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HEARTS UNVEILED

Key Quranic arguments for a spiritual and intellectual awakening

PART 1

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SAPIENCE
INSTITUTE

Hearts Unveiled: Key Quranic Arguments for Spiritual and Intellectual Awakening

Part I

Sapience Institute

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Introduction

This booklet, *Hearts Unveiled: Key Quranic Arguments for Spiritual and Intellectual Awakening* (henceforth *Hearts Unveiled*), marks the first part of an ongoing series dedicated to exploring key Quranic verses through reflection, context, and practical lessons. It has been prepared as a heartfelt gift to those who have generously supported this project, allowing it to come to life. Your contributions have helped in creating a resource that seeks to deepen our understanding of the Quran's timeless wisdom and its relevance to our daily lives.

The booklet itself is inspired by the *Sapience* YouTube series *Unlocking Your Heart* by Dr. Osman Latiff, which seeks to engage with the Quran in a way that is both meaningful and accessible. *Hearts Unveiled: Part I* takes readers on a journey of spiritual growth and self-awareness, guiding them through key Quranic arguments in a structured sequence. Each chapter offers reflective insights, building upon one another to provide a deeper understanding of faith and ourselves. The key themes explored in the chapters include trust in Allah, reflections on His creation, divine mercy and redemption, moral responsibility, and the significance of time and taqwa. Specifically, the booklet is designed as a journey of spiritual growth and self-awareness, guiding the reader through these key themes in a meaningful sequence. However, while the chapters follow a structured, linear progression, they do not represent the non-linear reality of spiritual growth. Faith is a journey marked by moments of clarity and doubt, progress and setbacks, reflection and renewal.

With this in mind, *Hearts Unveiled Part I* begins the journey of faith with the trust in Allah's wisdom, trust in His nearness, and trust in His guidance. Only when we recognise His presence can we begin to build a strong foundation for our spiritual path. With this trust, our perspective shifts outward, and we begin to see the world differently (**Chapters 1 and 2**). Every leaf, every star, every moment of existence becomes a reflection of Allah's majesty. We realise that nothing exists without purpose, and creation itself serves as a reminder of the divine (**Chapters 3 and 4**). From this point, the journey moves inward—towards understanding human fallibility and Allah's boundless mercy. Recognising our own shortcomings and the inevitability of making mistakes is a crucial step in spiritual development. Yet, alongside this, we are reminded of the vastness of Allah's mercy and the opportunity for redemption (**Chapters 5 and 6**).

With a strengthened awareness of divine mercy, the focus then shifts towards moral responsibility and self-discipline. Staying on the right path requires commitment, sincerity, and humility, as well as vigilance against the distractions and arrogance that

can lead one astray (**Chapters 7 and 8**). Finally, we come to understand the value of time. Life is a fleeting moment, a test that will one day come to an end. What we do with our time defines our legacy and our ultimate fate. To live with taqwa is to live with purpose—mindful of our actions, striving to make every moment meaningful, and keeping our final destination in sight (**Chapters 9 and 10**).

Chapter Summaries

Each chapter of this booklet is centred around a particular verse, but rather than viewing the verse in isolation, we explore the broader context, surrounding themes, and the wisdom embedded within the verses. This approach allows us to reflect on how these divine messages apply to contemporary challenges, personal growth, and spiritual well-being. A summary of the 10 chapters comprising Part I is given in turn below.

Chapter 1, By the Morning Brightness: *This chapter explores Surah Ad-Duha and its message of divine reassurance to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ during a period of silence. It reflects on the inevitability of hardship, the certainty of relief, and the importance of gratitude. Believers are reminded to trust in Allah’s timing and ever-present mercy.*

Chapter 2, Your Lord is All-Wise: *This chapter explores Surah Yusuf as a narrative of divine wisdom, patience, and redemption. Unlike other prophetic stories, Yusuf (AS)’s journey unfolds in a continuous sequence—his betrayal, hardship, and eventual rise. Revealed during the Prophet’s Year of Sorrow, the surah offers solace, reminding us that trials carry purpose, and trust in Allah’s plan leads to elevation.*

Chapter 3 This is the Creation of Allah: *This chapter explores the wisdom of Surah Luqman, highlighting monotheism, gratitude, and reflection. It examines Luqman’s guidance to his son, the signs of Allah’s creation, and how reflecting on nature—like the mulberry leaf—deepens faith, humility, and recognition of Allah’s boundless power.*

Chapter 4, The Fine Tuning of our Universe: *this chapter encourages us to reflect on all the signs in the universe, in all of Allah’s creation, to try to understand His Majesty and also ponder upon the reasons for their existence beyond their beauty and magnificence.*

Chapter 5, The Fall of Adam: *this chapter explores the idea of sin and provides a brief contrast with the Christian concept. In Islam, sins are considered part of human nature, an expected part of our journey and growth in this dunya. Humans are expected to slip but also repent, and Allah assures us of His mercy for those who repent, unlike Iblees.*

Chapter 6, They say, "The most merciful has taken a son": *This chapter looks at the concept of divine mercy, again contrasting Islam and Christianity. While Christian doctrine requires Jesus to be born as God's son and then sacrificed, Islam places no conditions on Allah's mercy. The Quran affirms that this understanding of Allah's mercy was held by the believers and prophets before the birth of Isa (AS), citing Maryam (AS) and Ibrahim (AS) as examples.*

Chapter 7, The Man Who Came Running: *This chapter uses examples of various figures, including the man mentioned in Surah Ya Sin, to demonstrate how we should strive to help our communities as our best selves, being sincere and humble whilst helping others, and dealing with hostility*

Chapter 8, Go to Pharaoh, Indeed, He Has Transgressed: *The example of what not to be! This chapter examines Pharaoh's behaviour as one of the worst of mankind—the epitome of self-inflated ego—and looks at the root cause of this: a disease of the heart, namely arrogance.*

Chapter 9, The Value of Time: *This chapter explores the fleeting nature of time and its link to spiritual awareness. Drawing from Surah Al-Hashr and Surah Al-Asr, it highlights how heedlessness leads to wasted time, while remembrance of Allah gives meaning to every moment. Ramadan exemplifies mindful living, urging lasting devotion beyond it.*

Chapter 10, The Most Precious Thing About You: *This chapter explores the Quranic concept of honour, centring on Surah Al-Hujurat and its teachings on human dignity. It emphasises that status is not defined by race, wealth, or lineage, but by taqwa—consciousness of Allah. The chapter also highlights ethical principles such as respect, truthfulness, and fairness, reinforcing their timeless relevance in maintaining a just and cohesive society.*

How to Use This Booklet

This booklet can be read sequentially or explored thematically, depending on the reader's interest. It is designed for personal reflection and can also be used in conjunction with the *Unlocking Your Heart* YouTube series by Dr. Osman Latiff. Readers are encouraged to engage deeply with the themes, ponder their meanings, and consider how these lessons can be integrated into daily life.

We ask not to not share this booklet in study circles yet, however this will be encouraged when the final version is published and available publicly.

A Note of Gratitude

This work would not have been possible without the generosity and support of our donors. Your contributions have helped make this series a reality, and we pray that the reflections within these pages serve as a source of benefit and inspiration. May Allah bless you abundantly for your kindness and dedication to spreading knowledge.

We hope *Hearts Unveiled* serves as a source of enlightenment and reflection, guiding you toward a deeper understanding of the Quran's messages and their significance in your spiritual journey.

Chapter 1: By the morning Brightness

Surah Ad-Duha was revealed when the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ faced a period of divine silence and its message is not only to the Prophet ﷺ but to every believer who has ever felt lost or alone. It speaks of patience, gratitude, and trust in divine wisdom. It teaches that, just as the morning brightness inevitably follows the night, relief follows hardship. This chapter expands on the revelation with respect to its context and timeless relevance, and how we are never alone, as Allah is always near, as He tells us directly in *Surah Al-Baqarah*, verse 2: *“Indeed, I am near.”* Through reflecting on its verses, we are invited to see our own struggles in a new light, to remember Allah’s blessings in our past, and to place our trust in the promise of what is yet to come.

Surah Ad-Duha

Surah Ad-Duha (93) (The Morning Brightness), *Surah Al-Layl* (92) (The Night), and *Surah Al-Fajr* (89) (The Dawn) are grouped together because of their common themes and imagery related to opposites, such as the differences between light and darkness, hardship and ease, and humility and arrogance. Their titles symbolise the transitions of time. For example, night represents a stillness in which the sun's light is hidden, dawn marks the moment of transformation when darkness gives way to a new beginning, and the morning brightness signifies renewal and hope. Each surah offers a profound lesson in faith, patience, and divine wisdom, reminding believers of the cyclical nature of trials and relief, the importance of trust in Allah’s plan, and the ultimate reward for perseverance.

Surah Ad-Duha serves as a timeless reminder that just as morning brightness follows the night, relief follows hardship, and divine guidance is never far. It calls on believers to reflect on past blessings, trust in Allah’s plan, and remain steadfast in hope. *Surah Ad-Duha* was revealed during a period of silence in the life of the Prophet ﷺ, when the sequence of divine revelations had paused. During this time, the disbelievers of Makkah began spreading accusations: *“His Lord has abandoned him!”*. Their words were intended to undermine the Prophet’s ﷺ mission and character, aiming to sow doubt in the hearts of his followers. In the face of this adversity, the Prophet ﷺ endured a campaign of slander, isolation, and abuse. During this same period, the Prophet ﷺ became unwell. His illness prevented him from standing in prayer for one or two nights. A woman (likely one of the idolaters or someone influenced by them) used this as an opportunity to mock him. As Imam Ahmad recorded from Jundub that she said: *“O Muhammad! I think that your devil has finally left you”*.

This taunt not only echoed the broader accusations of abandonment but also sought to undermine his spiritual strength and connection to Allah. It was during this critical juncture that Allah revealed *Surah Ad-Duha*, beginning with an oath that carries profound significance, echoed into our present day:

“By the early morning brightness, and by the night when it grows still, your Lord has not forsaken you, nor is He displeased with you. And surely, the future will be better for you than the present. And your Lord will give you, and you will be satisfied.”

(93:1–5)

Hence, at the core of this surah, the message is of comfort and encouragement, reminding the Prophet ﷺ of Allah’s past mercies and that what lies ahead is far greater than what has passed. The promise of a better future extends beyond this life, offering reassurance of the eternal Hereafter. However, it also holds meaning in the Prophet’s ﷺ worldly journey, foretelling the victories, success, and divine satisfaction that awaited him. His life stands as an inspiring example of patience, trust, and unwavering faith in Allah’s wisdom.

Specifically, the opening verse, *“By the early morning brightness (wa’d-duha),”* sets the tone for the *Surah*. It signifies renewal, hope, and the certainty that light follows darkness. This metaphor expresses new beginnings and a divine reassurance; a metaphor wrapped into words that are a direct response to the Prophet’s ﷺ distress, affirming that Allah had neither abandoned him nor grown displeased with him. Instead, it promised that brighter days lay ahead. For the Prophet ﷺ, this was not just a message of solace but also a reminder of Allah’s continuous presence and guidance. For us today, these words carry the same power. In moments of doubt, uncertainty, or hardship, the verse reminds us that no difficulty lasts forever. Like the morning sun that dispels the darkness of night, Allah’s mercy and guidance give light, though they do so with time.

