

The Qur'ān: Cover to Cover

Sūrat al-Baqara

سورة البقرة

Volume Three: Āyahs 142–210

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Sūrat al-Baqara, Volume Three: Āyahs 142–210

This book began in a weekly gathering. Since 2023 the author has sat with a small congregation on Thursday nights and read the Qur'ān with them from its opening towards its close, twenty minutes at a sitting, a few āyahs at a time. What follows gathers those sessions on the hundred and forty-second to the two hundred and tenth āyahs of Sūrat al-Baqara and develops the notes taken from them into connected prose. The second Juz' of the Qur'ān opens at the hundred and forty-second āyah, and this volume carries it to a little beyond its halfway mark.

The Qur'ānic Arabic is given in the 'Uthmānī text. The translations of the āyahs, and of the aḥādīth quoted throughout, are the author's own, and are offered in the plain register of the gathering from which they came rather than as a rival to the established renderings. They are not reproduced from any published translation.

The general introduction to the Qur'ān and to the discipline of tafsīr stands at the front of Volume One and is not repeated here, nor is the transliteration key, which the reader will find in either of the two earlier volumes. The system used for transliteration is unchanged.

Where a source has been named, the reference is given in the notes at the back of the volume rather than at the foot of the page, so that the page may be read without interruption and the reader who wants the chain of the matter may go and find it.

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The Author's Introduction

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

All praise belongs to Allāh ﷻ, who sent down His Book in truth and made it a criterion, who guides whom He wills to a straight path, and who has not left the ordinary man to find his own way in the dark. Peace and blessings upon our master Muḥammad ﷺ, who was given the Qibla he loved after long looking at the sky, and upon his family and his Companions and all who follow them in excellence until the Day of Recompense.

The two volumes before this one carried the reader through the first Juz' of the Qur'ān and set him down at the hundred and forty-first āyah, at the end of a long argument with the Children of Isrā'īl. This volume takes up the second Juz' from its first word and carries it to the two hundred and tenth āyah, which is a little past its middle, and there it stops, again for no better reason than that the pages have run out.

The reader will find that the ground under his feet changes in these āyahs. The first Juz' was, for the most part, an argument, and the Muslim reader was standing at the edge of it and listening to a case being made against somebody else. Here he is brought into the middle of the room and addressed directly. The Qibla is turned towards the Ka'ba, which is the first legal ruling in the sūra to abrogate an earlier one, and then there follows a stream of commands which have not stopped governing our days since: the ṣalāh and the ṣabr, the ṣafā and the marwa, the lawful and the unlawful on our plates, the retribution and the bequest, the fasting of Ramaḍān and the sighting of its moon, the du'a' and the nights of the fast, the wealth we take from one another and the courts we take it through, the fighting and its limits, and then the Ḥajj from the ihrām to the last pebble at Minā. Muftī Shafī' رحمه الله has said that the sūra turns here from establishing the truth of the Qur'ān to teaching the people who have accepted it, and a reader who has felt the sūra grow personal is not imagining it.

Two passages in this volume are read badly rather often, and I should say at the outset what I have done with them. The first is the passage on fighting at the hundred and ninetieth āyah and those which follow it, where the words are hard and the limits placed upon them are hard too, and where a Muslim can take a

sentence away without the āyah it was sitting in. I have set out my fuller thinking on this in the addendum at the back, and I would ask the reader who finds those āyahs difficult to turn there. The second is the sighting of the moon at the hundred and eighty-fifth āyah, which divides our own communities in Britain every year and which is discussed with more heat than it deserves. I have set out the positions as their own people would set them out, and I have not given my own, because the ‘ulamā’ of this country hold several of them and every one of the holders is trying to obey the same ḥadīth.

Everything of worth in these pages has been drawn from the tafsīr literature, from Imām Ibn Kathīr رحمه الله and Imām al-Qurṭubī رحمه الله and Imām al-Rāzī رحمه الله and Imām al-Ṭabarī رحمه الله amongst the earlier authorities, and from Muftī Muḥammad Shafī رحمه الله in his Ma‘ārif al-Qur’ān, Mawlānā Ashraf ‘Alī Thānawī رحمه الله in his Bayān al-Qur’ān, Mawlānā Idrīs Kāndhlawī رحمه الله, Shaykh Muḥammad ‘Alī al-Ṣābūnī رحمه الله in his Ṣafwat al-Tafāsīr, Imām Abū al-Su‘ūd رحمه الله, Imām Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir Ibn ‘Āshūr رحمه الله and Shaykh Muḥammad Abū Zahra رحمه الله amongst those nearer to our own time. Where the reader finds something useful, it belongs to them. Where the reader finds an error, it belongs to me, and I ask that it be pointed out so that it may be corrected in a later printing.

Nor is this a book for the specialist. It is written for the ordinary worshipper, for the man or woman who stands in the rows at Fajr and hears these āyahs recited and wishes, quietly and without much fuss, to know what is being said. There is a great deal in the tafsīr tradition which is properly the business of the seminary, and I have left almost all of it aside, not because it is unimportant, but because it is not what this reader needs first. What this reader needs first is the meaning, and after the meaning, the lesson, and after the lesson, the encouragement to go and act upon it.

This portion of the sūra begins with a Prophet ﷺ looking up at the sky and wanting something, and being given it, and it seems to me a mercy that Allāh ﷻ opens a Juz’ full of commands by first showing us that He noticed a longing which had never been spoken aloud. If this small effort of mine has anything of that spirit in it, it is from Allāh ﷻ. May He accept it, and may He put it in abler hands than mine when the time comes. Āmīn.

Where the Second Volume Left Us

A word for the reader who is opening this volume without the earlier ones at his elbow, and a reminder for the reader who has them but has been away from them a while.

The sūra opened with the disconnected letters and with the declaration that this is the Book about which there is no doubt, and it divided mankind into the believers, the disbelievers and the hypocrites before it had finished its first page. Then it turned, at the fortieth āyah, to the Children of Isrā'īl, and it stayed with them for a hundred āyahs. It recited the favours and the responses they drew. It told the story of the calf, and of the cow which gave the sūra its name, and of the hearts which grew harder than stone. It set out the covenant and its five commands, and the concealing of what they knew, and the wishing for death which they would not do, and the magic at Bābil, and the abrogation of an āyah for one better than it or like it, which the reader will want to keep in his pocket for what is coming.

And then, in the last portion of the first Juz', the sūra took us away from the quarrel altogether and set us down at the Ka'ba with Ibrāhīm عليه السلام and Ismā'il عليه السلام raising its foundations and praying that the work be accepted, and asking for a messenger to be sent from their descendants who would recite the āyahs to them and purify them and teach them the Book and the wisdom. It gave us the milla of Ibrāhīm عليه السلام and the sibgha of Allāh ﷻ, His colouring, than which there is no better. And at the hundred and forty-first āyah it closed the account of that earlier community with the same sentence it had used before: that was a nation which has passed away, theirs is what they earned and yours is what you earn, and you will not be asked about what they used to do.

Two things from that closing portion are about to be picked up again, and the reader should have them in his hand. The first is the Ka'ba, because the sūra has just spent a page and a half telling us who built it and why, and it is about to tell us to turn our faces towards it. The second is the du'ā' of Ibrāhīm عليه السلام, because Allāh ﷻ is about to answer it in front of us, word by word and in a better order than it was asked in.

That is where we now take it up.

The Isti'ādha and the Basmala

أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ

I seek refuge with Allāh from Shayṭān, the accursed.

Allāh ﷻ has commanded that when we recite the Qur'ān we should seek refuge with Him from Shayṭān, the accursed, and the 'ulamā' have understood from the wording that the seeking of refuge comes before the recitation and not after it, although the āyah, read flatly, might suggest otherwise. The reason is plain enough once it is said. A man about to open the Book is about to do the one thing Shayṭān most wishes him not to do, and he is therefore about to be interrupted, and the interruption will come as a wandering thought, or a sudden memory of an errand, or a small quarrel with somebody in the house, and the refuge is asked for in advance because that is when it is needed.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allāh, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful.

And then the Basmala, with which every sūra but one begins, and with which we are taught to begin every matter of consequence, so that the work is done in His name and not in our own. The two names are from one root, and the 'ulamā' have said that the first is a mercy so wide that it takes in the believer and the disbeliever and the animal in the field, and the second is a mercy reserved, which Allāh ﷻ keeps for those who turn to Him. A man who says these words honestly at the head of a task has already said a great deal about who he thinks is doing the work.

Sūrat al-Baqara

Volume Three · Āyahs 142–210

Madinan · The second sūra of the Qur'ān

The opening portion of the second Juz'

Why Have They Turned From Their Qibla?

