the best pattern. If we concentrate on this worldly life we are far lower than a sparrow, although we have far better developed faculties than any animal. An example of this is the following parable: a man gives one servant 10 gold coins and tells him to have a suit made for him out of a certain cloth. He gives servant 1,000 gold coins and sends him to the market with a shopping list. Having witnessed the first transaction, instead of studying the shopping list, he buys himself an excellent suit of the most expensive cloth.

The latter has acted foolishly, for he neither noticed how much money he had been given nor did he read the shopping list. Thinking that he should imitate his friend, he went into a shop and asked for a suit. The dishonest shopkeeper gave him a suit of the very worst-quality cloth, but charged him as if it were the best. The unfortunate servant returned to his master and received a severe reprimand and a terrible punishment. Anyone can see that the 1,000 gold coins had not been entrusted to him to purchase a suit, but rather had been intended for a very important transaction.

In the same way, our spiritual faculties, feelings, and senses are much more developed than those of animals. For example, we can see all degrees of beauty, taste all the special flavors of many different food, penetrate the many details of visible realities, yearn for all ranks of perfection, and many other special abilities. But animals, with the exception of a particular faculty that reaches a high state of development according to the particular duty for which it is intended, can realize only slight development, if any.

Our senses and feelings, which have developed a great deal owing to our mind and intellect, require that we have many faculties. Our many needs have caused us to evolve different types of feelings, to become very sensitive to many things. Also, due to our comprehensive nature we have been given desires that are turned to several aims and objectives. Our senses and faculties have greatly expanded due to the diversity of our essential duties. Furthermore, since we are inclined and able to worship, we have the potential to realize all kinds of perfection.

Such rich faculties and abundant potentials cannot have been given to us for an insignificant, temporary, worldly life. In reality, they were given to us because our essential duty is to perceive our obligations, which are directed toward endless aims; to affirm our impotence, poverty, and insufficiency via worship; to study by our far-reaching sight and penetrating understanding; to bear witness to creation's glorification of God; to discern and be grateful for the All-Merciful One's aid sent in the form of bounties; and to gaze, reflect upon, and draw warnings from the miracles of His Power as manifested in creation.

O world-worshipping one charmed by the worldly life and ignorant of the meaning of your nature as the best pattern of creation! Once I saw the true nature of this worldly life in a dream, as follows: My

Lord had caused me to set out on this journey. He gave me, gradually, some of the 60 gold coins He had allotted to me. This went on for some time, and after a while I arrived at an inn that provided some entertainment. I gambled away 10 gold coins in one night of entertainment and frivolity. The next morning, I had no money for the provisions I would need at my destination. All I had left was pain, sorrow, and regret left by sins and illicit pleasures. While I was in this wretched state, someone said to me: “You have lost all you had and deserve to be punished. Moreover, you will go on to your destination with no money. But if you use your mind, the door of repentance is not closed. When you receive the rest of the money, keep half in reserve and use it to buy what you will need at your destination.”

My carnal self did not agree, so the man said: “Save a third of it then.” Still my carnal self balked. The man insisted: “Then a quarter.” I knew that my carnal self could not abandon its addictions, so the man turned away indignantly and disappeared. At once, I found myself on a high-speed train traveling through a tunnel. I was alarmed, but there was no escape. To my surprise, I saw beautiful flowers and appetizing fruits all along the track, hanging out from the sides of the tunnel. I foolishly tried to pick some of them. But all around them were thorns that, due to the train’s speed, tore at my hands and made them bleed. Whatever I tried to hold on to slipped from my grasp.

Suddenly an attendant came and said: “Give me 5 cents and I’ll give you as many flowers and as much fruit as you want. Otherwise, with your hands all cut up, you will lose a 100 instead of 5 cents. Moreover, there is a punishment for picking them without permission.”