A significant aspect of the *Surah* is related to reflecting on time itself—past, present, and future. Allah calls upon the Prophet ﷺ to reflect on his own life:

“Did He not find you an orphan and give you shelter? Did He not find you lost and guide you? Did He not find you in need and enrich you?”

(93:6–8)

These verses remind the Prophet ﷺ and us of the blessings we have received in the past. They encourage us to acknowledge Allah's presence during moments of vulnerability and use those experiences as a source of strength to face future challenges. The verse is not set in declarative sentences but rather as questions, encouraging the reflective nature of blessings and how they themselves are our learning points—teaching us gratitude and trust in Allah's divine plan. The answer is that if He has guided us through difficulties before, He will surely guide us through them again.

The interrogative nature mentioned above is often found when we are in such states—when there is a silence to our prayers and needs. In such a period, the heart longs for comfort, reassurance, and connection. Allah, in His infinite Mercy, addresses this human need in a verse in *Surah Al-Baqarah*:

"And when My servants ask you concerning Me, indeed I am near. I respond to the call of the caller when they call upon Me. So let them respond to Me and believe in Me that they may be rightly guided."

(2:186)

Although revealed during the sacred month of Ramadan, this verse is not limited to that time. It is a timeless declaration of Allah's nearness and His readiness to respond to anyone who calls upon Him. It speaks to every believer in every circumstance, reminding us that Allah's closeness transcends time, space, and situation.

This verse is distinctive in how Allah responds to human inquiry. In other Qur'anic verses, when the companions of the Prophet ﷺ asked about a matter, Allah would instruct the Prophet ﷺ to "Say" (*Qul*) in response. For example:

"They ask you about the crescent moons. Say, they are measurements of time for the people..."

(2:189)

"They ask you about the soul. Say, the soul is of the affair of my Lord..." (17:85)

However, in Ayah 186, Allah omits the intermediary and directly says:

"Indeed, I am near." (2:186)

This omission reflects the immediacy and intimacy of Allah’s relationship with His servants. Allah does not instruct the Prophet ﷺ to relay the message on His behalf; instead, He speaks directly to every individual.

A Call to Reflection

Surah Ad-Duha encapsulates the human journey—marked by challenges, growth, and the promise of better days. It teaches us to reflect on Allah’s blessings, maintain hope during hardship, and live with compassion and gratitude. Whenever we face uncertainty or despair, we are encouraged to recall the opening verse of the *Surah*:

“By the early morning brightness.”

The promise within this *Surah* is timeless: just as morning light follows the darkest night, so too does divine mercy follow hardship. The silence we may sometimes experience is not abandonment; it is a pause before Allah’s greater plan unfolds. So, let us take a moment to reflect and ask ourselves: ***What past blessings remind us of Allah’s care in our own lives? In moments of hardship, do we trust that relief will come in its time?***

This *Surah* teaches us to have faith not only in Allah’s presence but also in His perfect timing. As we navigate our own struggles, may we hold firm to the promise that *what is to come is better than what has passed*.

And whenever we find ourselves in darkness, may we remember the divine words:

“By the morning brightness.”

For with every dawn, Allah reminds us that He is always near.

Chapter 2: Your Lord is All-Wise

One-third of the Qur'an consists of the stories of the prophets, and Surah Yusuf beautifully continues this tradition. Scholars, including Imam Qurtubi, have emphasised that one of the central themes of the Qur'an is the narratives of the prophets. However, these stories are not recounted merely for the sake of narration; each one carries moral guidance, spiritual wisdom, and lessons for humanity. The Qur'an is not simply a collection of stories; it is a guide for life. It carries not just historical narratives but divine wisdom on how to navigate challenges. The trials of the prophets serve as examples, teaching patience, faith, and perseverance. These stories are not distant historical events; they are lessons on how to process grief, loss, and life's trials. Surah Yusuf serves this purpose in an especially moving and heartfelt way. This chapter explores the profound themes of Surah Yusuf, focusing on the trials of Yusuf (AS) and the unwavering trust in Allah that leads him from the darkness of the well to the heights of power and reconciliation.

Surah Yusuf

What makes Surah Yusuf particularly unique is that, unlike other prophetic stories that are scattered throughout the Qur'an, the story of Yusuf (AS) is told in one continuous narrative. While his name appears in other parts of the Qur'an, his full story is found only in this surah. In verse 7, Allah explicitly states that there are signs and lessons within this account. The surah begins with an invitation to reflect on its wisdom and concludes by reaffirming the importance of learning from its teachings. It is a surah of patience, resilience, and unwavering faith—one that continues to inspire and console those who turn to it in times of difficulty.

Surah Yusuf was revealed during one of the most difficult periods in the Prophet's ﷺ life, known as the Year of Sorrow. This was a time of personal loss and hardship, as he grieved the passing of two of his greatest supporters—his beloved wife Khadija (RA) and his uncle Abu Talib. Their loss left him vulnerable in Makkah, where opposition against him grew fiercer, culminating in the painful experience of being pelted with stones in Ta'if. In this moment of grief, Allah revealed Surah Yusuf as a source of solace and reassurance, reminding him that trials have always been part of the journey of the prophets. The story of Yusuf (AS) served as a reminder that hardship is followed by ease, that trials carry wisdom, and that even in difficulty, divine purpose is at work, even if it is not immediately visible.

It is also significant to note that Surah Yusuf was revealed around the same time as Surah Hud. While Surah Hud was a stern warning to the people of Makkah, highlighting Allah's immense power and judgment, Surah Yusuf carried a different tone—one of hope, patience, and trust in divine wisdom. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ once remarked that Surah Hud made his hair turn white due to its message of accountability. In contrast, Surah Yusuf provided emotional comfort, a reminder that even in adversity, Allah's plan unfolds with mercy. These two surahs, revealed in close succession, together offer both a warning and a source of solace.

Allah introduces different surahs in ten unique ways, known as the keys to a surah (*fawatih al-suwar*). Some surahs begin with praise, such as *Alhamdulillah*, which appears in five surahs. Others start with disjointed letters known as *Hurūf al-Muqatta'āt*, like *Alif Lam Ra* or *Ha Meem*. Some surahs begin with direct addresses to the Prophet ﷺ or the Ummah, while others open with oaths, commands, questions, or supplications. Understanding these introductions provides deeper insight into the structure and message of each surah.

The Qur'an contains a series of surahs named after prophets, reinforcing their significance in guiding humanity. There is an intricate connection between these surahs, and recognising these links enhances our understanding of the Qur'an. Interestingly, six surahs in the Qur'an begin with *Alif Lam Ra*, and Surah Yusuf is one of them.

The key thing for us to appreciate about the Qur'an is that there is a context behind the verses of Allah. Sometimes you might read a verse of the Qur'an, but once you know the context of its revelation, it helps you understand more about life, the weight of its revelation, and the worthiness of what is being said in those verses.

This is one such verse. Allah says:

"Indeed, your Lord is All-Knowing and Ever-Wise."

This verse exists not only once in Surah Yusuf but three times, and it also appears in other parts of the Qur'an. So why is it so powerful? Why is it so crucial for us to understand that verse in its context and in life itself?

In Surah Yusuf, we learn an amazing narrative of one of the great prophets of Allah, Yusuf (AS). So many things happen in his life that were unpredictable, remarkable, and strange:

- Betrayed by his siblings.
- Separated from his father.
- Grows up in a different landscape—Egypt.
- Works for the minister.
- Involved in a controversy involving women.
- Wrongly imprisoned.
- Released and elevated in status.
- The very ones who betrayed him in the beginning become dependent on him by the end of the surah.

The story of Yusuf (AS) is a remarkable example of resilience, patience, and the unfolding of divine wisdom. His journey begins with betrayal and hardship but ultimately leads to triumph and reconciliation. He is first abandoned by his brothers, who cast him into a well out of jealousy. He is then sold into slavery and taken to Egypt, where he is bought as a servant.

As he matures, he faces another great trial—being falsely accused by Zuleikha and subsequently imprisoned. While in prison, he remains steadfast in his faith and interprets the dreams of his fellow inmates. This ability eventually leads to his release and elevation to a high-ranking position in Egypt. By the end of the story, Yusuf (AS) forgives his brothers and reunites with his family, demonstrating an extraordinary level of patience and compassion.

During this period, his father still laments the loss of his beloved son. But Allah reminds him, and all of us:

"Indeed, your Lord is All-Knowing and Ever-Wise."

Even in his grief, Ya'qub (AS) remains steadfast in his faith, teaching his sons never to lose hope in Allah's mercy. For example, when Yusuf (AS) asks his brothers to bring their youngest brother, Benjamin, to Egypt, the brothers return to their father, Ya'qub (AS), and explain the situation. At this moment, Ya'qub (AS) recalls the loss of Yusuf (AS) and is overcome with grief, but he reminds his sons of Allah's mercy and says:

"Go forth and search for Yusuf and his brother, and do not lose hope in the life-inspiring mercy of Allah."

This is a powerful example of how remembering Allah keeps us spiritually grounded.

We sometimes look at the world from our own vantage points and try to make sense of situations, but we are limited—in scope, understanding, awareness, and knowledge. We see only a pixel, but Allah has the full picture. We might read Surah Yusuf in the beginning and not realise its full significance. But by the end, a remarkable reconciliation happens—something none of us could predict, because we are not All-Knowing, nor are we All-Wise.

Reflecting on our own lives, we can often see how events that once seemed difficult later revealed hidden wisdom. I remember failing my 12+ exams. Everyone expected me to pass, including my parents and teachers. I even appealed the decision, but I failed again. It was painful. My friends went to different schools while I had to go elsewhere. But looking back, that school experience shaped me in profound ways. It was there that I began practising Islam more seriously, and my life took a course that I would not change for anything. At the time, I could not see where my journey would lead, but Allah was always All-Knowing and All-Wise.

Concluding Remarks

The story of Yusuf (AS) is a testament to the power of patience and trust in Allah's wisdom. What began as betrayal and hardship ultimately unfolded into mercy, redemption, and triumph. In moments of uncertainty, this surah reassures us that Allah's wisdom is at work, even when it is not immediately visible. The final words of Yusuf (AS) to his brothers, echoed by the Prophet ﷺ upon his return to Makkah, remind us of the strength found in forgiveness and the beauty of divine justice. In every hardship, there is a path toward ease, and in every moment of despair, the light of Allah's wisdom shines through.

Chapter 3: This is the creation of Allah

This chapter explores the timeless wisdom contained in Surah Luqman, a profound message revealed during a pivotal period in the life of the Prophet ﷺ. Set against the backdrop of the Makkan period, when the message of monotheism faced intense opposition, Surah Luqman offers a framework for righteous living through devotion to Allah, gratitude, and reflection. At its heart lies the story of Luqman the Wise, whose advice to his son encompasses universal principles of faith, morality, and humility, underscored by a deep connection to the signs of Allah's creation. This chapter delves into these teachings, inviting readers to reflect on how they can embody this wisdom in their own lives.

Surah Luqman

Surah Luqman was revealed during the Makkan period, a time when the Prophet ﷺ and His followers faced significant challenges from the Quraysh. This era is characterised by the interaction of two opposing belief systems: the Prophet ﷺ actively inviting the people of Makkah to monotheism, urging them to abandon their idol worship and embrace the oneness of Allah, and the intense resistance from the Quraysh, who were deeply entrenched in their polytheistic traditions. The Quraysh perceived the message of Islam as a direct challenge to their socio-economic and religious structure, which was heavily dependent on idol worship.