ج
سَيَقُولُ السُّفَهَاءُ مِنَ النَّاسِ مَا وَلَّاهُمْ عَنْ قِبَلَتِهِمُ الَّتِي كَانُوا عَلَيْهَا قُلْ
لِلَّهِ الْمَشْرِقُ وَالْمَغْرِبُ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

The foolish amongst the people will say: what has turned them away from the Qibla they were upon? Say: to Allāh belong the east and the west; He guides whom He wills to a straight path.

al-Baqara 2:142

The Juz' opens with a question which has not yet been asked. Allāh ﷻ says *say-aqūlu*, they will say, in the future tense, and He sets down the objection and its answer before a single objector has opened his mouth. Ibn Kathīr رحمه الله notices this and takes it as a preparation, that Allāh ﷻ is arming His Prophet ﷺ and the believers with the reply in advance so that the sneer, when it comes, lands on a community which has already heard it and thought about it and is not disturbed by

it.¹ There is a lesson in the timing which is worth taking before the lesson in the content. A man who knows what will be said to him tomorrow is not wounded by it when it is said.

The objectors are named as *al-sufahā' min al-nās*, the foolish amongst the people, and the mufasssirūn have understood the phrase to take in the Jews of Madīnah, who had a Qibla of their own and a great deal invested in it, together with the hypocrites and the idolaters of Makkah, each of whom found something in the change to make trouble with.² The word *safīh* does not mean a man of low intelligence. It means a man who is light, whose judgement has no ballast in it, who will pick up an opinion and put it down again according to what suits him, and the Qur'ān uses it for the man who cannot be trusted with his own wealth as well as for the man who cannot be trusted with an argument. These were not stupid people. Some of them were learned, and that is precisely what makes the description so heavy.

And the answer given is not a defence. Allāh ﷻ does not say, we turned them for such and such a reason, and here is the wisdom of it, and we hope you are satisfied. He says: *to Allāh belong the east and the west*. The whole earth is His, every direction on it is His, and a direction has no sanctity in itself which He did not put there, so the question of why He should prefer one to another is a question about His ownership and not about geography. He guides whom He wills to a straight path. That is the end of the matter. Shaykh al-Ṣābūnī رحمه الله observes that the reply is deliberately larger than the objection, because the objection was small and was not really about the Qibla at all, and a small objection which is really about something else is best answered by being lifted out of its own frame.³

What Actually Happened

The event itself is recorded plainly in the Ṣaḥīḥ. Al-Barā' b. 'Āzib رضي الله عنه narrated that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ prayed towards Bayt al-Maqdis for sixteen or seventeen months, and that he wished he might pray towards the Ka'ba. The first prayer he prayed towards the Ka'ba was the 'Aṣr, with a group of people, and one of those who had prayed it with him went out and passed a masjid whose people were bowing in their prayer towards Jerusalem, and he called out to them that he bore witness by Allāh that he had prayed with the Prophet ﷺ facing Makkah, and they turned, as they were, still bowing, towards the House.⁴

The reader should hold that picture for a moment, because it is the whole of the passage in one movement. A congregation in *rukūʿ*, mid-prayer, hearing a single man at the door say that the command has changed, and turning through a hundred and eighty degrees without straightening up and without a word of discussion. They did not send for a scholar. They did not wait until the prayer had finished. They did not observe that the fellow at the door was only one witness and that the matter needed corroboration. That masjid is still standing in Madīnah, and it is called Masjid al-Qiblatayn, the masjid of the two Qiblas, and what is being commemorated in the name is not an architectural curiosity. It is an obedience.

Ibn ʿUmar رضي الله عنهما narrated a similar thing at Qubāʾ. The people were in the Fajr prayer when a man came and told them that Qurʾān had been sent down during the night and that the Prophet ﷺ had been commanded to face the Kaʿba, and that they should therefore face the Kaʿba; and their faces were towards Shām, and they turned towards the House.⁵

A Point of Law Hidden in a Story

Ibn Kathīr رحمه الله draws out of these two narrations a principle which the students of uṣūl have leaned on ever since, and it is worth setting down carefully because it governs a great deal more than the Qibla. The Companions who had prayed ʿAṣr and Maghrib and ʿIshāʾ towards Jerusalem *after* the command had already been revealed and announced in the masjid of the Prophet ﷺ were not told to repeat those prayers. The abrogating text had come, and it was in force, and it had not yet reached them, and their prayers stood. So the *nāsikh* binds a man from the moment he learns of it, and not from the moment it was revealed.⁶

There is a mercy in that ruling which the reader should not walk past. Allāh ﷻ does not hold a man accountable for a command he had no way of hearing. And there is a warning in it too, for the man who arranges his life so that the commands never quite reach him, who does not sit in the gathering and does not ask and does not read, because the ruling protects the man who could not have known and it says nothing at all in favour of the man who preferred not to.

He Had Been Facing Both All Along

A detail of the Makkan years is often missed. In Makkah the Prophet ﷺ faced Bayt al-Maqdis, and he was able to stand on the south side of the Kaʿba and face Jerusalem in such a way that the Kaʿba was in front of him at the same time, so that

the two Qiblas were not yet in competition. In Madīnah that arrangement was no longer possible. Jerusalem lies to the north of Madīnah and Makkah lies to the south, and a man there must turn his back on one in order to face the other. So the sixteen or seventeen months in Madīnah were the first time that facing Bayt al-Maqdis meant, plainly and physically, not facing the House which his father Ibrāhīm عليه السلام had built. That is the setting of the looking at the sky.

And the love was real and he did not hide it. When he was driven out of Makkah he turned and addressed the city itself, and said:

وَاللّٰهُ اِنَّكَ لَـٰخِيَرُ اَرْضِ اللّٰهِ وَاَحَبُّ اَرْضِ اللّٰهِ اِلَى اللّٰهِ وَلَوْلَا اَنِّيْ اُخْرِجْتُ مِنْكَ مَا
خَرَجْتُ

*By Allāh, you are the best of Allāh's earth and the most beloved of Allāh's earth to Allāh, and had I not been driven out of you I would not have left.*⁷

A man who had said that about a city, and who was then made to stand with his back to it five times a day for a year and a half, and who never once asked for the ruling to be changed, is the man Allāh ﷻ is about to describe as looking at the sky.

A Middlemost Community

وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ
الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا وَمَا جَعَلْنَا الْقِبْلَةَ الَّتِي كُنْتَ عَلَيْهَا إِلَّا لِنَعْلَمَ
مَنْ يَتَّبِعُ الرَّسُولَ مِمَّنْ يَنْقَلِبُ عَلَى عَقْبَيْهِ وَإِنْ كَانَتْ لَكَبِيرَةً إِلَّا
عَلَى الَّذِينَ هَدَى اللَّهُ وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيُضِيعَ إِيمَانَكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِالنَّاسِ
لَرَءُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ

And thus have We made you a middlemost community, so that you may be witnesses over mankind and the Messenger may be a witness over you. And We did not appoint the Qibla you were upon except that We might know who follows the Messenger from him who turns back on his heels. It was indeed a heavy thing, save upon those whom Allāh guided. And Allāh was never going to let your faith go to waste. Truly Allāh is Most Kind, Most Merciful to mankind.

al-Baqara 2:143

Before anything else, a small thing which the ‘ulamā’ of the Qur’ān have counted and which is pleasant to know. The word *wasat*, middlemost, is the middle word of Sūrat al-Baqara. The sūra has a centre, and the word sitting at the centre is the word for centre, and Allāh ﷻ is using it to describe us.

The word does not mean moderate in the way a modern ear takes it, as though the Ummah had been praised for having no strong opinions. Ibn Kathīr رحمه الله explains that *wasat* here means the best and the most honoured, and he gives the Arab usage to prove it: to say that Quraysh are the *wasat* of the Arab tribes is to say that they are the best of them, and to say that the Messenger ﷺ was in the *wasat* of his people is to say that he was of the finest of them, and the prayer described as *wusṭā* is the best prayer.⁸ Since Allāh ﷻ has made this Ummah the *wasat*, He has given her the most complete law and the clearest way. And Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī رضي الله عنه narrated the word straight from the Messenger ﷺ with its meaning attached, that *wasatan* means ‘*adlan*, justly balanced.’⁹

The middle is also the place from which you can be seen and from which you can see. A community placed in the middle is a community placed where the evidence will be taken.