Depressed by this condition, I looked out the window to see when the tunnel would end. But there was no

end in sight. The tunnel's walls had many openings into which passengers were being thrown. Suddenly I caught sight of an opening just opposite me with a gravestone on either side. When I peered out, I made out my name, "Said," written in capital letters on a gravestone. I gave a cry of bewilderment and repentance.

Unexpectedly, I heard the voice of the man who had advised me at the inn, asking: "Have you come to your senses?" I replied: "Yes, but I am in despair and there is nothing I can do." He told me to repent and trust in God, to which I replied that I would. Then I woke up and I found myself transformed into the New Said; the Old Said had gone.

I will now interpret some aspects of this dream: The journey is our life, a journey from the incorporeal world of eternity, passing through the stages of your mother's womb, youth, old age, the grave, the Intermediate World, Resurrection, and the Bridge. The 60 gold coins are the 60 years of an average lifetime. I was 45 when I had this vision. Only God knows when I will die. A sincere student of the Qur'an showed me the true path so that I might spend half of the remaining 15 years striving for the Hereafter.

The inn, I came to understand, was Istanbul. The train was time, and each wagon was a year. The tunnel was this worldly life. The thorny flowers and fruits were illicit pleasures and forbidden amusements that make the heart bleed with the idea of separation the very moment you reach for them. The disappearance of pleasures increases sorrow, and moreover, as they are unlawful, they cause one to suffer punishment. The attendant had said: "Give me 5 cents, and I'll give you as many flowers and as much fruit as you want." This meant that the permissible tastes and pleasures, obtained in lawful ways, would be enough to satisfy me and so there was no need to pursue illicit ways.

FOURTH REMARK: We resemble delicate children. Our strength is our weakness, and our power is our impotence. Because of this lack of strength and power creation has been subjugated to us. Therefore, if we perceive our weakness and become humble servants of God by employing both verbal and active prayer, and if we recognize our impotence and seek God's help, then we will have shown our gratitude for this subjugation of nature.

Moreover, God will enable us to reach our goal and achieve our aims in a way far beyond our own capabilities. Sometimes we wrongly attribute the attainment of a wish to our own power and ability, when in reality it has been obtained for us through the prayer offered by the tongue of our disposition. Consider how great a source of power is a chick's weakness, for it causes the mother hen to attack even a lion. A lion cub's weakness subjugates a great lioness, which will suffer hunger to feed its baby. How remarkable is the powerful appeal inherent in weakness, and what a spectacular manifestation of Compassion for beings who persist in prayer.

In the same way, beloved children obtain their goals by weeping, wishing, or sulking, all of which can cause mighty people to serve them. If children rely on their own strength, in practical terms they can achieve nothing. Their weakness and powerlessness, as well as feelings of affection and protection, work so in their favor that a single gesture may allow them to subjugate powerful persons. But if they arrogantly deny the care and affection shown to them and claim to do all of this on their own, then they deserve to be punished. Similarly, we deserve punishment if we deny our Creator's Mercy and show our ingratitude by saying that our own power and knowledge—not Divine Mercy—have achieved all of this. We will be like Korah, who said:

I have been given it (my possessions) on account of my knowledge. (Al-Qasas 28:78)

This shows that our observed dominion in nature, and our advancement and progress in civilization and technology, are mainly due to our essential weakness and helplessness, which attract Divine aid. Our poverty is the source of Divine provision, our ignorance is compensated for by Divine inspiration, and our need draws Divine favors. Divine Mercy, Affection, and Wisdom, not our own power and knowledge, have empowered us with dominion over creation and have put things at our disposal. Divine Authority and Compassion enable us, beings so weak that we can be defeated by a blind scorpion or a snake without limbs, to dress in silk produced by a worm and to eat honey produced by a stinging insect.

Since this is the truth, O people, renounce arrogance and self-trust. Rather, affirm your impotence and weakness in the high presence of God by asking for His help, and by praying to Him. Declare your poverty and insufficiency. Show that you are His true servant. Then say:

God is sufficient for us. Most sublime is He in Whom we trust. ('Al 'Imran 3:173)

and ascend to the higher ranks.