The Prophet's ﷺ message of monotheism disrupted the very fabric of Makkan society. In response, the Quraysh subjected Him and His followers to social ostracism, economic sanctions, and physical persecution. Despite these challenges, the Prophet ﷺ persevered, calling people to the worship of one God and emphasizing the signs of Allah's creation as undeniable evidence of His existence and power.

Surah Luqman stands as a source of profound wisdom and a compelling argument against the worship of anything besides Allah. The declaration in verse 11 is a powerful reminder that everything in existence, from the vast galaxies to the intricate design of a single leaf, is a testament to Allah's power:

“This is the creation of Allah. So show Me what those besides Him have created.”

(30:10)

This verse encourages believers to reflect on these signs, strengthening their faith and deepening their recognition of Allah's greatness. The Surah highlights the connection between recognising Allah's creation and gaining wisdom. Being aware and curious about the world around us allows for a deeper understanding and appreciation of Allah's Power. Each observation of the natural world, whether it is the heavens above or the plants on earth, invites us to recognise the signs that point to the Creator. The placement of this Ayah within Surah Luqman is particularly significant as it precedes the story of Luqman, whose teachings are presented in the subsequent verses, and follows a verse on what Allah has created:

“He created the heavens without pillars—as you can see—and placed firm mountains upon the earth so it does not shake with you, and scattered throughout it all types of creatures. And We send down rain from the sky, causing every type of fine plant to grow on earth.”

(31:10)

Among these signs, the Qur'an draws attention to the continuous cycles of day and night, and the harmonious movement of the sun and moon. Allah says:

“Do you not see that Allah causes the night to merge into the day and the day into the night, and has subjected the sun and the moon, each orbiting for an appointed term, and that Allah is All-Aware of what you do?”

(31:29)

This verse invites believers to reflect on the seamless transitions between day and night and the balance of the universe. These cycles are not random but signs of Allah's wisdom and power, reminding us of His mercy and the intricate design of His creation. Such reflections also serve as a call to gratitude and mindfulness, as Allah's awareness encompasses all that we do.

The Qur'an further draws attention to the blessings of Allah in facilitating the smooth movement of ships across the seas, a clear sign of His mercy and power. Allah says:

“Do you not see that the ships sail ‘smoothly’ through the sea by the grace of Allah so that He may show you some of His signs? Surely in this are signs for whoever is steadfast, grateful.”

(31:31)

The ability of ships to glide effortlessly across oceans points to the ease and order Allah places within His creation. It serves as a reminder that reflecting on these signs fosters gratitude and steadfastness, reinforcing our connection to the Creator. By drawing attention to the natural rhythms of the world and the blessings that sustain human life, Surah Luqman reinforces its central message: to recognise Allah’s oneness and power by observing the signs in His creation. These verses complement Luqman’s advice to his son, urging reflection on the visible and subtle wonders of the world to deepen faith, gratitude, and humility.

Luqman’s story, embedded in the Surah, is one of humility, gratitude, and reflection. Historical accounts describe him as Luqman ibn 'Anqa' ibn Sadun, though some sources identify him as Luqman ibn Tharan. He was said to have lived in Aylah, associated with present-day Jerusalem, and was of African descent, possibly from Nubia or Ethiopia. Ibn 'Abbas described him as an Ethiopian carpenter, while Jabir ibn 'Abdullah portrayed him as a short man with a flat nose. Despite his humble origins and status as a servant, Luqman’s wisdom earned him a place of honour in the Qur’an. Known for his profound insights and piety, he came to be remembered as Luqman the Wise.

The Qur’an highlights Luqman’s wisdom through his heartfelt advice to his son, a series of lessons that reflect universal principles of morality and faith. Luqman begins his guidance with the foundation of belief, emphasizing the oneness of Allah and rejecting shirk, or associating partners with Him. He warns his son of the grave injustice of shirk, stating:

“O my dear son! Do not associate others with Allah in worship, for associating others with Him is truly the worst wrong.”

(31:13)

This profound statement underscores that all acts of worship and devotion must be directed solely to Allah. It also serves as a reminder that all creation is a sign of Allah’s singularity and power, and that no other entity possesses the ability to create or sustain

the intricate balance of the universe. Luqman then shifts his focus to the importance of kindness to parents, highlighting the sacrifices made by mothers in particular:

“And We have commanded people to ‘honour’ their parents. Their mothers bore them through hardship upon hardship, and their weaning takes two years. So be grateful to Me and your parents. To Me is the final return.”

(31:14)

This command not only emphasises gratitude to parents but also points to the intricate process of creation itself—how Allah nurtures human life through the care and sacrifice of parents, especially mothers. Reflecting on these acts of mercy and provision is itself a reflection on the signs of Allah. Allah provides guidance on how to balance obedience to parents with maintaining devotion to Him, emphasising that kindness and respect toward parents are paramount, even if they attempt to lead one away from monotheism, but without compromising faith and obedience to Allah.

“But if they pressure you to associate with Me what you have no knowledge of, do not obey them. Still, keep their company in this world courteously, and follow the way of those who turn to Me ‘in devotion’. Then to Me you will ‘all’ return, and I will inform you of what you used to do.”

(31:15)

This delicate balance reflects the importance of maintaining respect and kindness towards parents, even when they diverge from the path of Allah, while remaining firm in recognising Allah as the ultimate source of guidance.

Luqman’s wisdom goes further, teaching his son about Allah’s omniscience and the ultimate accountability for all deeds, no matter how small or hidden. He states:

“O my dear son! If a deed were the weight of a mustard seed—be it ‘hidden’ in a rock or in the heavens or the earth—Allah will bring it forth. Surely Allah is Most Subtle, All-Aware.”

(31:16)

This verse is a powerful reminder of Allah’s encompassing knowledge and justice, urging believers to be mindful of their actions, knowing that nothing escapes His awareness. The example of the mustard seed invites reflection on the miniscule signs of Allah’s precision in creation—how every small detail, visible or invisible, is accounted for by His divine wisdom. Through such reflections, believers are reminded that the natural world itself is a witness to Allah’s Beauty and Majesty.

As a guide to righteous living, Luqman advises his son to establish regular prayer and to remain steadfast in enjoining good and forbidding evil:

“O my dear son! Establish prayer, encourage what is good, and forbid what is evil, and endure patiently whatever befalls you. Surely this is a resolve to aspire to.”

(31:17)

Through this advice, Luqman emphasises the importance of patience and perseverance in facing life’s trials, anchoring his guidance in the practicalities of daily worship and moral responsibility. The call to prayer and moral action reflects Allah’s natural order, where harmony and balance are maintained through justice, good conduct, and the rejection of evil. These principles mirror the greater harmony found in creation, reminding believers that righteous living aligns one’s life with Allah’s divine will.

Lastly, Luqman warns against arrogance and pride, advising humility both in conduct and in speech. He tells his son:

“And do not turn your nose up at people, nor walk pridefully on the earth. Surely Allah does not like the arrogant and boastful. Be moderate in your pace. And lower your voice, for the ugliest of all voices is certainly the braying of donkeys.”

(31:18-19)

These verses encapsulate the essence of humility, advocating for modesty in one’s demeanour and tone, as arrogance alienates one from Allah and others. Luqman’s emphasis on walking humbly upon the earth draws attention to the natural signs of Allah—how the vastness of creation humbles human beings, urging them to acknowledge their place as stewards of Allah’s world rather than its masters.

Reflection

In these timeless pieces of advice, Luqman weaves a complete moral framework for life, centred on devotion to Allah, compassion for others, and a commitment to humility and accountability. His wisdom is deeply intertwined with the call to reflect on Allah’s

signs—whether in the vastness of the heavens, the nurturing care of parents, or the subtle details of creation like a mustard seed. Each piece of wisdom reflects Allah’s broader guidance for humanity, encouraging believers to embody these principles in their own lives. Through this reflection, Luqman’s teachings continue to inspire believers to live a life of gratitude, humility, and purpose, always mindful of the signs of Allah that surround them.

His emphasis on gratitude and humility serves as a timeless reminder to recognise Allah’s power and to appreciate the intricacies of His creation. In life, every encounter with beauty—whether it be a breathtaking landscape, the intricate design of a living being, or the myriads of sensations like taste, smell, and sight—serves as a testament to the creative power of Allah. Even the smallest of creatures, like the ant, demonstrate the intricate design and wisdom inherent in Allah’s creation. Consider how ants build their nests with such sophistication, how they construct intricate tunnels, and how they possess the knowledge to carry food much heavier than themselves. Ants are also aware of how to prevent food from germinating. For example, they split grains into two because this prevents germination, and they split coriander into four pieces because splitting it into two still allows it to germinate. The knowledge possessed by these tiny creatures is another sign of Allah’s wisdom. Furthermore, ants can find their way back to their nests in complete darkness, despite their inability to see. This is a testament to Allah being their Guide and Provider.

Reflecting on the wonders of creation naturally leads to a strengthened belief in Allah. The story of Imam Shafi’i illustrates this, in which an atheist asked him for the proof of the existence of Allah. His response was both simple and profound: he pointed to the Mulberry leaf as a sufficient sign of Allah’s existence:

“The leaves of the mulberry tree have the same taste, colour, smell, and form. Yet, when the silkworm eats from it, it produces silk. When the bee eats from it, it produces honey. When the sheep eats from it, it produces fat and milk. And when the gazelle eats from it, it nourishes itself and produces musk. Who made these things of such diverse outcomes from one identical leaf? Surely, it is Allah.”

Reflecting on these signs in nature, as highlighted in Surah Luqman and through examples like the mulberry leaf, encourages us to recognise Allah’s power and creativity. This reflection is not only a source of spiritual growth but also a reminder of

our own place in the grand design of creation. As the stated in Surah Al-Mu'minun:

“So blessed be Allah, the Best to create.”
(23:14)

A call to reflection

Surah Luqman offers a comprehensive moral and spiritual framework, weaving together divine wisdom with practical guidance for life. Revealed during a period of immense challenges for the Prophet ﷺ and his followers, the Surah stands as a powerful testament to the enduring relevance of monotheism, gratitude, and humility. It begins with a central warning against shirk, urging believers to recognize Allah’s oneness and to direct all acts of worship to Him alone. This foundational principle is complemented by a call to reflect on the intricate signs of Allah’s creation, from the heavens above to the smallest details of life on earth.

Luqman’s advice to his son forms the heart of this Surah, touching on themes of gratitude to parents, accountability for actions, perseverance in trials, and humility in character. His guidance illustrates how reflecting on Allah’s signs—whether in the care of a mother, the precision of a mustard seed, or the complex wisdom of ants—leads to a deeper understanding of Allah’s power and a stronger sense of purpose. Each piece of advice reinforces the Qur’an’s broader invitation to observe the natural world as evidence of Allah’s greatness.

The Surah also serves as a reminder that true wisdom is rooted in gratitude and mindfulness of Allah’s blessings. Luqman’s wisdom transcends time, encouraging believers to balance respect for parents with devotion to Allah, to act with moral integrity, and to embody humility in all aspects of life. Through the lessons of Luqman, the Qur’an calls upon readers to reflect not only on their personal actions but also on the beauty and intricacies of the world around them.

In reflecting on the wonders of creation, the story of Imam Shafi’i and the mulberry leaf provides a vivid illustration of Allah’s unmatched power and creativity. From a single, identical leaf, Allah enables silkworms to produce silk, bees to make honey, and sheep to nourish themselves. Such reflections serve as a profound reminder of Allah’s limitless wisdom and His care for all creatures.