Witnesses Over Mankind

Here is the ḥadīth of Abū Saʿīd رضى الله عنه in full, because the āyah is describing a scene and the ḥadīth is the scene:

يَجِيءُ النَّبِيُّ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَمَعَهُ الرَّجُلَانِ وَأَكْثَرُ مِنْ ذَلِكَ، فَيَدْعَى قَوْمَهُ، فَيُقَالُ: هَلْ بَلَّغْتُمْ هَذَا؟ فَيَقُولُونَ: لَا، فَيُقَالُ لَهُ: هَلْ بَلَّغْتَ قَوْمَكَ؟ فَيَقُولُ: نَعَمْ، فَيُقَالُ: مَنْ يَشْهَدُ لَكَ؟ فَيَقُولُ: مُحَمَّدٌ وَأُمَّتُهُ

A prophet will come on the Day of Resurrection and with him will be two men, or more than that, and his people will be summoned and asked: did this man convey it to you? And they will say: no. And he will be asked: did you convey it to your people? And he will say: yes. And he will be asked: who will bear witness for you? And he will say: Muḥammad and his Ummah.¹⁰

Then Muḥammad ﷺ and his Ummah are summoned and asked whether that prophet conveyed the message to his people, and they say yes, and they are asked how they know, and they say: our Prophet came to us and told us that the messengers had delivered. And it is upon that testimony that Allāh ﷻ recites this āyah.

Consider what has just been given to us. A prophet who spent his life calling and was answered by two men is standing on the Day of Judgement, and his own people are denying to his face that he ever spoke, and the witnesses who settle the matter in his favour are us. Not because we were there. We were not there. But because our Prophet ﷺ told us that they all delivered, and our testimony is accepted on the strength of his. The honour is not in the seeing. The honour is in whom we were told by.

And the second half of the āyah is heavier than the first, that *the Messenger may be a witness over you*. We give evidence about the nations, and evidence is given about us, and the one giving it is the one man whose word about us we could not possibly dispute.

Wajabat, Wajabat

The witnessing is not reserved for the Last Day. It begins in the street. Abū al-Aswad said: I came to Madīnah when an epidemic had broken out and people were dying, and I sat with ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ when a funeral passed and the people praised the dead man, and ‘Umar said, *wajabat*, it is due. Then another passed and the people spoke ill of the dead man, and ‘Umar said, *wajabat*. Abū al-Aswad asked him what he meant, and he said: I said what the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said:

أَيُّمَا مُسْلِمٍ شَهِدَ لَهُ أَرْبَعَةٌ بِخَيْرٍ أَدْخَلَهُ اللَّهُ الْجَنَّةَ. قُلْنَا: وَثَلَاثَةٌ؟ قَالَ: وَثَلَاثَةٌ. قُلْنَا:
وَاثْنَانِ؟ قَالَ: وَاثْنَانِ. ثُمَّ لَمْ نَسْأَلْهُ عَنِ الْوَاحِدِ

*Any Muslim for whom four bear witness with good, Allāh will admit him to the Garden. We said: and three? He said: and three. We said: and two? He said: and two. And we did not ask him about one.*¹¹

They did not ask about one. Al-Qurṭubī رحمه الله and others have paused on that silence, and it is worth pausing on. They stopped asking because the number was coming down and they did not want to hear it come down to a place where a man's fate might hang on a single tongue.¹² But the principle is set: the testimony of the believers about a man carries weight with Allāh ﷻ, and the Ummah which will testify about the nations is testifying already, every time it stands at a graveside and says what it knows.

Which puts our praise and our criticism in a different light than we usually give it. A man who speaks carelessly about the dead, or about the living, is not merely gossiping. He is giving evidence, and it is being written down.

The Test in the Turning

Then Allāh ﷻ says why the first Qibla was appointed at all: *that We might know who follows the Messenger from him who turns back on his heels*. And *li-na'lama*, that We might know, does not mean that Allāh ﷻ acquires information. He knows what will be before it is. The mufasssīrūn explain it as knowing in the sense of the thing coming out into the open, of the knowledge becoming a knowledge of something that has actually happened, so that the man is judged on what he did and not only on what he would have done.¹³

The turning of the Qibla was a sieve, and it worked. When the direction changed, the men with a sickness in their hearts and the disbelievers amongst the People of the Book were thrown into confusion by it, and they said, what has turned them away from the Qibla they were upon, and the very same sentence which exposed them left the believers exactly where they were. Ibn Kathīr رحمه الله compares it to what Allāh ﷻ says of the sūras when they are sent down, that the believers are increased in faith by them and rejoice, and those in whose hearts is a disease are increased in filth upon their filth.¹⁴ The same rain, and two different soils.

And notice what the believer's position actually amounts to, because Ibn Kathīr رحمه الله states it in a sentence: it is they who believe that Allāh ﷻ does what He wills and decides what He wills and commands His servants with what He wills and abrogates what He wills of His commands, and that He has perfect wisdom and a decisive proof in all of it. That is what was being tested at the turn. Not the direction. The willingness to let Him be the one who decides.

Why It Stung Them

‘Ā’isha رضي الله عنها narrated that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said of the People of the Book:

إِنَّهُمْ لَا يَحْسُدُونَنَا عَلَى شَيْءٍ، كَمَا يَحْسُدُونَنَا عَلَى يَوْمِ الْجُمُعَةِ الَّتِي هَدَانَا اللَّهُ لَهَا وَضَلُّوا عَنْهَا، وَعَلَى الْقِبْلَةِ الَّتِي هَدَانَا اللَّهُ لَهَا وَضَلُّوا عَنْهَا، وَعَلَى قَوْلِنَا خَلْفَ الْإِمَامِ: آمِينَ

*They do not envy us for anything as they envy us for the Friday to which Allāh guided us and from which they went astray, and for the Qibla to which Allāh guided us and from which they went astray, and for our saying Āmīn behind the imām.*¹⁵

Three small things. A day of the week, a direction, and one word said aloud behind the imām. The Messenger ﷺ is telling us that the envy did not attach to our numbers or our victories, it attached to our being guided to little things that they had lost, and there is something in that worth sitting with, because the things we are envied for are not the things we are proud of.

Your Faith Was Never Going to Waste

Now the tender part, and the reason the āyah is here at all. The Companions asked a question which had been troubling them. Men had died in those sixteen months. Some had been killed at Badr. They had prayed their whole Muslim lives towards

Jerusalem and had gone to their graves having never once faced the Ka'ba, and now the Ka'ba was the Qibla and the direction they had prayed towards was not, and their brothers stood over their graves and did not know what to say about them. Al-Barā' رضي الله عنه says it plainly in the ḥadīth: *we did not know what to say about them.*

And Allāh ﷻ sent down: *And Allāh was never going to let your faith go to waste. Truly Allāh is Most Kind, Most Merciful to mankind.*

Two things are worth noticing in that sentence. The first is that *īmānakum*, your faith, is the word used for the prayer. He did not say, We were never going to let your prayers go to waste. He called the prayers faith, which the fuqahā' have taken as one of the plainest proofs in the Qur'ān that action is part of īmān, and which the ordinary reader may take as something else: that when we stood in those rows facing the wrong way in perfect obedience, what Allāh ﷻ saw was not the direction. He saw the faith.

The second is the closing: *ra'ūf, raḥīm*. Ibn Kathīr رحمه الله brings here the ḥadīth of the captives, and it belongs here. The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ saw a woman amongst the captives who had been separated from her child, and she was searching, and whenever she found an infant amongst the captives she would snatch him up and hold him to her chest, and when she found her own child she clutched him and gave him her breast. And the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said to those with him:

أَتُرُونَ هَذِهِ طَارِحَةً وَلَدَهَا فِي النَّارِ وَهِيَ تَقْدِرُ عَلَى أَنْ لَا تَطْرَحَهُ؟ قَالُوا: لَا يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ. قَالَ: فَوَاللَّهِ لَئِنْ أَرَحِمُ بَعَادَهُ مِنْ هَذِهِ بَوْلَدَهَا

*Do you think this woman would throw her child into the fire while she had the power not to? They said: no, Messenger of Allāh. He said: by Allāh, Allāh is more merciful to His servants than this woman is to her child.*¹⁶

A man may read the whole of the tafsīr literature on this āyah and take away one thing, that the anxiety of the Companions over their dead was answered, and that it was answered with the two gentlest names in the Book.