Do not say: "I am nothing. Why should the All-Wise Creator put creation at my disposal and demand universal gratitude?" In physical terms you are almost nothing, but your duty or rank makes you an attentive observer of this magnificent universe, an eloquent tongue of beings declaring Divine Wisdom, a perceptive student of this Book of Creation, an admiring

overseer of the creatures glorifying God's praise, a respected master of worshipping beings.

You are, O humanity, an insignificant atom, a poor creature, and a weak animal in terms of your physical being and soul. And so you are being carried away by the huge waves of creation. But if you are perfected through the light of belief, which comprises the radiance of Divine love, and through the training of Islam, you will find a majesty in your being a servant, a comprehensiveness in your particularity, a world in your small entity, and a lofty rank in your insignificance. The realm in which you supervise the rest of creation will be so broad that you can say: "My Compassionate Lord has made the world a home for me. He has given me the sun and moon as lamps, the spring as a bunch of roses, the summer as a banquet of favors, and animals as obedient servants. He has put plants and vegetation at my disposal, as ornaments and provisions to my home."

In conclusion, obeying your evil-commanding selfhood and Satan leads to the lowest depth, whereas following the truth and the Qur'an leads you to the highest rank and as the most excellent pattern of creation.

FIFTH REMARK: We have been sent here as guests with a special responsibility. Endowed with important potential, we have been assigned important duties and are strongly urged to carry them out. If we do not, we will be punished. To make "being the best pattern of creation" more comprehensible, I will summarize the essentials of worship and duties.

Our worship consists of two aspects. The first aspect is implicit and concerns reflection and consciousness. It involves our submitting to the Sovereignty of His Lordship over creation and observing in amazement the works of His Beauty and Perfection. We draw the attention of others to the intricate, ornamented works of art: the manifestation of the sacred Divine

Names. We also measure in “units” of due perception and discernment the gems of the Lord’s Names, each a hidden spiritual treasure, and evaluate them with the grateful appreciation of our hearts.

Then we study the pages of creation and the sheets of the heavens and Earth, each of which is a missive of Divine Power, and contemplate them in great admiration. Afterwards, as we gaze in amazement and admiration upon the subtle ornamentation and refined skills seen in creation, we ardently desire to know their Beautiful Creator and yearn to enter His Presence, where we hope to be received into His favor.

The second aspect, visible prayer, means turning toward our Majestic Creator, Who wills Himself to be known through the miracles of His artistry. Supplicating directly in His presence, we unburden ourselves to Him in sincere belief and try to acquire knowledge of Him. We discern that a Compassionate Lord wants to be loved through the beautiful fruits of His Compassion, and so we make ourselves loved by Him through devoting our love and adoration to Him.

Seeing that the Generous Provider nourishes us with the best and dearest of His material and spiritual favors, we respond with gratitude and praise, expressed through our works, deeds, lifestyle and, if possible, our senses and faculties. Observing that a Lord of Beauty and Majesty manifests Himself in the mirror of beings and draws attention to His Glory and Perfection, Majesty and Beauty, we respond: “God is the Greatest. Glory be to God,” and prostrate before Him in wonder and adoration.

Noticing that the One of Absolute Riches displays His limitless wealth and treasures in an infinitely generous fashion, we respond by glorifying and praising Him and, displaying our need, asking Him for His favors. Observing that the Majestic Creator has arranged Earth like an exhibition to display His peerless works,

we appreciate them by saying: “What wonders God has willed and created”; we confirm their beauty by saying: “God bless them”; show our wonder by saying: “Glory be to God” and express our admiration by saying: “God is the Greatest.”