Ultimately, Surah Luqman reminds us that Allah's knowledge and creation are boundless; even if all the trees were pens and the oceans ink, His words could never be exhausted:

If all the trees on earth were pens and the ocean were ink, refilled by seven other oceans, the Words of Allah would not be exhausted. Surely Allah is Almighty, All-Wise.

(31:27)

This chapter invites readers to live with a sense of awe and gratitude, finding guidance in Allah's signs and striving to embody the moral principles exemplified in Luqman's advice. Through devotion to Allah, humility in behaviour, and reflection on His signs, believers can draw closer to their Creator and lead lives filled with purpose, righteousness, and curiosity of Him and His creation.

Chapter 4: The Fine Tuning of our Universe

The majority of scholars consider Surah Ar-Rahmān to be an early Makkan revelation, although some argue that certain parts may have been revealed in Madinah. The surah is renowned for its highly poetic and mystical style, with the recurring verse: ***“Then which of the favours of your Lord will you deny?”*** appearing 31 times across its 78 verses. The context of revelation is worthy of mention here: the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was facing opposition from the Quraysh, who rejected his message of monotheism and the concept of the **Hereafter**. Many disbelievers were arrogant towards the idea that they would be resurrected and held accountable for their deeds. And so, Surah **Ar-Rahmān** was revealed as a response to their doubts, highlighting the **greatness of Allah’s mercy, the precision of His creation, and the certainty of judgment.**

This surah is the sixth in a series of seven (50-56) that focus on divine revelation, the blessings of Allah, and the Hereafter. The surah frequently employs the dual grammatical form, emphasising that while creation exists in pairs, everything ultimately originates from the One Creator, who is the source of all blessings and the final destination of all existence. Surah Ar-Rahmān beautifully encapsulates the boundless mercy and generosity of Allah. It serves as a powerful reminder of the countless favours He has bestowed upon humanity and the natural world. The surah highlights the divine balance in creation, the fleeting nature of worldly existence, and the ultimate reality that only Allah remains eternal.

Surah Rahman

The surah begins by emphasising one of Allah’s greatest blessings to humankind, namely revelation. The Qur’an is a gift of divine guidance, enabling human beings to recognise truth and live with wisdom. Allah’s creation is perfectly harmonised, with every being benefiting from His generosity. Yet, despite the vastness of His mercy, all created things are temporary, and only He will endure forever (55:1-34 Allah manifests His presence through the Qur’an, human intellect, and the natural order. The universe operates under His laws, defined by balance, justice, kindness, and care. Though man was formed from clay, he has been granted the ability to comprehend his Creator—the Sustainer of the East and the West, the Lord who bestows life, faith, and all means of sustenance. The verses then transition to the fate of creation, in which the righteous will receive eternal reward, while those who deny the truth will face the consequences of their deeds. Yet, through all of this, Allah’s name remains exalted, for He is the Lord of Majesty, Honour, and Generosity (55:35-78).

Returning to the point we mentioned in the opening of this chapter is the striking repetition of the question Allah asks: "Then which of the bounties of your Lord will you deny? (Surah Ar-Rahman 55:13)" 31 times. The recurrence of this verse serves as a powerful reminder, urging us to be ever-conscious of the countless blessings bestowed upon us by Allah, both in this life and the next. It is an insistence on gratitude, a call to never take for granted the signs and favours of our Lord.

One such sign, mentioned in this Surah, is the celestial order established by Allah:

The sun and the moon are in precise calculation.'

(55:5)

'And the stars and the trees prostrate.'

(55:6)

'And the heavens, We have raised them and set a balance.'

(55:7)

Interestingly in 2022, the celestial order manifested in a particularly spectacular way. Venus and Jupiter aligned in their orbits so closely that they appeared, to the naked eye, as if they were touching, described as "kissing," by some astronomers. Yet, in reality, they remained 400 million miles apart. This cosmic dance, awe-inspiring as it was, is but one example of the precise calculation Allah has set in motion. The sun, the moon, the planets each move in a meticulously designed orbit, a system of perfect balance that governs the universe.

Beyond the sheer spectacle of these cosmic movements, there lies a deeper call for reflection. The Quran urges us to ponder these signs not merely as observers admiring their beauty, but as seekers searching for meaning. The planets do not move in chaos; they exist within a divine order. Their intricate design invites us to recognise the Creator's wisdom and power. Consider, for a moment, our own planet. Earth's position in the solar system is perfectly calibrated for life. If it were slightly closer to the sun, we would burn. If it were farther away, we would freeze. Yet, here we are, living in a delicate balance that makes human survival possible. This is not an accident. It is a deliberate act of divine wisdom.

Take Jupiter, as another example: this gas giant does more than simply exist in the night sky. It plays a crucial role in protecting Earth, its immense gravitational pull shielding us from asteroids and meteors that might otherwise collide with our planet. Even the moon, positioned exactly where it needs to be, regulates the tides and maintains the stability of Earth's rotation. If the moon were any closer, the friction would cause catastrophic shifts in the Earth's crust. If it were any farther away, the ocean tides would destabilize. Again, there is no randomness here, rather, it is only precision.

A Call to Reflection

These signs in the cosmos should not be dismissed as mere natural phenomena. They are reminders and proofs of divine orchestration. Allah calls us not to simply marvel at these wonders but to reflect on what they signify. What does it mean for us as human beings? What does it mean for our purpose? What does it mean for our relationship with Allah?

The Quran tells us:

“Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth are signs for those who reflect.”

(3:190)

What makes these signs so powerful is not merely their grandeur, but their ability to evoke something deep within us. They remind us of our own place in this vast creation. They remind us of our dependence on Allah. And they remind us that this life—this existence—is not in vain. The true believer does not stop at admiration. They contemplate, they reflect, and they remember Allah in all states; standing, sitting, and lying down. They recognize that none of this is without purpose. Just as the cosmos operates within a divine order, so too must our lives be aligned with a greater purpose.

Allah describes the believers in the Quran as those who not only witness these wonders but respond with remembrance. They see the order in the universe and turn towards their Creator in awe and submission.

“Our Lord, You did not create this in vain.”

(3:191)

The essence of faith is to see beyond the spectacle and recognize the signs for what they are: a call to consciousness, a call to return to Allah. Even in acts of worship, such as

Hajj, Allah reminds us that rituals are not ends in themselves. When the rites have been completed, when the journey has ended, the true act of worship continues:

“And when you have completed your rites, remember Allah.”

(2:200)

The pilgrimage is not about the mere performance of rituals; it is about internal transformation. Similarly, witnessing the alignment of planets, the intricacies of the universe, or the wonders of creation should not be a fleeting moment of amazement. It should be a catalyst for deeper faith and greater devotion. Venus and Jupiter may move apart again. The celestial event will pass. But the remembrance of Allah should remain constant. Every moment, every sign in this universe, is an invitation—a call to return to the One who created it all. May Allah make us among those who reflect deeply, who remember Him in all states, and who recognize His signs in the heavens and within ourselves. Ameen.

Chapter 5: The Fall of Adam

A Slip, Not a Fall

One of the many ways in which Allah (SWT) makes the Qur'an our ultimate book of guidance is by addressing and responding to contentions from previous revelations and scriptures. A profound example of this is the story of Adam (AS), which explores his departure from the gardens of Paradise, his encounter with the forbidden tree, and the consequences of his actions.

The bible speaks of the 'fall of adam' in the book of genesis and mankind's sin is attributed to this one event. Original sin, rather than referring to the first sin of the first person, refers to the inherent sinfulness of mankind.

In Romans (5:12), Paul states: "sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned." This verse places an immense weight on Adam's actions—implying that, had he not sinned, humanity might have remained sinless and eternal.

Among Christian scholars, the doctrine of Original Sin has long been debated, leading to the formation of various theological theories, such as the Devil Ransom Theory, the Fishhook Theory, and the Christ Redeemer Theory. However, it is considered such a central doctrine that in the fourth century, a man named Pelagius was condemned as a heretic for asserting that Adam's sin affected no one but himself, other than perhaps as setting a bad example but that otherwise had no direct effect on his children or descendants.

In the Christian faith it is believed that redemption for mankind comes through the son of God, Jesus Christ, and that through his sacrifice on the cross we earn salvation and a chance at an eternal life again.

In contrast, the Qur'an describes Adam's (AS) transgression not as a 'fall' but as a 'slip'—one caused by Shaytaan:

"Then Shaytaan caused them to slip, and removed them from that (condition) in which they had been. And We said, 'Go down (all of you) as enemies to one another, and you will have upon the earth a place of settlement and provision for a time.'"

(2:36)

The Arabic word used here—*zall*—means “to slip,” which conveys a vastly different meaning regarding responsibility and consequence. Despite their slip, Adam (AS) and Hawa face a consequence in the Qur’an: they are removed from the garden and sent to earth.

“We said, ‘Go down from it, all of you. And when guidance comes to you from Me, whoever follows My guidance—there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve.’”

(2:38)

If we accept that Adam (AS) and Hawa were banished from the gardens as a punishment, we may observe Allah’s mercy even in that. Not only does Allah accept their repentance but this earth that He places them on comes with provision, with joys as well as sadness, and perhaps most importantly, with the opportunity to worship and obey Allah until we return to Him.

The month of Ramadan offers a time to reflect on our own moments of ‘slipping’ into sin. Unlike the doctrine of Original Sin, which burdens all of humanity with Adam’s transgression, the Qur’an presents his story as one of hope and redemption. Upon realizing their mistake—made in a moment of forgetfulness and under Shaytaan’s influence—Adam (AS) and Hawa immediately repent.

“We had given a directive to Adam earlier, then he forgot, and We did not find in him a firm resolve.”

(20:115)

“Thereafter his Lord chose him. So He accepted his repentance and gave him guidance.”

(20:122)

How often do we find our resolve weakening despite good intentions? How often do we slip, tempted by Shaytaan and our immediate desires? Here, Allah reminds us that we are not alone in our struggles—human weakness has been inherent since the creation of the first human beings.

Allah reminds us that he is Al-Raheem, The Most Merciful and Al-Afuww, the pardoner in the expression of His wishes for us to turn back to him in countless verses and hadith:

“O My servants who have transgressed against themselves [by sinning], do not ever give up hope in Allah. Allah will forgive all your sins.”

(39:53)

“My mercy encompasses all things.”

(7:156)

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ once visited a young boy who was dying and asked him, “How are you?” The boy replied, “O Messenger of Allah, I swear by Allah that I have hope in Allah, but I also fear my sins.” The Prophet ﷺ said, “These two qualities do not gather in a slave’s heart at such a moment except that Allah grants him what he hopes for and protects him from what he fears.” (Tirmidhī)

A Contrast between Adam and Iblees

Unlike Adam and Hawa, who immediately turned to Allah in sincere repentance upon realizing their mistake, Iblees persisted in his arrogance and defiance. Rather than seeking forgiveness, he chose to double down on his rebellion, justifying his disobedience by blaming Allah for leading him astray. In his jealousy, he vowed to corrupt humanity, making sins appear attractive and leading as many astray as he could. As narrated in the Qur'an:

“My Lord, since You made me go astray, I swear that I shall beautify for them (evils) on the earth and I will lead all of them astray.”