The Face Turned to the Sacred Masjid

قَدْ نَرَى تَقَلُّبَ وَجْهِكَ فِي السَّمَاءِ فَلَنُوَلِّيَنَّكَ قِبْلَةً تَرْضَاهَا فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَحَيْثُ مَا كُنْتُمْ فَوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ شَطْرَهُ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ لَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَفِلٍ عَمَّا يَعْمَلُونَ

We have indeed seen the turning of your face towards the sky, so We shall surely turn you to a Qibla which will please you. Turn your face, then, towards the Sacred Masjid; and wherever you are, turn your faces towards it. Those who were given the Book know well that it is the truth from their Lord, and Allāh is not unaware of what they do.

al-Baqara 2:144

Muḥammad b. Ishāq reports from al-Barā' رضي الله عنه that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ used to pray towards Bayt al-Maqdis and to keep looking up at the sky, waiting for the command of his Lord, and then this was sent down.¹⁷

He never asked. That is the thing to hold. Allāh ﷻ does not say, we have heard your request, and He does not say, you have asked Us repeatedly and We have decided to grant it. He says: *qad narā taqalluba wajhika fī al-samā'*, we have seen the turning of your face towards the sky. The desire never became a demand. It never even became a sentence. It stayed in his chest and came out only as a movement of the head between the prayers, and Allāh ﷻ watched the movement of the head, and answered it.

And then, *qiblatan tarḍāhā*, a Qibla which will please *you*. Not a Qibla which is better, or a Qibla which is more correct, or a Qibla which suits the community. A Qibla which will please you. Ibn 'Āshūr رحمه الله notes the force of the address, that the whole Ummah is being turned and the reason given is the pleasure of one man.

¹⁸ Every one of us who has ever stood in a row anywhere on the earth has been standing in a direction which was chosen because it would make our Prophet ﷺ happy.

The ordinary worshipper should take from that āyah the thing it is most obviously teaching, which is not about the Qibla at all. It is that Allāh ﷻ notices the wanting which is never spoken. A man may have a need which he is too shy or too proud or too resigned to put into a du‘ā, and he should understand that the need is not therefore invisible.

Why a Direction at All?

Muftī Shafīʿ رحمه الله takes up the question which a thoughtful reader will already have asked. Allāh ﷻ is not confined to a direction or a place. His attention takes in every direction and every dimension at once, and a man can find Him wherever he turns. The Muslims, in turning towards the Ka‘ba, do not mean to worship it, and any child who thinks otherwise should be corrected before he grows up. So why a Qibla?¹⁹

Part of the answer is in front of us in every congregation. Imagine a masjid in which every man faced whichever direction he preferred, on the sound principle that Allāh ﷻ is in every direction. The principle would be correct and the room would be a shambles. We unite on one God, one Book, one Prophet ﷺ, one prayer, and one direction, and the direction is the visible piece of that oneness, the piece a stranger can see from the door. A man walking into a masjid in Dewsbury and a man walking into a masjid in Jakarta are looking at the backs of people who are pointed at the same building.

And part of the answer is that the ruling has been made light in exactly the places where insisting on it would have become a burden, which shows what it is for. Muftī Shafīʿ رحمه الله gathers the concessions:²⁰ a man travelling on a mount who wishes to pray his nawāfil is not required to turn towards the Qibla at all, but may face the direction his animal is going and pray with the gestures of his head. And a man who does not know the direction, and cannot work it out because of the darkness of the night or for some other good reason, and can find nobody to ask, is to use his best judgement and turn where he thinks it is, and that direction becomes his Qibla, and if he finishes his prayer and then discovers that he was wrong, his prayer stands and he does not repeat it.

Read those two rulings together and the point is hard to miss. The Qibla is a discipline and not an idol. It is required of a man exactly to the extent that he is able to give it, and where he is not able, it recedes and the prayer goes on, because the prayer was never about the wall.

Why the Ka'ba?

The mufasssīrūn have gathered several reasons, and none of them cancels the others.

It is the milla of Ibrāhīm عليه السلام, whose foundations the sūra has just finished describing, and the second Juz' opens by turning our faces towards the building the first Juz' closed by raising. It is the love of Makkah, which he ﷺ had been made to leave. It would draw the Arab tribes, for whom the House was the centre of everything and who would find in this a door they could walk through. And it distinguished the community from the Jews of Madīnah, who were already opposed and had grown harsher, so that the borrowed direction which had never satisfied anybody was taken away and the Muslims were given something of their own.

How Exact Must a Man Be?

The fuqahā' have set out a plain ladder. If you can see the Ka'ba, you face the Ka'ba. If you cannot see the Ka'ba but you can see al-Masjid al-Ḥarām, you face that. And if you can see neither, you face the direction of Makkah, and here the Messenger ﷺ gave the community a wide door. Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه narrated:

مَا بَيْنَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ قِبْلَةٌ

*What lies between the east and the west is a Qibla.*²¹

The ruling was given to people for whom Makkah lay to the south, so that the whole southern arc was acceptable to them, and the fuqahā' have taken from it a general licence of roughly twenty-four degrees on either side of the exact line.²² Muftī Shafī' رحمه الله adds a plea which every masjid committee in this country ought to have framed on the wall: do not cause fitna over a few degrees. It is not unknown for a congregation to divide itself over the angle of its carpet, and the Sharī'a which permitted a traveller to pray facing his camel's head is not the Sharī'a which will thank them for it.

They Know It as They Know Their Sons

The āyah ends by turning to the People of the Book and telling us, and them, that they know this is the truth from their Lord, and that Allāh ﷻ is not unaware of what they do. The knowledge was never the difficulty. That is a theme the sūra has been sounding since the fortieth āyah and it does not tire of it, and it is about to say it again in the plainest words it has yet used.

They Will Not Follow Your Qibla

وَلَيْنَ آتَيْتَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ بِكُلِّ آيَةٍ مَا تَبِعُوا قِبْلَتَكَ وَمَا أَنْتَ
بِتَابِعٍ قِبْلَتَهُمْ وَمَا بَعْضُهُمْ بِتَابِعٍ قِبْلَةَ بَعْضٍ وَلَيْنِ آتَبَعَتْ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ
مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِنَّكَ إِذَا لَمِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ

And if you were to bring every sign to those who were given the Book, they would not follow your Qibla; nor are you a follower of their Qibla; nor are they followers of one another's Qibla. And if you were to follow their desires after the knowledge that has come to you, you would then be of the wrongdoers.

al-Baqara 2:145

The first half of the āyah closes a door which we keep trying to open. Bring them every sign, and they will not follow your Qibla. Ibn Kathīr رحمه الله reads it beside the āyah of Yūnus, that those against whom the word of your Lord has been realised will not believe though every sign should come to them, until they see the painful punishment.²³ This is the message of Sūrat al-Kāfirūn given in a single line, that there is a point at which the arguing has finished, and the finishing is not a failure of the argument.

There is a relief in the āyah for the da'wah-minded man who is wearing himself out. He should keep speaking, because the speaking is his job, and he should stop measuring his worth by whether the other man moves, because that was never his job. And he should notice the middle clause, which is a small piece of observation with a long reach: *nor are they followers of one another's Qibla*. They cannot agree amongst themselves. A man who abandons his own position in order to be accepted by people who are not united on any position has given away something real in exchange for nothing at all.

A Proof Sitting in Plain Sight

Now the second half, and the reader should slow down, because there is an argument here which has settled the doubts of a great many people. Allāh ﷻ turns to His Prophet ﷺ and says: and if *you* were to follow their desires after the knowledge that has come to you, you would then be of the wrongdoers.

Consider who is being addressed and by whom. If the Qur'ān were the composition of Muḥammad ﷺ, as his enemies said in his lifetime and as others have said since, then here is a man writing a warning to himself, in a book he is presenting to his followers as the speech of God, in which God threatens him with the company of the wrongdoers should he waver. Men who forge scriptures do not write themselves into the dock. They write themselves a throne. The presence of this sentence in this Book is an argument which needs no learning to follow, and it is the reason the mufasssīrūn have called these addresses to the Prophet ﷺ a proof of revelation.²⁴

And there is a second thing in the sentence, which is a matter of balance. The āyahs just before this one were an outpouring of love. Allāh ﷻ saw his face turning to the sky, and gave him a Qibla to please him, and turned an entire Ummah on the strength of his happiness. A community which is given that and nothing else will do to its Prophet ﷺ what was done to 'Īsā عليه السلام by his. So immediately after the love comes the reminder, that the Master is still the Master and the servant is still the servant, and the man whose face Allāh ﷻ was watching in the sky is the same man who is told that if he followed their desires he would be a wrongdoer. Our love for him ﷺ is meant to be intense, and the Qur'ān will not let it become worship, and it holds the line by placing the two sentences next to each other.

الَّذِينَ آتَيْنَاهُمُ الْكِتَابَ يَعْرِفُونَهُ كَمَا يَعْرِفُونَ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ وَإِنَّ فَرِيقًا
مِّنْهُمْ لَيَكْتُمُونَ الْحَقَّ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ

*Those to whom We gave the Book recognise him as they recognise their own sons;
and indeed a party of them conceal the truth while they know.*

al-Baqara 2:146

As they recognise their own sons. There is no stronger image available for certainty without effort. A man does not study his son's face and reach a conclusion about it. He knows him across a crowded street from the back.