We see that the Unique One shows His Oneness throughout creation by His unique signs and specific decrees, and by His inimitable stamps and seals placed upon every creature. He inscribes signs of His Oneness on everything and raises the flag of His Unity throughout the world to proclaim His Lordship. We respond to this with belief, affirmation, admission, and testimony to His Unity, and with devotion and sincere worship.

We may attain true humanity through such types of worship and reflection. We may show that we are the best pattern of creation and, by the grace of belief, become trustworthy vicegerents of God on Earth. Now, O heedless people who move toward the lowest level by misusing your will, although you have been created as the best pattern of creation, listen to me. To see how ugly the face of the world is, the face which turns toward passions and desires, and how extraordinarily beautiful is the other face, the one that turns toward the Hereafter, look at the signboard below.

First Signboard

(This signboard depicts the true spirit of the heedless one’s world.)

Do not invite me to the world.
I came, and found it evil and mortal.
Heedlessness was a veil;
I saw the light of Truth concealed.
All things, the whole of creation
I saw, were mortal and full of harm.
Existence, indeed I put it on.
Alas, It was non-existence; I suffered much.

As to life, I experienced it.
I saw it was torment within torment.
Intellect became pure retribution.
I saw permanence to be tribulation.
Life was like a wind, it passed in whims.
I saw perfection to be pure loss.
Deeds were only for show.
I saw ambitions to be pure pain.
Union was in fact separation:
I saw the cure to be the ailment.
These lights became darkness.
I saw these friends to be orphans.
These voices were announcements of death.
I saw the living to be dead.
Knowledge changed into whim:
I saw in science thousands of ailments.
Pleasures became unmixed pain.
I saw existence to be
compounded non-existence.
I have found the True Beloved.
Ah. I suffered much pain
because of separation.

Second Signboard

(This signboard describes the true spirit of the world of
the people of guidance and peace.)

Heedlessness has disappeared:
I have seen the light of Truth
to be manifest.
Existence is a proof of Divine Being.
See, life is the mirror reflecting the Truth.
Intellect has become the key to the treasury.
See, mortality is the door to eternity.
The spark of self-attainment has died.
But see, there is the Sun of Grace and Beauty.
Life has become pure action.
See, eternity is pure life.
Darkness is a thin membrane enclosing light.
See, there is true life in death.

All things have become familiar.
See, all sounds are the recitation
of Divine Names.
See all the particles in creation.
recite God's Names
and glorify Him.
I have found poverty to be
a treasury of wealth.
See, in impotence lies perfect power.
If you have found God, see
all things are yours.
If you are a servant of the
Owner of All Things -
see His property is yours.
If you are egotist and claim self-ownership;
it is endless trial and tribulation.
It is infinite torment you will experience,
it is an unbearable calamity.
If you are truly a servant of God,
devoted to Him,
see, it is an infinite delight.
Taste its uncountable rewards,
experience its boundless bliss...

Glory be to You. We have no knowledge save what You have taught us. Truly, you are the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. O my Lord, relieve my mind and ease my task. Loosen a knot from my tongue so they may understand my speech.

O God, bestow peace and blessings on Muhammad, his pure, unique essence, who is the light revealing all the mysteries, the manifestation of light, the point upon which manifestations of God's Majesty are centered, the pivot around which the world of His Grace and Beauty revolves.

O God, for the mystery of him in his relation to You, and for his journeying toward You: secure me from my fears, protect me from falling, diminish my

sorrows, and purify me of my passions. Be with me, take me away from myself unto You, and favor me with effacement from myself. Do not leave me obsessed with my self, veiled by my feelings. Unveil to me every mystery.

O Eternally Living and Self-Sustaining, O Eternally Living and Self-Sustaining, O Eternally Living and Self-Sustaining. Have mercy upon me and my companions. Have mercy upon all believers and all the people of the Qur'an. Amen, O Most Compassionate of the Compassionate, O Most Generous of the Generous.

The conclusion of their call will be: "All praise is due to God, the Lord of all the worlds."