(15:39)

This declaration was not only a refusal to repent but an active commitment to opposing divine guidance. However, despite his grand threats, Iblees himself acknowledged that he would have no power over those who are truly devoted to Allah:

“By Your might, then I will surely mislead them all, except Your chosen slaves amongst them.”

(38:71)

While Iblees can attempt to mislead, those who seek refuge in Allah and remain steadfast in their faith will not fall prey to his deception. Unlike Iblees, who chose

arrogance and despair over humility and repentance, believers are reminded that Allah, *Al-Ghaffur* (The Great Forgiver) and *Al-Gaffaar* (The Constant Forgiver), does not expect His servants to be free from sin, but rather to turn back to Him in sincere repentance.

As our beloved Prophet ﷺ narrated in a hadith Qudsi, Allah says:

“O My servants, you sin by night and by day, and I forgive all sins, so seek forgiveness from Me, and I shall forgive you.”

[Muslim}

Even in their exile, Adam (AS) and Hawa were not abandoned. Allah placed them on earth with sustenance, joy, and the opportunity to worship and obey Him until their return. Moreover, Allah (SWT) honoured Adam (AS)—an honour that Shaytaan resented:

“See this one whom You have honoured above me; if You delay my end until the Day of Judgment, I will certainly take hold of his descendants, except for a few.” (17:62)

According to Ibn Katheer, Allah honoured Adam with four things: He created him with His Noble Hand, breathed into him the soul which He had created, ordered the angels to prostrate to him, and He taught him the names of all things. These honours granted to Adam (AS) bear such a striking difference to a narrative where Adam not only falls from the grace of God but is responsible for the introduction of sin to mankind and for their spiritual state for all following generations.

Hope and Mercy

During the caliphate of Umar ibn Al-Khattab (RA), there was a man who was well known in his community for his devotion to the masjid and his presence among the sahaba. His absence was so noticeable that it prompted Umar (RA) to enquire about him. The people informed him that the man had fallen into sin and had distanced himself from the community. Rather than condemning him, Umar (RA) sought to bring him back with a reminder of Allah’s boundless mercy. He instructed a scribe to write him a note, addressing him informally, man to man, and included the following ayah from Surah Ghaafir:

"(Allah is) the One who forgives sins and accepts repentance, the One who is severe in punishment, the One who is the source of all power. There is no god but He. To Him is the ultimate return."

(40:3)

The man read the verse repeatedly, reflecting deeply on its meaning, recognising that despite his transgressions, Allah's door was still open to him. This moment of introspection led him back to the community, allowing him to rejoin the congregational prayers and reconnect with the people of faith. Umar's (RA) instruction to his companions further reinforces the message that a believer's role is not to shame or alienate a brother who has slipped, but to support his return.

When we push someone further into despair through judgement and condemnation, we inadvertently aid Shaytaan in his mission to lead people away from Allah. Shaytaan thrives on hopelessness, whispering that redemption is impossible and that returning to Allah is futile. But Allah reassures us in the Qur'an that despair is not from Him:

"Certainly no one despairs of Allah's Mercy, except the people who disbelieve."

(12:87)

"And who despairs of the Mercy of his Lord except those who are astray?"

(15:56)

These verses remind us that losing hope in Allah's mercy is a mistake that distances people from faith. True belief is marked by an enduring trust in Allah's forgiveness, no matter how serious one's sins may be.

This theme of divine mercy is further emphasised in a hadith Qudsi, where Allah expresses the extent to which He welcomes His servants back to Him:

"I am as My servant thinks of Me, and I am with him when he remembers Me. If he remembers Me within himself, I remember him within Myself; and if he remembers Me in a gathering, I remember him in a better gathering. If he draws one span nearer to Me, I draw one cubit nearer to him; and if he draws one cubit nearer to Me, I draw a distance of two outstretched arms nearer to him; and if he comes to Me walking, I go to him running."

[Bukhārī]

This hadith illustrates that no matter how distant one feels from Allah, the moment a person takes even the smallest step towards Him, Allah responds with overwhelming mercy and nearness. Unlike humans, who may hesitate in forgiving others, Allah is always ready to accept His servants when they turn to Him.

In another hadith Qudsi, the vastness of Allah’s forgiveness is further emphasised:

"The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, 'Allah Almighty says: Whoever comes with a good deed will have the reward of ten like it and even more. Whoever comes with an evil deed will be recompensed for one evil deed like it or he will be forgiven. Whoever draws close to Me by the length of a hand, I will draw close to him by the length of an arm. Whoever draws close to Me by the length of an arm, I will draw close to him by the length of a fathom. Whoever comes to Me walking, I will come to him running. Whoever meets Me with enough sins to fill the earth, not associating any partners with Me, I will meet him with as much forgiveness.'"

[Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 2687]

This narration beautifully reassures us that even if a person has accumulated many sins, Allah’s forgiveness remains greater. The only condition is that they turn back to Him sincerely. Just as Umar (RA) facilitated this realisation in the man who had distanced himself from the community, we too should adopt a similar approach—encouraging hope, reminding others of Allah’s mercy, and creating an environment where returning to faith is always met with understanding and acceptance.

Chapter 6: They say, “The Most Merciful has taken a son!”

Allah as the Most Merciful

The predominant belief of Christians is that Isa (AS) is the son of God and he is God himself. They see Jesus as a representation and representative of God’s divine mercy, that God sacrificed his own son for the salvation of humankind - Jesus came to save humanity and without him, people cannot attain salvation. He is known as the saviour. Allah (SWT) addresses this in the Qur’an.

‘They say that al-rahman has taken a son.’

(19:88)

Allah (SWT) identifies himself as al-Rahman, the Most Merciful, in this ayah and He highlights that He is al-Rahman 4 times over, in verse 88, 91, 92 and 93 and this is the attribute chosen for deliberate reason. Allah (SWT) is responding to the characterisation created by the biblical narrative that Allah (SWT) is a severe and vengeful God, and sending Isa (AS) to earth was an exceptional case.

Allah (SWT) is asserting the falseness of this characterisation. He is al-Rahman, the Most Merciful. He is not merely capable of acts of mercy; mercy is His name. Moreover, he was al-Rahman before the birth of Isa (AS) and He remains so.

In Surah Maryam, when the angel Jibrail approaches Maryam (AS), she refers to Allah as al-Rahman.

‘She said, “I seek refuge in al-Rahman against you, if there is any righteousness in you.”’

(19:18)

This demonstrates, first of all, her faith, as in the face of perceived imminent danger from a strange man, she does not call out to help from any people, she calls to Allah. Secondly, it is evident that she is aware of Allah’s divine attribute and acknowledges it in her speech, even before her son is born.

Ascribing partners to the Most Merciful

Allah (SWT) impresses upon us the severity of ascribing a son to him in the following verses.

‘Indeed, you have come up with such an abominable statement that the heavens are well-nigh to explode at it, and the earth to burst apart, and the mountains to fall down crumbling. For they have ascribed a son to al-Rahman.’

(18:89-91)

He then continues to explain why it cannot be.

“It is not befitting of the Most Merciful to have a son. There is none in the heavens and earth but that they are bound to the Most Merciful as a slave.”

(18:92-93)

Allah (SWT) is elucidating in simple terms that to have a son goes against the very core definition of who Allah (SWT) is. There is no one that stands beside Him or shares his power. Everything in existence is his creation, therefore under his power and might.

As Allah says of Himself in Surah Ikhlas,

“Say, Allah is One. He is eternal. He did not beget, nor was he begotten. And there is none comparable to Him.”

(112:1-4)

In Surah an-Nisa, Allah (SWT) speaks of tawhid also, and warns against the falsehood of the Trinity.

“O people of the Book, be not excessive in your faith and do not say about Allah anything but the truth. The Masih, Isa, the son of Maryam, is only a messenger of Allah and His Word that He has delivered to Maryam, and a soul from Him. So believe in Allah and His messengers. Do not say Trinity. End this. It is better for you to say Allah is only One God. He is pure and has no son. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth, and it is enough to trust in Him.”

(4:171)

Additionally, Allah (SWT) is warning us all about the gravity of shirk, of ascribing partners to Him. It is as though the skies, the mountains, the heavens, everything Allah has created that worships Him alone would implode in outrage, at even the utterance of these words.

Moving further back into history, we encounter the story of Ibrahim (AS) who acknowledges the mercy of Allah when he begs his father to move away from idol worship.

“My dear father, I fear lest a punishment from the Most Merciful should afflict you, and you become a companion of Shaytan.”

(19:45)

We see the parallels here in the mention of shirk and Allah as the Most Merciful. Ibrahim (AS) who precedes both Isa (AS) and Maryam (AS) is calling Allah (SWT) al-Rahman.

However, even knowing that Allah is Most Merciful, he fears that sin may be too great for forgiveness. It is perhaps worth noting here that trust and belief in Allah’s mercy

does not preclude us from consequences and should not make us complacent about sins.

Remembering and reminding others of the Most Merciful

We see how al-Rahman has shared His wisdom with us in the Qur'an of how we can call Christians to Islam by reminding them that His mercy eternal and spans across all time. Allah alone is the Most Merciful, without need of partners or helpers and His mercy reaches us through his creation, his servants. His mercy is not limited to any finite figures of our observations. Isa (AS) was indeed a mercy from Allah, in a similar way that our prophet Muhammad ﷺ was a mercy to mankind.

Of Isa (AS), Allah (SWT) says in the Qur'an,

"...and We made him a sign for the people and a mercy from Us, and this is a decided matter."

(19:21)

Similarly, Allah (SWT) says of our beloved prophet ﷺ in Surah al-Anbiya,

"And We have not sent you but as a mercy for all the worlds."

(21:107)

Naturally, the reminder of Allah's eternal mercy is universal and so, a reminder for us all. Throughout Surah Maryam there is mention and remembrance of Allah's mercy. Indeed, Allah (SWT) tells us in the opening of Surah Rahman, that Allah taught us the Qur'an from his benevolence and mercy. Whenever we make supplication to Allah, we ask our favours from 'arham-al-rahimeen', from the most merciful of the merciful.

An example of this is found in a dua by Musa (AS) mentioned in the Quran.

*'He (Musa) said, "My Lord, forgive me and my brother, and admit us into Your mercy.
You are the most merciful of all the merciful."*

(7:151)

Chapter 7: The man who came running

The people of the Town

The Qur'an contains many ayahs which relay the conversations and arguments between messengers and their people. Surah Ya Sin, often referred to as the heart of the Qur'an, narrates an incident about a particular town in which the inhabitants were particularly stubborn in their rejection of messengers.

'When We sent to them two (apostles), they rejected both of them, so we confirmed them with a third one. So they said, "We are sent to you." They (the people of the town) said, "You are no more than human beings like us, and the most merciful has not sent down anything. You are but a lie."

(36:14-15)

It is remarkable that the people of the town acknowledged God, and a merciful God. Like many people we encounter in our current society, they believed in a higher power. However, they rejected the messengers, despite Allah in His mercy sending multiple, their argument being that they did not deem these men extraordinary or superior in any way, therefore they could not be messengers of God.

In verse 20 of this surah, we are told about a man in this town. He was not a prophet; he had not been called upon by Allah through Jibreel (AS). He was simply a man concerned about the people in his community. Many mufasssireen identify him as Habib, a carpenter and believe the town referred to in the Quran to be the city of Antioch. He was not a strong man and yet he traversed the width of the city to come to the people.