‘Abdullāh b. Salām رضي الله عنه is the standing proof of the āyah and the sūra has already given him to us. He was a rabbi of Madīnah, he had the knowledge, and when the Messenger ﷺ came he recognised what he had been waiting for and entered Islam. Others had precisely the same knowledge and did not. So it was never

a question of information. It was a question of acceptance, and the two are separated by something which no amount of evidence will bridge, since the evidence was already in their hands. Muftī Shafīʿ رحمه الله observes that these two āyahs together are showing us that the conduct of that party towards the Prophet ﷺ was dishonest as well as hostile, because a man who does not know is merely wrong, and a man who knows and hides it has decided something about himself.²⁵

And notice the precision, which the sūra never loses: *a party of them*. Not all of them. The Qurʾān is more careful with that community than we are, which is a strange position for a man to have reached by reading the Qurʾān.

الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ ۖ فَلَا تَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُمْتَرِينَ

The truth is from your Lord, so do not be of those who doubt.

al-Baqara 2:147

Four words of Arabic and then a prohibition. The truth is from your Lord; the definite article is on it, so it is not *a* truth amongst others.

And then, do not be of the doubters. The Prophet ﷺ did not doubt, and the ‘ulamā’ have long observed that an address of this kind is aimed through him at us, in the way that a father corrects the guest so that the son will hear it. The instruction to the reader is short enough to carry about: when a matter has been settled by Allāh ﷻ, do not let other people’s opinions of it get inside you. They will try. The whole passage has been about a community which stood in the middle of a chorus of objections, some of them from learned men, and did not move. The Qurʾān is not asking us to win the argument. It is asking us not to be talked out of what we know.

Race One Another to the Good

وَلِكُلِّ وِجْهَةً هُوَ مُوَلِّيًا ۖ فَاسْتَغْبِئُوا اللَّهَ ۖ إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ
لَّهِ جَمِيعًا ۖ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

For everyone there is a direction to which he turns, so race one another to the good things. Wherever you may be, Allāh will bring you all together. Truly Allāh has power over everything.

al-Baqara 2:148

The word *wijba* is a direction a man turns himself towards, and the mufasssirrūn have taken the āyah first in its plain sense, that every community has had its Qibla appointed for it, and then in the wider sense which the wording invites, that every person alive has a direction he is facing in life, whether he has named it or not.²⁶ This is one of those places where the Qur'ān says a thing about a dispute in Madīnah in the seventh century and hands the ordinary worshipper a rule for his Tuesday.

And then, having noted that everybody is facing somewhere, Allāh ﷻ does not tell the believers to go and argue about the directions. He tells them to race. *Fastabiqū al-khayrāt*. The commandment has been given and the objections have been recorded and the answer to the objections is: get on with it. Muftī Shafī' رحمه الله puts it in a sentence which is worth keeping, that once the divine commandment has been promulgated the Muslims need not concern themselves with the taunts and the ridicule of others, but should give up fruitless controversy and strive to excel in good deeds, because they have to appear before Allāh ﷻ on a Day when they will be dealt with according to what they did.²⁷

There is a diagnosis hidden in that instruction. A man who has time to sit in the objection has time he could be spending in the race, and the one is very often a way of avoiding the other. It is easier to hold an opinion about the Qibla than to get up for Fajr and face it.

The Race and the Finish

The image is a race and the reader should let it be a race. We are running towards the Garden. Some are far ahead, some are behind, some have wandered off the road altogether and are sitting in a field congratulating themselves on their independence. And the āyah does two things with the picture which change it entirely.

The first is that the race ends. *Wherever you may be, Allāh will bring you all together.* Every runner is coming to the same finish, and no one is going to be left out on the course. The man who was far ahead and the man who wandered off will both be standing in the same place, and the distance between them will be visible, and it will be the distance they made.

The second is that the finish is not chosen by the runner. He is *brought*. The timer is running now and we do not know how long it has left, and when it stops a man will see exactly how far he got. That is the whole of the matter. Not how far he meant to get, and not how far he told people he had got. How far he got.

And *Allāh has power over everything* is the seal on it, because the gathering of every man who has ever lived, from every grave and every sea and every field, is a thing a man cannot picture, and Allāh ﷻ closes the āyah by reminding us not to measure His power against our imagination.

From Wherever You Go Out

وَمِنْ حَيْثُ خَرَجْتَ فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَإِنَّهُ لَلْحَقُّ
مَنْ رَبِّكَ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَفِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ

And from wherever you go out, turn your face towards the Sacred Masjid; it is indeed the truth from your Lord, and Allāh is not unaware of what you do.

al-Baqara 2:149

ج
وَمِنْ حَيْثُ خَرَجْتَ فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَحَيْثُ مَا
كُنْتُمْ فَوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ شَطْرَهُ لِئَلَّا يَكُونَ لِلنَّاسِ عَلَيْكُمْ حُجَّةٌ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ
ظَلَمُوا مِنْهُمْ فَلَا تَخْشَوْهُمْ وَاخْشَوْنِي وَلِأَتِمَّ نِعْمَتِي عَلَيْكُمْ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ
تَهْتَدُونَ

And from wherever you go out, turn your face towards the Sacred Masjid; and wherever you are, turn your faces towards it, so that people may have no argument against you, except those of them who do wrong. So do not fear them, and fear Me, and so that I may complete My favour upon you, and that you may be guided.

al-Baqara 2:150

Three times now. The command was given at the hundred and forty-fourth āyah, and it is repeated at the hundred and forty-ninth, and again at the hundred and fiftieth, and a reader who is paying attention will ask why.

Muftī Shafīʿ رحمه الله gives two reasons and both are worth having. The first is that this was the first occasion in the Sharīʿa on which a command came to abrogate an earlier one, and a first is a heavy thing, and repetition impresses upon the mind what a single statement would not. The second is that an abrogation of any command whatever is likely to give rise to doubts and to produce disorder inside a community and outside it, and the simple man cannot be expected to work out for himself the why and the how of a ruling being lifted by the One who gave it, so an emphatic reiteration becomes necessary.²⁸

And the mufasssīrūn have found that the three are not three sayings of one thing. Each takes a different case, so that the ruling is sealed at every corner:

Āyah 144

Those in Makkah, in sight of the House

Covering every state and condition

At home, in Madīna Ṭayba

Āyah 149

Those in the Arab lands around it

Covering every place

Āyah 150

Those living anywhere in the world

Covering every age to come

Taking in the whole of it

On a journey, having
gone out

So the man reading this in England fourteen centuries later is not applying a ruling given to somebody else. He is in the third āyah.

Which Argument?

Then: *so that people may have no argument against you*. What argument were they going to make? That we keep changing our minds. That we prayed one way and now we pray another, and who is to say we will not be facing somewhere else next year. And the answer given is not an explanation. It is a finality. This is the last one. There will be no more turning. Face it and let your steadiness be the reply.

And then the exception, which is honest and which every da'wah worker learns eventually: *except those of them who do wrong*. There is a kind of objector whose objection is not an objection, and he will have an argument whatever you do, and no answer will close it, because the argument is not where his difficulty lives. Allāh ﷻ sets him outside the sentence and then tells us what to do about him, which is nothing: *do not fear them, and fear Me*.

A community which fears people will spend its life adjusting itself. It will keep half an eye on how the ruling looks from outside, and it will explain, and it will apologise, and it will never once be at rest. A community which fears Allāh ﷻ does the thing and lets the comment fall where it falls.

That I May Complete My Favour

And the reason given at the end of the hundred and fiftieth āyah lifts the whole passage. *And so that I may complete My favour upon you, and that you may be guided*.

The Qibla is being called part of the favour. It is being placed alongside the sending of the Messenger ﷺ in the very next āyah, as an item in the same account. So the direction was not a piece of administration which had to be settled so that the prayers could be organised. It was a gift, and it was withheld for sixteen months so that the community would want it, and it was given at the moment when wanting it had become an act of worship in itself.

As We Have Sent a Messenger Amongst You

كَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِيكُمْ رَسُولًا مِّنكُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْكُمْ ءَايَاتِنَا وَيُزَكِّيكُمْ وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ
الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَيُعَلِّمُكُم مَّا لَمْ تَكُونُوا تَعْلَمُونَ

As We have sent amongst you a Messenger from yourselves, who recites Our āyahs to you, and purifies you, and teaches you the Book and the wisdom, and teaches you what you did not know.

al-Baqara 2:151

The favour which was to be completed is now itemised, and the first item on the list is the man standing in front of them.

The reader who has the first Juz' in his hand will recognise every word of this āyah, because he has read it before. Ibrāhīm عليه السلام stood at the foundations of the House with his son and asked: *our Lord, and send amongst them a messenger from themselves, who will recite Your āyahs to them and teach them the Book and the wisdom and purify them.*²⁹ The du'ā' was made forty centuries before this āyah was recited, and here is the answer, arriving in the same vocabulary in which it was asked, so that the community which heard it could put the two side by side and see that Allāh ﷻ had kept a note.

The Messenger ﷺ said of himself that he was the supplication of his father Ibrāhīm عليه السلام and the good news of his brother 'Isā عليه السلام.³⁰ A man who had waited that long to arrive did not arrive by accident.

The Order Was Corrected

And now the thing which repays the reading. The du'ā' was granted, and the sequence in it was rearranged, and the rearrangement is a teaching.

Ibrāhīm عليه السلام asked for recitation, then the Book, then the wisdom, then the purification. Allāh ﷻ gives recitation, then the purification, then the Book and the wisdom. The *tazkiya* has been moved forward, out of last place and into second.

Why? Consider who was standing next to Ibrāhīm عليه السلام when he made the du'ā'. Ismā'īl عليه السلام was beside him, laying the stones, a prophet and a son of a

prophet, and the only child he had experience of. A father whose only child is Ismā'īl عليه السلام will put purification last, because purification is not the problem in front of him. The boy is pure. What the boy needs is the Book and the wisdom, and if there is any purifying to be done it can be done afterwards, since a pure man does not stay pure by himself.

Allāh ﷻ knew what was coming. He knew that the children who would receive this Messenger ﷺ would not be Ismā'īl عليه السلام, and that they would arrive at the lesson already needing to be cleaned before they could hold anything, and that a man who is taught before he is purified will take the teaching and use it badly, and will not be interested in it besides, since wisdom is what happens when a man learns a thing and then acts upon it, and an unpurified man will not act upon it. So the order was corrected in the answer. The du'ā' of a Prophet عليه السلام was accepted and improved, which tells the ordinary worshipper something about his own du'ā's which should be a comfort rather than a worry.

Reciting Is Not Teaching

And notice that the reciting and the teaching are listed as two separate favours. *Yatlū 'alaykum āyātīnā*, and then *yu'allimukum al-kitāb*. If recitation were only a delivery system for meaning, the two would be one item. They are two, which the 'ulamā' have taken as a proof that the recitation of the Qur'ān is itself an act of worship with its own reward, quite apart from the understanding of it.³¹

This is worth saying plainly in our own time, because a certain kind of clever young man will tell his grandmother that there is no point in her reciting what she does not understand. He is wrong, and he is wrong on the authority of this āyah, and she should carry on. Understanding is better and she should be helped towards it. But the reciting was a favour before the teaching was, and the tongue which moves with the Book is doing something whether or not the mind has caught up.

Remember Me and I Will Remember You

فَاذْكُرُونِي أَذْكُرْكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوا لِي وَلَا تَكْفُرُونِ

So remember Me, I will remember you; and be thankful to Me, and do not be ungrateful to Me.

al-Baqara 2:152

After a list of favours, a bill. And the bill is: remember Me, and thank Me. That is the whole of what is being asked in return for the Messenger ﷺ, the Book, the wisdom, the purification, and the Qibla.

Al-jazā' min jins al-'amal, the recompense is of the same kind as the deed, and here the principle is stated as bluntly as language allows. Remember Me, I will remember you. There is no *fa-* in it, no *thumma*, nothing to suggest a delay or a procedure. The two verbs sit next to each other.

Now weigh what is being offered. In this world, the people we remember do not remember us. A man may follow a public figure for twenty years, know his opinions and his history and the names of his children, and the man does not know he exists. That is the ordinary shape of remembering upwards: it goes one way. And Allāh ﷻ, who has no need of us at all, says that if we remember Him He will remember us, and He says it in the imperative, as though He were asking for a favour.

And in the ḥadīth qudsī He goes further:

يَقُولُ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى: مَنْ ذَكَرَنِي فِي نَفْسِهِ ذَكَرْتُهُ فِي نَفْسِي، وَمَنْ ذَكَرَنِي فِي مَلَأٍ ذَكَرْتُهُ فِي مَلَأٍ خَيْرٍ مِنْهُ

Allāh Most High says: whoever remembers Me within himself, I remember him within Myself; and whoever remembers Me in a gathering, I remember him in a gathering better than his.³²

A man sitting alone in his car at a traffic light saying *subḥānallāh* is being answered in a place he cannot imagine, and a man sitting in a circle of twelve in a cold masjid on a Thursday night is being spoken of in a gathering better than his. That is the exchange rate.

Dhikr With the Tongue Only

Al-Qurṭubī رحمه الله raises the difficulty which every honest man raises, that the dhikr is often mechanical and the heart is elsewhere.³³ The poets of this way have said hard things about it, that the repetition of a Name has no effect in a man who is thinking about his cattle while his tongue moves. The criticism is just and it should sting.

And then the mercy, which is the reason we bring the criticism at all. It is related that a man complained to the great Abū ‘Uthmān of exactly this, that his tongue was busy and his heart was not, and Abū ‘Uthmān told him to be grateful to Allāh ﷻ that at least one organ of his body had been drawn into His service. Which is the correct answer, and the reader should take both halves of it. A dhikr without the heart is not what we are aiming at, and a dhikr without the heart is not nothing, and the man who abandons the tongue because the heart is cold has now lost both.

And Be Thankful, and Do Not Be Ungrateful

Then *ushkurū lī wa lā takfurūn*, and the opposite of thankfulness is given as *kufṛ*. Not forgetfulness. Not carelessness. Kufr, which comes from a root meaning to cover a thing over, and which is exactly what ingratitude does to a gift: it does not destroy it, it hides it, so that the gift is still there and the man can no longer see it.

The ordinary worshipper should sit with the pairing for a moment. The Book has put ingratitude on the same continuum as disbelief, and a man who has spent a life complaining about what he was not given, with a roof over his head and food in his kitchen and his children asleep upstairs, has been doing something to his soul that he did not have a name for.

Seek Help in Ṣabr and Ṣalāh

ج
يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ

O you who believe, seek help in ṣabr and in the ṣalāh. Truly Allāh is with those who have ṣabr.

al-Baqara 2:153

The previous āyah asked for dhikr and shukr, and the honest man reads it and asks the practical question: how? How does a man remember constantly and thank constantly, when his life is not arranged for it and his temperament is against it? The answer is this āyah. Ṣabr and ṣalāh. The two tools.

And the word ṣabr is worn thin in English by being translated as patience, which suggests a man sitting quietly and waiting for something unpleasant to end. That is not the word. Ṣabr is self-restraint, it is grip, it is the refusal to be moved off a position by pressure, and it takes in the man in the gym as much as the man at the graveside. The ‘ulamā’ have divided it into three, and the division is worth memorising because it turns an abstraction into a diary:

The first is ṣabr away from sin, which is the eye that does not go where it wants to go, and the tongue that does not say the thing which would have been so satisfying to say. The second is ṣabr upon obedience, which is the wuḍū’ made in cold water in a cold house in January when the bed was warm. And the third is ṣabr upon affliction, which is what the word is usually reserved for and which is only a third of it.³⁴

Most of us are prepared to give the third and think we have paid. The first two are where the account is settled.

The Affair of the Believer

عَجَبًا لِأَمْرِ الْمُؤْمِنِ، إِنَّ أَمْرَهُ كُلَّهُ خَيْرٌ، وَلَيْسَ ذَاكَ لِأَحَدٍ إِلَّا لِلْمُؤْمِنِ: إِنْ أَصَابَتْهُ سَرَاءٌ شَكَرَ فَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَهُ، وَإِنْ أَصَابَتْهُ ضَرَاءٌ صَبَرَ فَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَهُ

*How wonderful is the affair of the believer, for the whole of his affair is good, and that is not for anyone except the believer. If ease comes to him he gives thanks, and it is good for him; and if hardship comes to him he has ṣabr, and it is good for him.*³⁵

Look at what the ḥadīth does with the two words of the previous āyah. Shukr and ṣabr are put in the two positions a man can be in, and between them they cover every hour he will ever live. There is no third position. So the believer has been given a way of profiting from the whole of his life, and it is not available to anybody else, and the Messenger ﷺ begins the ḥadīth by expressing wonder at it, which he did not often do.

And the Ṣalāh

Ṣalāh is the second tool, and it is the submission which makes a difficulty carriable. Ḥudhayfa رضي الله عنه narrated that whenever a matter of any weight came upon the Prophet ﷺ he would hurry to the prayer.³⁶ Not after the matter had been dealt with, as a thanksgiving, and not before it, as a preparation. When the thing landed, he went to the prayer, and through the baraka of it Allāh ﷻ would open the way.