'And there came a man rushing from the farthest part of the city. He said, "O my people, follow the messengers." Follow those who do not claim any reward from you, and who are on the right path. What excuse do I have if I do not worship the One who has created me and to whom you will be returned?'

(36:20-22)

There is significance in the way this man addresses the people as ‘Ya Qawmi’. He is part of the community that he is speaking to, with an understanding of the thoughts of the people, the emerging ideas of the time, the challenges facing that society in their environment, the political climate and so forth, removing any barriers in communication of ideas or addressing legitimate concerns of the people.

His plea is for them to understand that the messengers have no personal agenda or profit in their work – to follow them is for our own benefit – with the implicit message and warning that many people who come with a call to change do so in the interests of their own gain, financial or social.

He was a charitable and sympathetic man. However, the people of this town were so incensed by his call to change their ways and follow the prophets that they viciously attacked him and killed him in a barbaric manner.

The success of the man

We are told in the Qur’an that after he is killed, he is invited into Paradise.

‘It was said to him, “Enter Paradise.” He said, “Would that my people knew how my Lord has forgiven me and placed me among the honoured ones!”

(36:26-27)

Allah (SWT) presents to us the essence of this man’s humble and caring character. Even as he is presented paradise, he thinks of his people, and that if Allah has forgiven his sins, then surely Allah (SWT) would have forgiven theirs too, if they had turned to Allah. Even as he lost his life, he felt no loss for himself but only the loss experienced by those

who deny the truth and disobey the messengers. His concern was so sincere and genuine that even their cruel treatment of him did not cause him to falter.

The steadfast nature of this man's imaan, is an aspirational example for all daees, and for everyone sharing the message of Allah with people. This man was, in many ways, in his circumstances, a relatable character: he was a working man with health problems, he was not affluent or well situated in the city. He was without any social or political status.

What set him apart was his iman and strength of character. He did not allow his daily commitments, his physical limitations or physical distance to be barrier. He overcame these challenges because of his conviction in his faith and his authentic desire to help others.

There are many things to note from this story besides the wonderful character of this man. Allah tells us that he was steadfast but also that, in the worldly sense of the word, he was not successful. He did not have the pleasure or incentive of being listened to and heeded, just the like the prophets themselves, but the immediate result was not their motivation or deterrent. This reflects the reality of so many situations we encounter. Our efforts do not always produce the fruits we expect or hope for. However, Allah is giving us an exemplar for how to deal with such people and situations with grace and sincerity.

Sometimes, we may face backlash despite our sincerest intentions. Sometimes success is only in the next life, but it is still success, and like in many other places in the Qur'an, we are called upon to reflect on our definition of success and failure.

The success of Bilal (RA)

In one hadith, the companion Bilal (RA) was asked why his footsteps were heard ahead of the prophet ﷺ in Jannah when the prophet ﷺ performed the night journey.

“At the time of the Fajr prayer the Prophet (ﷺ) asked Bilal, "Tell me of the best deed you did after embracing Islam, for I heard your footsteps in front of me in Paradise." Bilal replied, "I did not do anything worth mentioning except that whenever I performed ablution during the day or night, I prayed after that ablution as much as was written for me.”

[Sahih al-Bukhari 1149]

Once again, we see the humility of character while he is being told that he is a position of great honour. In Bilal’s eyes, he only does any believer does. Yet we see that Bilal does not leave his prayer until he is obliged to do so. He holds on to his time with his creator for as long as he can, every time he performs wudu, and when he moves to his next task, he views this as Allah’s decree too. Essentially, we see how this companion moves through life with a constant remembrance and connection to Allah (SWT) in all that he does.

The prescription for a hard heart

Whilst reflecting on the character of great people, a natural question occurs – what about those of us who do not find this kindness, this humility, this care, this concern and all those positive impulses with ease?

A man once came to the prophet ﷺ worrying that his heart was too hardened. The prophet ﷺ asked if he would wish for Allah to soften his heart. He replied in the affirmative, so the prophet advised him to have mercy on the orphans and feed them from his own food.

As with all of the prophet’s ﷺ sayings, there is a vast wisdom in this small handful of words to have mercy on the orphans and feed them from your own food. Our hearts are changed through actions. We are advised, first of all, to look out for the most vulnerable in society who may be struggling with a lack of food, money, basic human care and

protection – all the things which usually parents would provide. Secondly, to feed someone from our own food holds the connotation that what we provide should be of the same quality as what we would choose for ourselves. The transformation of our hearts requires giving away what is difficult to part with, in order to help the most vulnerable.

We do what we can

At all levels of ability and imaan, we are able to do something for others according to our strengths. For the man who feared his heart was too hard, his desire was to change for the better and so the prophet ﷺ gave a prescription. For Bilal (RA) his strength lay in his prayer and personal connection to Allah (SWT) and Allah (SWT) honoured him in Jannah and this world with the news of it. For the man in the town, his strength was his skilled but gentle speech which he called to people with. There is a message here for us all to be brave and resolute in the face of challenges, to do so while being sincere, and to do something in the path of Allah, even if people are not responsive or grateful because Allah gives the greatest and best recompense.

Chapter 8: “Go to Pharaoh. Indeed he has transgressed.”

Pharaoh: a cautionary tale

Pharaoh, or Fir’awn, is mentioned numerous times in the Qur’an over several surahs, from Surah Baqarah to Surah an-Naziyat, referring to the pharaoh of the time of Musa (AS). He is notorious for his arrogance and wanton bloodshed, killing the young infant boys of Bani Israil, which would have taken the life of Musa (AS) himself, had it not been for the divine decree of Allah (SWT).

This frequent mention of Pharaoh, and those like him, is an indication of Allah’s (SWT) wish for us to reflect on pharaoh’s character, his mindset, his behaviour, the opportunities presented to him, the choices he made and ultimately the consequences he was unable to escape. More explicitly, Allah declares in the Qur’an that He is leaving Pharaoh’s body behind as for that very purpose.

*‘So today, We will save you in body that you may be to those who succeed you a sign.
And indeed, many among the people are heedless of Our signs.’*

(10:92)

When we consider that the tradition of pharaoh’s was to preserve themselves through mummification, this is an interesting statement. Allah (SWT) is promising that his body will indeed be preserved, but not for those reasons that pharaohs would usually assume – because they are of elevated rank, to be revered for successive generations and preserved with their servants and precious items, but for the reverse. Furthermore, even at the time of revelation, pharaoh’s body was still lost in the seabed. This promise of Allah (SWT) was for future generations, and it is speculated that a mummy found in the late 19th century may be that body.

The mission of Musa (AS)

In Surah an-Naziyat, a makkan surah, we find that Allah (SWT) instructs Musa (AS) to go to Pharoah.

“Go to Pharoah. Indeed, he has transgressed.”

(79:17)

The transgressions of Pharoah are well known from the scriptures of the Old Testament to the Qur’an. The bible makes mention of his enslavement and oppression of the Israelites, who were forced to do the most menial and harrowing manual labour, were restricted in the personal freedoms and still taxed heavily on their earnings. The Qur’an confirms his cruel nature in Surah al-Araf when he orders the torture and killing of the sorcerers who begin to worship Allah (SWT).

“I will cut off your hands and legs from opposite sides. Then I will crucify you altogether.”

(7:124)

After telling Musa (AS) to go to Pharaoh, Allah (SWT) continues by telling Musa (AS) how to engage with the pharaoh and what to say.

‘And say to him, would you want to attain purification? And I will guide you to your Lord, and you’ll be in awe of Him. You will gain reverence for Him.’

(79:18-19)

Musa (AS) is instructed to begin with that core message of tawhid and calling Pharaoh back to the worship of the only one worthy of worship. Musa (AS) is told to directly address the very thing pharaoh is lacking, the belief and reverence of anything above him. However, Pharaoh not only refuses Musa (AS) but he calls together a gathering of the masses to make the public announcement that he is the lord most high.

Pharaoh's rejection

'But he rejected and disobeyed. Then he turned back, and tried hard (to refute the messenger). Then he gathered (his people) and proclaimed, "I am your lord most high."

(79:21-24)

Surah ash-Shuara relates the dialogue between Musa (AS) and Pharaoh in which Pharaoh attempts to refute him. Pharaoh's first response and tactic is to shame Musa (AS) into silence, calling him ungrateful.

'He the Pharaoh said, "Did we not nourish you among us as a child? And you remained amidst us for years, and you did the blunder you did; still you are ungrateful."

(26:18-19)

When Musa (AS) responds that he has been sent by Allah, the pharaoh questions who this Lord of the Worlds is, and attacks Musa's (AS) credibility.

"He (Pharaoh) said, "Your messenger who is sent to you is a mad man indeed."

(26:27)

Pharaoh then resorts to threats to subdue Musa (AS).

'He (Pharaoh) said, "If you adopt a God other than me, I will certainly put you to prison."

(26:30)

Musa (AS) then proposes to bring forth something irrefutable.

'He (Musa) said, "Will you do this even if I bring to you something evident?"'

(26:30)

The following verses of ash-Shuara detail the miracles that Musa (AS) performs by throwing down his staff which turns into a snake, and shining bright light directly from his hands. The pharaoh and his advisors declared it to be sorcery and challenged Musa (AS) to a public contest between himself and the greatest sorcerers of the time. When Musa's (AS) snake swallows those of the magicians, they recognise that Musa (AS) is not performing a trick or creating an illusion, but that it is a true miracle.

'So the sorcerer's were made (by the truth they saw) to fall down in prostration. They said, "We have believed in the Lord of the Worlds."'

(26:46-47)

Rather than following the expertise and lead of these magicians, Pharaoh declares that Musa (AS) must be their leader and teacher. Pharaoh's final resort in resisting the truth, is believing in a concerted conspiracy concocted against himself, the offense of which he punished them for severely.

'He (Pharaoh) said, "You have believed in him before I permit you. Surely, he (Musa) is the chief of you all, who has taught you sorcery. So you will soon know (your fate). I will cut off your hands and feet from different sides, and will crucify you altogether.'

(26:49)

The rejection of Pharaoh

Allah (SWT) in his infinite mercy, offered pharaoh multiple opportunities to repent and change his ways. After being presented with an invitation to turn to Allah, rational reasons and even miracles beyond rational argument, it follows that pharaoh knew there was power above him. Even without witnessing these miracles, he could have known that he is incapable of creating a single world, or any living being. However, just as he was insistent on holding on to his power by any violent means, even killing innocent infants in the cradle, he clung to his delusion of power and greatness, insisting that he was the supreme lord, with no one above him.

The verse following pharaoh's absurd declaration that he is Allah, says:

'So Allah seized him for an exemplary punishment in the Hereafter and the present.'
world.'

(79:25)

In contrast to so many people around him, including those sorcerers and his courageous wife Asiya (RA), Pharaoh was resolute in his disbelief and enraged by the belief of those who were, in actuality, better than himself. While pharaoh is determined to flaunt his power by torturing and killing people, Allah (SWT) is stating that it is Pharaoh who will be punished in both lives.

Attaining khushoo

But then Allah says,

"Indeed, in that, is a profound lesson for the one who has 'khushoo'"

(79:26)

The Arabic word 'khushoo' has no direct equivalent in English but was described by scholars to mean a state of humility and deep focus in connection with Allah, the clear antithesis of pharaoh's mentality and immorality. In simple terms, Allah is telling us not to be like pharaoh.