The ordinary worshipper has this available to him and does not use it. A letter comes, or a phone call, and we reach for the phone to tell somebody, and then for the internet to look something up, and then for the kettle. The prayer mat is in the room the whole time.

Where the Patient Will Be Standing

‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-‘Ābidīn رحمه الله said: when Allāh gathers the first and the last, a caller will call out, where are the people of ṣabr, that they may enter the Garden before the reckoning? And a company of people will stand, and the angels will meet them and say, where are you going, children of Ādam? And they will say, to the Garden. And they will say, before the reckoning? And they will say, yes. And they will say, and who are you? And they will say, we are the people of ṣabr. And they will say, and what was your ṣabr? And they will say: we had ṣabr upon the obedience of Allāh, and we had ṣabr away from the disobedience of Allāh, until Allāh took us. And they will say: you are as you have said. Enter the Garden, and excellent is the wage of those who worked.³⁷

And notice which two kinds of ṣabr they named when the angels asked them. Not the third. They did not mention their bereavements. They mentioned obedience and abstention, which is the ṣabr nobody sees, and it was enough to get them past the queue.

Allāh ﷻ says elsewhere that the patient will be given their wage without any reckoning.³⁸ Every other deed is weighed and measured and comes back with a figure attached. This one is handed over without a scale, and the ‘ulamā’ have said that this is because ṣabr has no ceiling and therefore no unit, and a thing which cannot be measured cannot be paid at a rate.

Do Not Say of Them That They Are Dead

وَلَا تَقُولُوا لِمَن يُقْتَلُ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمُوتَ بَلْ أحيَاءٌ وَلَكِن لَّا
تَشْعُرُونَ

*And do not say of those who are killed in the way of Allāh that they are dead.
Rather they are alive, and you do not perceive it.*

al-Baqara 2:154

The prohibition is on the saying. Allāh ﷻ did not say, do not think it, and He did not say, do not believe it. He forbade the sentence itself, because the words we use about a thing govern what we come to feel about it, and a community which stands over the graves of its best men and calls them dead will slowly cease to produce any.

And then the correction: *bal ahyā'*, rather, they are alive. Not alive in a manner of speaking, and not alive in our memories, which is what we say at funerals when we do not believe in anything. Alive. And the reason we cannot see it is given in the last clause and it is not flattering to us: *wa lākin lā tash'urūn*, but you do not perceive. The failure is in the instrument, and the instrument is us.

Masrūq asked 'Abdullāh b. Mas'ūd رضى الله عنه about this āyah, and he said: as for that, we asked about it, and were told:

أَرْوَاحُهُمْ فِي جَوْفِ طَيْرٍ خُضِرٍ، لَهَا قَنَادِيلُ مُعَلَّقَةٌ بِالْعَرْشِ، تَسْرَحُ مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ حَيْثُ
شَاءَتْ، ثُمَّ تَأْوِي إِلَى تِلْكَ الْقَنَادِيلِ

Their souls are within green birds, which have lamps hanging from the Throne. They roam the Garden wherever they wish and then return to those lamps.³⁹

And their Lord looked upon them and said: do you wish for anything? And they said: what could we wish for, when we roam the Garden wherever we please? And He asked them again, and again, and when they saw that they would not be left until they asked for something, they said: our Lord, we wish that You would return our souls to our bodies so that we might be killed in Your way once more. And when He saw that they had no need, they were left.

Read that carefully. They were asked three times and could not think of anything they wanted, and when they were pressed into naming something, the thing they named was to be killed again. That is what they thought of the transaction, having seen the receipt. And Allāh ﷻ says elsewhere that they are rejoicing at what Allāh has given them of His bounty, and are receiving good news about those who have not yet joined them, that no fear shall be upon them and they shall not grieve.⁴⁰

We do not understand the life they are living. The āyah says so and the ḥadīth confirms it. What we can understand is that not one of them wants to come back to ours, and a man who has understood that has been given a rather large piece of information about the value of what he is currently protecting.

We Shall Surely Test You

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ
وَالثَّمَرَاتِ وَبَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ

And We shall surely test you with something of fear, and hunger, and loss of wealth and lives and fruits. And give good news to those who have ṣabr.

al-Baqara 2:155

The oath is doubled in the Arabic and the testing is certain. There is no reading of the āyah which lets a man out of it. The only question ever open is what kind and how much.

And the first mercy is in the second word. *Bi-shay'in min al-khawf*, with *something* of fear. A little of it. The indefinite is being used to make the thing small, and the mufasssirūn have all noticed it, that Allāh ﷻ announces the test and in the same breath tells us that He has kept the dose down.⁴¹ We should measure our afflictions against what they could have been rather than against what we wanted, because Allāh ﷻ has described elsewhere what a full measure looks like, when He made a town taste the garment of hunger and fear.⁴² A garment covers a man completely. That is what it looks like when it is not *shay'*.

The Five, in Order

And the five named are not a random selection. They are the things we are most afraid of losing, and Allāh ﷻ has put them in the order in which they frighten us.

Fear first, because insecurity is worse than anything it is fear of. Then hunger, which is the fear made physical. Then wealth, then lives, then fruits. And the ‘ulamā’ have noted that this passage was recited to a community which was about to live it in the most literal way at Tabūk, in the height of the summer, at the time of the harvest, when the men were called away from the very fruits the āyah names.⁴³

Sit with the fruits for a moment, because a townsman reads the word and passes over it. Some trees bear once. A man works a year for one crop, and the crop fails, or comes in unfit to eat and unfit to sell, and the year is simply gone and cannot be worked again. That is what is being named, and Allāh ﷻ named it last because it is the one which follows a man home.

Some of the mufasssirrūn have offered a reading of the five which turns them into acts of worship, that the fear is the fear of Allāh ﷻ, and the hunger is the fasting of Ramaḍān, and the loss of wealth is the zakāh, and the loss of lives is illness, and the loss of fruits is the death of children. Ibn Kathīr رحمه الله reports it and then says, plainly, *wa fīhi naẓar*, there is a difficulty in it.⁴⁴ The reader may take the report and take the judgement with it. The āyah is about affliction, and turning affliction into a metaphor is a way of not having to face it.

And Give Good News

Then the closing, which changes the subject of the āyah. *Wa bashshir al-ṣābirīn*. Give good news to those who have ṣabr.

He does not say, give good news to those who are tested. Everybody is tested; there is no distinction in that and no news in it. The good news is for what a man does inside the test. So we are not congratulating the afflicted for being afflicted, which is the sentimental thing our age likes to do, and which leaves a man exactly where he was with a medal on. We are congratulating the man who held on.

الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَهُمْ مُصِيبَةٌ قَالُوا إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

Those who, when a calamity strikes them, say: we belong to Allāh, and to Him we are returning.

al-Baqara 2:156

The word *muṣība* is from *aṣāba*, *yuṣību*, to hit a thing, to reach it, to strike the target. So a *muṣība* is the thing which was aimed at you, and the grammar of the word carries the whole doctrine: it was never going to miss. It had your name on it before it left. Al-Ṣābūnī رحمه الله and others draw the consequence, which is that the question *why me* is a question with a grammatical error in it.⁴⁵

And then the response, and the reader should look at what is missing from it. There is no *thumma* and no *fā*-. Allāh ﷻ does not say, when a calamity strikes them, *then* they say. He puts the striking and the saying next to each other with nothing in between, which is the grammatical way of describing a man for whom the sentence is the first thing out of his mouth and not the conclusion of a process. That is a high station and the reader should know that it is being described rather than demanded, since the āyah is praising the people who reach it.

Two Words Worth Weighing

First, *innā lillāh*, we belong to Allāh. Not, this belongs to Allāh, or this happened by the will of Allāh, which is what we usually mean. *We* belong to Him. The man himself is the property under discussion. And once a man has said that honestly, the loss of a thing he owned is a smaller matter than he thought, because he has just conceded that he never owned anything at all, including himself. The Qur'ān has been preparing us for this from its second page, where the believers are described as spending out of what We have provided them, which is a sentence that concedes the ownership before it describes the generosity.⁴⁶

Second, *rāji'ūn* and not *turja'ūn*. The Qur'ān elsewhere says that you will be returned, in the passive, as a man is returned to a place whether he likes it or not. Here it is active. We are *returning*. The man is walking. He is going home and he is going willingly, and the difference between being sent back and going back is the difference between two kinds of Muslim.

Umm Salama Says It

Umm Salama رضي الله عنها said: Abū Salama came to me one day from the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ and said, I heard from the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ a saying which pleased me. He said: no Muslim is struck by a calamity and says *innā lillāhi wa innā ilayhi rājiʿūn*, and then says, *O Allāh, reward me in my calamity and give me something better than it in its place*, except that Allāh does that for him.