With an example such as pharaoh, the ultimate power-hungry megalomaniac, almost deranged in his inability to admit the clear truth before him, the link between the average person and this ancient ruler may seem tenuous. However, Allah (SWT) points to the common denominator, the issue of his lack of imaan, reverence and khushoo due to his arrogance. The core issue here is this disease of the heart, arrogance, when the ego overinflates in the absence of khushoo.

A well-known hadith warns us of admitting even the smallest amount of arrogance into our hearts, because of the danger it poses.

None shall enter the Fire (of Hell) who has in his heart the weight of a mustard seed of Iman and none shall enter Paradise who has in his heart the weight of a mustard seed of pride.

[Sahih Muslim]

A similar narration includes examples of how arrogance manifests.

The Prophet ﷺ said, "He who has, in his heart, an ant's weight of arrogance will not enter Jannah." Someone said: "A man likes to wear beautiful clothes and shoes?" The messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "Allah is beautiful, He loves beauty. Arrogance means ridiculing and rejecting the truth and despising people."

[Muslim]

In the above hadith, as well as the verses in surah an-Naziyat reveal that the antidote to arrogance is in reverence of Allah (SWT), in humility, in challenging our delusions of grandeur or superiority and always being mindful of reality and truth.

Allah (SWT) gives us such a deep insight into the pathology of Pharoah's disease so that we can reflect on the path that arrogance leads a person down, and how arrogance presents in thought, in speech, in actions and the ultimate self-destruction. Every person battles with the ego, which dislikes being commanded and dislikes discomfort. Allah (SWT) reminds us of the importance of finding humility in His remembrance.

Chapter 9: The Value of Time

Time is one of the greatest blessings Allah has bestowed upon humanity—yet it is also one of the most fleeting. Every moment that passes is a part of our lives that we can never regain. The Quran frequently reminds us of the importance of time, urging us to use it wisely before it slips away. In Surah Al-Asr, Allah (SWT) swears by time itself, emphasising that mankind is in loss except for those who believe, perform righteous deeds, and encourage truth and patience.

However, despite these reminders, it is easy to become heedless. We often become consumed by worldly distractions, allowing time to pass without purpose or reflection. Forgetting Allah leads to forgetting ourselves, as mentioned in Surah Al-Hashr (59:19). When we lose sight of our spiritual purpose, time becomes a blur, filled with distractions, wasted opportunities, and a detachment from meaningful worship.

In this chapter, we explore the connection between time and spiritual awareness, examining how our relationship with time influences our faith. We will reflect on how Ramadan serves as an example of living with purpose and mindfulness and how anchoring our daily lives in remembrance of Allah can transform the way we experience time. Through this discussion, we hope to deepen our awareness of time's significance and inspire a commitment to making every moment count.

The Reality of Forgetfulness and Time

In Surah Al-Hashr, which was revealed in Madinah, Allah gives us a profound lesson in Ayah 19—a verse that helps us position ourselves spiritually, but to fully appreciate it, we must first look at the verse before it—Ayah 18, where Allah addresses the believers:

"O you who believe! Fear Allah, and let every soul look to what it has sent forth for tomorrow."

(59:18)

Here, Allah commands the believers to be mindful of Him and to reflect on what they are preparing for their future. Every act of worship—prayer, fasting, charity—is an investment for the Hereafter. Often, we do not think far ahead, but Allah reminds us

that our actions today will define our tomorrow. We are told to be conscious of everything we do because it will not only benefit us in this world but also in the next.

Allah then re-emphasises: "*Fear Allah, for indeed, Allah is aware of all that you do.*" This sets the immediate context for the following verse:

"And do not be like those who forgot Allah, so He made them forget themselves. They are the transgressors."

(59:19)

This verse teaches a crucial lesson: forgetting Allah leads to forgetting ourselves. What does it mean to forget Allah? It means neglecting dhikr, abandoning worship, and distancing ourselves from His guidance. When we forget Allah, we lose sight of our own purpose, our true potential, and our spiritual identity.

Time is one of the most precious gifts Allah has given us—fleeting, irreplaceable, and constantly slipping away. Yet, it is easy to become heedless of time's value, not because we lack it, but because we forget its purpose. In the Quran, Allah often links the loss of time to spiritual forgetfulness: forgetting Him leads to forgetting ourselves, and with that, comes the careless passing of our days without reflection or meaning.

When we neglect the remembrance of Allah, time becomes a blur—filled with distractions, empty routines, and missed opportunities for growth. But through mindfulness and worship, even the smallest moments can carry profound meaning. In this chapter, we will explore how time and remembrance are intertwined, how Ramadan serves as a living example of time well-spent, and how being intentional can help us reclaim the moments we often let slip away.

Ramadan: Living with Purpose, Moment by Moment

There is a month in the year in which the direct opposite happens, as we are indeed living our true purpose, potential, and spiritual identity - this is the beloved month of Ramadan. Ramadan shows us the immense potential we have as Muslims. Many of us engage in acts of worship we may not have done before. Our hearts feel closer to Allah, and we experience an enthusiasm for ibadah, dawah, and deep reflection upon the Quran in ways we may never have felt before.

One of the lessons we internalise during Ramadan is the value of time. Ramadan is a month of limited, countable days—29 or 30. Allah mentions in the Quran about fasting: "Ayyāman ma'dūdāt"—a limited number of days.

In Ramadan, we become acutely aware of time. We don't just count days; we count hours, minutes, even seconds. Each moment feels precious because we realise that in one minute, our lives can transform. In a single hour, we can perform deeds beloved to Allah. Even a fleeting second can be an opportunity to make a heartfelt dua or perform a righteous act. This heightened awareness teaches us to value time beyond Ramadan.

The mindfulness we have during Ramadan, may Allah grant us the same enthusiasm throughout the year, should continue beyond the blessed month. As the scholars have said:

"O son of Adam, you are nothing but a collection of days. When a day passes, part of you passes with it."

Our enthusiasm for worship should not be restricted to just one month. The true test of faith is maintaining that connection beyond Ramadan. If we forget Allah when the month ends, we risk losing sight of our greater purpose in life. Allah warns us—do not allow this heightened spirituality to be temporary. Do not become like those who forget Allah once Ramadan ends.

Scholars have explained verse 19 in Surah Al-Hashr (59:19) in multiple ways, which highlight how forgetting Allah shows up in our everyday life. One way is by **neglecting His rights**, as Allah alone deserves worship without any partners. When a person forgets

this, it leads to spiritual loss and detachment from divine guidance, and thus one forgets their true identity.

Another way is **falling into sin without repentance**; while every believer may stumble, sincere repentance keeps the heart connected to Allah. However, when sin becomes normalised and a person no longer seeks forgiveness, they drift further into forgetfulness. The final reminder is related to gratitude and failure to show it leads to a form of heedlessness. Recognising and acknowledging Allah's blessings is an act of remembrance, and when we fail to see His favours in our lives, we risk becoming ungrateful and disconnected from Him. These manifestations of forgetfulness serve as a reminder to be mindful of our worship, our actions, and our gratitude, ensuring that our hearts remain in remembrance of Allah.

Anchoring Time with Purpose

The link between forgetfulness of worship and the loss of time is important. When we forget Allah, we become heedless of our true purpose, which in turn leads to the careless passing of time without reflection or meaning. Time becomes a blur, filled with distractions that distance us from our spiritual goals. Conversely, the remembrance of Allah anchors us in the present, giving each moment purpose and direction.

For instance, have you ever noticed how quickly time seems to slip away when engaged in mindless activities, yet how deeply fulfilling even a few minutes of sincere prayer or reflection can feel? This is the difference between time spent in forgetfulness and time infused with remembrance. The hours lost to heedlessness become empty, while moments of worship expand with meaning and barakah.

Surah Al-Asr offers a powerful reflection on the value of time and accountability:

"By time, indeed, mankind is in loss, except for those who believe, do righteous deeds, and encourage each other to truth and patience."

(103:1-3)

This surah highlights that time itself is a witness to human actions. Without faith, good deeds, and patience, we risk falling into loss, making every moment an opportunity for either gain or regret.

"The nights and the days are working hard on you to distract you, so why don't you work hard in them?" *(Attributed to Hasan al-Basri)* This powerful reminder highlights that time is constantly at work, moving forward whether we are mindful of it or not. Just as time exerts its influence on us, we should strive to make our efforts meaningful within it.

Within the constraints of time, we still possess the power to achieve so much. The Prophet ﷺ also said:

"There are two blessings which many people waste: health and free time."

Hence, in your life, value time. Understand that time is not always be available. Therefore, we must actively work on strengthening our connection with Allah: as we saw in Chapter 2 on the story of Surah Yusuf, we find timeless lessons about patience, trust in Allah, and the unfolding of divine wisdom over time. Yusuf (AS) endured trials with unwavering faith, and through the passage of time, Allah's plan became clear, leading to both personal growth and the fulfilment of a greater purpose. This teaches us that time, while fleeting, holds within it the seeds of divine wisdom.

There are different ways we can strengthen our connection with Allah in our everyday life. One way is by **prioritising worship of Allah**, such as continuing prayer, Quran recitation, and dhikr beyond Ramadan, allowing them to become our sources of comfort and renewal every day. Another is **seeking forgiveness regularly**, and reminding ourselves that no one is free from mistakes, but Allah's mercy is always near for those who turn to Him sincerely. **Expressing gratitude** also plays a role in strengthening our awareness of His blessings. Allah reminds us in *Surah Ad-Duha (93:11)*: *"And as for the blessings of your Lord, proclaim them."* Taking a moment to acknowledge His blessings can bring a sense of peace and contentment to our hearts. Lastly, **surrounding**

ourselves with good company helps us stay spiritually uplifted, as being in the presence of those who remember Allah naturally encourages us to do the same. By embracing these small yet powerful steps, we can cultivate a lasting sense of closeness to Allah in our everyday lives.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ advised:

"Take advantage of five before five: your youth before your old age, your health before your sickness, your wealth before your poverty, your free time before you become busy, and your life before your death."

To help deepen this awareness, consider trying a 'Time Audit' and/or a 'One-Minute Dhikr Challenge' to reflect on how time feels when spent intentionally versus passively. This is the difference between time spent in forgetfulness and time spent in remembrance. The hours lost to heedlessness become empty, while moments of worship expand with meaning and barakah.

This reflection on the fleeting nature of time recalls a personal moment in which I saw my days, my youth, and my health pass by as memories and reminders. It was a moment when two events in time coincided: turning 41 and speaking to young students on that day. I told them that I had reached 41, where the number four now follows the one, whereas for them, it is still 14—the one before the four. Between 14 and 41, so much will happen: triumphs, challenges, successes, and failures. But the key lesson is to recognise the value of time.

At 14, time seems endless, filled with possibilities yet to unfold. At 41, there is a deeper awareness of how quickly the years pass and how each moment carries weight. The lessons learned in the years between are shaped not just by experience but by how intentionally time is spent. Standing before those students, I couldn't help but think about my own younger self, once at the very age they were now. Time moves quietly, yet when we pause to reflect, we see its imprint on everything—on our choices, our relationships, and our faith.

As the scholars have said: "O son of Adam, you are nothing but a collection of days. When a day passes, part of you passes with it." This profound reminder highlights that

every day that leaves us takes a part of our existence with it. We are not simply living through days; we are made of them. Each moment shapes who we are, and with every sunrise and sunset, we move closer to our appointed time. Therefore, cherishing and utilising each day with purpose is not just a practice of mindfulness but a spiritual obligation.

Surah Al-A'raf, revealed in Makkah, carries a profound reminder:

"Every person, every nation has an appointed time. And when that time comes, they can neither delay it by an hour nor advance it by an hour."

(7:34)

This verse speaks about the temporality of life. Each one of us has a limited span of time, a fixed duration decreed by Allah. When our time comes, it cannot be postponed or hastened—it is set. The Meccan Surahs, like this one, served as guidance for the Prophet's ﷺ companions—lessons on how to live life meaningfully, to maximise potential, and to prepare for the challenges ahead in Medina and beyond. They instilled an understanding of life's temporary nature, encouraging strength, optimism, and spiritual vibrancy.

Let us remember that the temporality of life should inspire us, not put us in a state of fear, but rather in a state of hope and purpose. Every fleeting moment is a chance to return to Allah, seek His forgiveness, and earn His pleasure. Life's impermanence is not just a reminder of our mortality, but an invitation to embrace every day with sincerity, gratitude, and devotion.

Chapter 10: The most Precious Thing about You

The Quran is a call to realign our fitrah—our innate disposition—so that we see the world and each other through the divine lens of truth and justice. With this backdrop, the verse we reflect upon in this chapter is related to realigning ourselves and how we are to see each other and our connections in this world. The verse is one of immense power—not only in its content but in the profound context in which it was revealed. It is from *Surah Al-Hujurat*, verse 13, revealed in Medina, and it holds an eternal significance for all of humanity.

Let us first begin giving some context to *Surah Al-Hujurat*; it is the third in a sequence of three Madinan *surahs* (47 to 49) that focus on the organisation of the Muslim *ummah*, both in terms of external defence and internal social relations. This *surah* specifically addresses the principles of conduct that were necessary for the rapidly expanding Muslim community, setting guidelines for how believers should interact with one another and with their leader, the Prophet ﷺ. It was revealed around the 9th year after the *Hijra* (migration to Medina), during what is known as the Year of Deputations—a period when large numbers of people were embracing Islam and visiting Medina to pledge their allegiance. With this influx of new believers came new customs, traditions, and expectations, making it essential to establish a framework for unity, respect, and discipline within the community.

The name *Al-Hujurat* (The Chambers) is taken from verse 4, which refers to the private quarters of the Prophet ﷺ, and serves as a reminder of the importance of etiquette, particularly in speech and mannerisms. The *surah* highlights key moral and ethical principles, such as having respect and etiquette towards the Prophet ﷺ (verses 1-5), verifying information before acting on it (verse 6), avoiding suspicion and backbiting, resolving disputes with fairness (verses 9-12), and recognising that honour is not defined by race, lineage, or social status but by *taqwa*—consciousness of Allah (verse 13). This message remains just as relevant today, particularly in an era where societal divisions, identity politics, and personal biases continue to shape our collective ethics and interactions.

Taqwa

One of the first principles established in *Surah Al-Hujurat* is the necessity of respecting leadership, particularly in how one engages with the Prophet ﷺ:

"O you who believe! Do not put yourselves forward before Allah and His Messenger, but fear Allah. Verily! Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing."

(49:1)

"O you who believe! Raise not your voices above the voice of the Prophet, nor speak aloud to him in talk as you speak aloud to one another, lest your deeds should be rendered fruitless while you perceive not."

(49:2)

Ibn Kathir reports that this verse was revealed concerning **some Bedouins from the tribe of Banu Tamim**, who came to Medina and called out to the Prophet ﷺ from outside his chambers in a loud and impatient manner. This was seen as disrespectful, leading to the revelation of the verse. The lesson extends beyond the historical context, teaching us the importance of humility and decorum in dealing with authority figures and scholars today. It reminds us that respect in speech and behaviour is fundamental to maintaining bonds within a given community.

One of the key ethical lessons in *Surah Al-Hujurat* is the importance of verifying information before acting on it, especially in times of conflict or uncertainty. The Qur'an directly warns against blindly accepting reports without investigation:

"O you who believe! If a rebellious person brings you news, investigate it carefully, lest you harm people in ignorance and afterwards become regretful for what you have done."

(49:6)

In Ibn Kathir, it is reported that this verse was revealed in response to an incident involving **Al-Walid ibn 'Uqbah**, who mistakenly assumed that the **Banu al-Mustaliq** tribe had refused to pay *zakat* (charitable dues). Without verifying the situation, he returned with a false report, almost leading to unnecessary conflict.

The principle yet again is universal. Acting on misinformation, whether it is through hearsay, gossip, or unchecked news, it can lead to real harm. In today's world of access to an enormous amount of information, in which false narratives can spread faster than ever, this verse serves as a timeless reminder: before passing judgment or sharing information, always ensure it is accurate.

Another principle is revealed in verse 11, warning against mockery and ridicule:

"O you who believe! Let not a group of people mock another group; perhaps they may be better than them. Nor let women mock other women; perhaps they may be better than them."

(49:11)

With these words, Allah reminds us of a truth we often struggle with—the way we assign value to people. Too often, we focus on the superficial, reducing a person's worth to external factors, failing to appreciate the deeper realities of their existence. Then, in verse 13, Allah addresses not just the believers but all of humanity:

"O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, so that you may know one another. Verily, the most noble among you in the sight of Allah is the one who has the most taqwa. Indeed, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware."

(49:13)

Here, Allah speaks to all of civilization, breaking down the barriers that humans have constructed among themselves. He reminds us that we have all been created from a male and a female—settling, in one simple declaration, the fundamental reality of gender identity. He then acknowledges the distinctions of nations and tribes, recognising that humanity is diverse, whether it be the Maasai of East Africa, the Hadza of Tanzania, the Chambri of Papua New Guinea, or the Hutu and Tutsi of Rwanda. These cultural and ethnic identities are real, but they are not the essence of a person's worth.

The verse does not deny differences but rather reframes them—not as markers of superiority or division but as a means to *know one another*. The message is clear: human value is not determined by ethnicity, skin colour, social class, or geography. These are external attributes, insignificant in the grand scheme of things. What truly matters—the only measure of true nobility in the eyes of Allah—is *taqwa*, or God-consciousness.

Allah states unequivocally that the most honourable among us is the one with the most *taqwa*. But what is *taqwa*? It is often translated as 'piety' or 'God-consciousness,' but it encompasses much more: reverence for Allah, love, fear, reliance, hope, and a deep-rooted sense of self-discipline in avoiding what is displeasing to Him. It is an awareness

that shapes our actions and interactions, compelling us to do good and restrain from harm. Ibn Abbas (RA), a cousin of the Prophet ﷺ and a renowned Qur'anic commentator, described *taqwa* as *placing a barrier between oneself and the punishment of Allah by following His commands and avoiding His prohibitions*.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ embodied *taqwa* in every aspect of his life—through his character, interactions, and decisions. His humility, justice, and mercy set the ultimate standard, showing that righteousness should always take precedence over social divisions. In the Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ *Farewell Sermon*, delivered during his final pilgrimage, he emphasised *taqwa*:

"O people, your Lord is One, and your father is one. You are all from Adam, and Adam was created from dust. There is no superiority of an Arab over a non-Arab, nor of a non-Arab over an Arab, nor of a white person over a black person, nor of a black person over a white person—except by taqwa."

[*Musnad Ahmad, 23489*]

With these words, the Prophet ﷺ dismantled racial and tribal superiority, making it clear that a person's worth is determined not by ethnicity, lineage, or status but by their consciousness of Allah. This principle remains just as relevant today, serving as a reminder that true honour is rooted in righteousness, not in worldly labels or distinctions.

It is *tawqā* that elevates a person in the eyes of Allah, and yet, only *He* truly knows who possesses it. If this is the divine standard, then what right do we have to construct artificial hierarchies, judging people by worldly scales that Allah Himself has dismissed?

The Story of Julaibib and Zahir

The society of Medina, where this verse was revealed, was a diverse community comprising people of different backgrounds, statuses, and abilities. Yet, under the guidance of the Prophet ﷺ, they were bound together by something far greater than race, wealth, or lineage. Consider the story of Julaibib, a man who was often looked down upon due to his physical appearance. He was neither wealthy nor influential, and society did not find him particularly desirable to associate with. Yet, the Prophet ﷺ

instilled in his companions a deeper understanding of worth—one that transcended these superficial judgments.

When the Prophet ﷺ arranged Julaibib's marriage, it was an act of immense love and recognition, a sign that in the sight of Allah and His Messenger, Julaibib's worth was not diminished by worldly measures. And when Julaibib was martyred, the Prophet ﷺ came to his body and declared:

"This man is from me, and I am from him."

This was not just a statement; it was a powerful proclamation of belonging, of dignity, of divine recognition.

Another example is that of Zahir, a humble man who would travel from outside Medina to sell goods in the marketplace. One day, the Prophet ﷺ approached him from behind, playfully covering his eyes. When Zahir recognised the Prophet's ﷺ blessed presence, he smiled and said, "O Messenger of Allah, if you were to sell me, you would find me worthless."

The Prophet ﷺ, in his infinite mercy, replied:

"But you are not worthless in the sight of Allah."

What greater honour could a person receive than to be told that their worth is defined by Allah alone?

A Final Reminder

Surah Al-Hujurat redefines the way we see ourselves and others, breaking down the false hierarchies that humans have constructed. It reminds us that honour is not found in wealth, status, or lineage, but in *taqwa*—our consciousness of Allah. The *surah* lays out a framework for ethical conduct, shaping how we interact with one another, reinforcing values of respect, truthfulness, and humility. These principles were essential in unifying the early Muslim *ummah* and remain just as relevant today, in a world where divisions based on race, social status, and identity politics continue to shape our interactions.

This *surah* serves as a powerful reminder of the principles that sustain a just and ethical society. It calls for **verifying information before acting on it**, discouraging **mockery, backbiting, and suspicion**, and **emphasising fairness in resolving disputes**. These teachings are not just ideals but essential foundations for a healthy and cohesive community. A world built on unchecked rumours, arrogance, and discrimination is one bound for division and injustice. But a society rooted in *taqwa*—where people uphold truth, honour one another, and understand that their ultimate worth lies with Allah—fosters unity and righteousness.

In a time where external measures of success dominate, *Surah Al-Hujurat* brings us back to what truly matters—*taqwa*. May we take these lessons to heart, striving to live by the principles Allah has set, seeking honour not through the world's ever-changing standards, but through the sincerity of our faith and the righteousness of our actions.

Conclusion

This first part of Hearts Unveiled has taken us on a journey of reflection, exploring key Quranic arguments that deepen our understanding of faith, self-awareness, and divine guidance. We began with trust, including trust in Allah's wisdom, nearness, and guidance, before turning our gaze outward to reflect on the signs of His creation so we can benefit inwardly. We moved onto recognising our own shortcomings and the vastness of Allah's mercy. This was followed by a consideration of the importance of moral responsibility, self-discipline, the fleeting nature of time, and how our worth is measured by *taqwa* rather than the perceived societal hierarchies.

Although these chapters followed a structured progression, spiritual growth is not linear. Faith is a journey marked by moments of clarity and doubt, as well as progress and setbacks. The reflections in these pages are intended as reminders along the way, encouraging us to engage with the Quran more deeply and apply its wisdom to our daily lives. As we continue this journey in future parts, we pray that we remain steadfast, mindful of our purpose, and always striving towards closeness with Allah. Ameen.