She said: I memorised it from him. And when Abū Salama died, I said *innā lillāhi wa innā ilayhi rājiʿūn*, and I said, *O Allāh, reward me in my calamity and give me something better than him in his place*. And then I thought to myself: and where am I going to get somebody better than Abū Salama?

And when her ʿidda was over, the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ asked permission to come in, and she was tanning a hide, and she washed her hands of the tanning solution and let him in and put out a leather cushion stuffed with palm fibre for him to sit on, and he proposed to her. And she said: Messenger of Allāh, it is not that I do not want you, but I am a woman with a fierce jealousy in me, and I fear you will see something in me for which Allāh will punish me; and I am a woman advanced in years; and I am a woman with dependants. And he said: as for the jealousy you mention, Allāh will take it away from you; and as for the years you mention, the same has come upon me as has come upon you; and as for the dependants you mention, your dependants are my dependants.

And she said: I surrendered to the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ. And she said afterwards: Allāh gave me, in the place of Abū Salama, someone better than him. The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ.⁴⁷

She said the words while doubting that they could be answered, and she said them anyway, and she was answered beyond the limit of what she had been able to picture. The lesson is not that every widow will marry a Prophet ﷺ. The lesson is that her imagination was the smallest thing in the room, and so is ours.

أُولَئِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ صَلَوَاتٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَرَحْمَةٌ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُهْتَدُونَ

Upon those are blessings from their Lord, and mercy; and those are the rightly guided.

al-Baqara 2:157

Three things are given, and any one of them would have been enough. *Ṣalawāt* from their Lord, which is His praise of a man in the highest assembly. Then *raḥma*, and the ‘ulamā’ have said that this is a mercy beyond the general mercy which reaches everybody, a particular one, which raises a man’s rank in the Garden after he is in it. And then the third: *and those are the rightly guided*, which is a certificate, and it is being handed to a man for one sentence said at the worst moment of his life.

Imām Aḥmad رحمه الله records from Abū Mūsā رضي الله عنه that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said: when a servant’s child dies, Allāh says to His angels, you have taken the child of My servant. And they say, yes. And He says, you have taken the fruit of his heart. And they say, yes. And He says, what did My servant say? And they say, he praised You and said *innā lillāhi wa innā ilayhi rāji‘ūn*. And Allāh says: build for My servant a house in the Garden, and call it the House of Praise.⁴⁸

The angels are made to state the case for the prosecution. He knew. He is telling them, and He is telling us, that He knew exactly what was taken and what it cost, and that when the man said the words, He heard him.

Al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa

﴿ إِنَّا لَاصْفَا وَالْمَرْوَةَ مِنْ شَعَائِرِ اللَّهِ ۚ فَمَنْ حَجَّ الْبَيْتَ أَوْ اعْتَمَرَ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِ أَنْ يَطَّوَّفَ بِهِمَا ۚ وَمَنْ تَطَوَّعَ خَيْرًا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ شَاكِرٌ عَلِيمٌ ۝ ﴾

Truly al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa are amongst the symbols of Allāh. So whoever makes Hajj to the House, or performs 'Umra, there is no blame upon him that he goes between them. And whoever does good of his own accord, then Allāh is Appreciative, All-Knowing.

al-Baqara 2:158

The subject of the House returns, and the reader who has been following the Juz' will see the shape of it: the Qibla was turned towards the Ka'ba, and now the two hills beside it are named, and the sūra is drawing the reader physically closer to the building it made him face.

Sha'ā'ir is from *shu'ūr*, to know or to be aware of a thing, so a *sha'ira* is a sign, a mark set up which makes something known. The hills are not sacred in themselves. They are two lumps of rock, and there are a great many lumps of rock in that valley. They are markers, and what they mark is an event.

The Question 'Urwa Asked

There is a difficulty in the wording which troubled a very great man, and the answer he received is one of the finest things in the Ṣaḥīḥ. 'Urwa said to his aunt 'Ā'isha رضي الله عنها: what do you think of the saying of Allāh, *there is no blame upon him that he goes between them*? By Allāh, there is no blame on a man if he does *not* go between them.

His reading is grammatically reasonable. *No blame* is the language of permission, and permission is not obligation, so a man who reads the Arabic and nothing else might conclude that the *sa'y* is optional and might even conclude that it is the leaving of it which is being excused.

And she rebuked him. She said: what a bad thing you have said, nephew. If it were as you say, the āyah would have been, *there is no blame upon him that he does not go between them*. And then she told him what the āyah was actually doing. The Anṣār,

before Islam, used to enter iḥrām for the idol Manāt, and those who did so felt a difficulty about going between al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa, because of what was attached to the two hills in the days of ignorance. So when Islam came they asked the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ about it, and Allāh revealed this āyah. And she said: and the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ made the going between them a Sunnah, so no one may leave it.⁴⁹

The lesson in method is worth more than the ruling. A man with excellent Arabic read the words correctly and arrived at the wrong place, because he did not have the occasion of the revelation, and the occasion turned the meaning around completely. The āyah was not making the sa'y optional. It was removing a hesitation from the hearts of people who had a bad memory attached to the place. And she settled the matter by telling him what the Arabic would have said if he had been right, which is the cleanest argument in the book.

Start With What Allāh Started With

Jābir رضي الله عنه described the Ḥajj of the Prophet ﷺ: he finished his ṭawāf, and kissed the black stone, and went out from the door nearest to al-Ṣafā, and as he came near to it he recited *inna al-ṣafā wa'l-marwata min sha'ā'iri'llāh*, and said:

أَبْدَأُ بِمَا بَدَأَ اللَّهُ بِهِ

*I begin with what Allāh began with.*⁵⁰

He recited the āyah and then followed its word order with his feet. Allāh ﷻ said al-Ṣafā first, so he went to al-Ṣafā first, and the sequence of the ritual was taken from the sequence of the sentence.

What the Sa'y Is Remembering

Hājar رضي الله عنها was left in that valley with her infant son and no water, in a place where nobody lived, by a husband who was walking away because he had been told to. And when she feared that the child would die she got up and went between the two hills looking for help, and she went back and forth seven times, and she was humbled and frightened and in need, and she begged Allāh ﷻ the whole way. And Allāh ﷻ answered her, and relieved her loneliness, and brought out for her the well of Zamzam, of which the Messenger ﷺ said:

طَعَامُ طُعِمٍ وَشِفَاءُ سَقِيمٍ

It is food that feeds, and a healing for sickness.⁵¹

Ibn Kathīr رحمه الله draws the conclusion which every pilgrim should carry up the hill with him. Whoever makes the sa'y between al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa should remember his own meekness and humbleness and need for Allāh ﷻ, and should ask Him to guide his heart and to set his affairs right and to forgive his sins, and to remove his shortcomings from him and to keep him firm on the straight path until he meets Him, and to change his condition from one of sin and error to one of soundness and forgiveness, in the way that He changed hers.⁵²

She was a woman with nothing, in a desert, running because there was nothing else left to do. That is the posture the ritual preserves. And Allāh ﷻ made her running into a pillar of the religion which millions of people repeat every year, which is worth remembering the next time we think that a small act of desperation, performed properly, is beneath the notice of the Lord of the worlds.

As for the ruling, the details of the Ḥajj and the 'Umra and the sa'y are available in the books of fiqh and this is not the place for them. It may be noted that the sa'y is mustahabb according to Imām Aḥmad رحمه الله, farḍ according to Imām Mālik رحمه الله and Imām al-Shāfi' رحمه الله, and wājib according to Imām Abū Ḥanīfa رحمه الله, which means that one who abandons it must slaughter a goat in compensation.⁵³

And Whoever Does Good of His Own Accord

The āyah ends with the nawāfil, and the placement is not accidental: a passage about a required rite closes by praising the voluntary.

The picture worth holding is of layers. Every obligation is a wall between a man and Shayṭān, and every voluntary act is another wall built outside it, and a man with many walls is hard to reach. And there is a second use for them, which the fuqahā' have always mentioned and which should be said aloud in every masjid: the nawāfil will be brought on the Day of Judgement to make up the shortfall in the farḍ. Our obligatory prayers are not what they should be. Something has to cover the gap, and this is what covers it.⁵⁴

But the highest thing said about the voluntary is in the ḥadīth qudsī which every reader should have by heart. Allāh ﷻ says: whoever shows enmity to a friend of Mine, I declare war upon him. And My servant does not draw near to Me with

anything more beloved to Me than what I have made obligatory upon him. And My servant continues to draw near to Me with the voluntary until I love him; and when I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, and his sight with which he sees, and his hand with which he strikes, and his foot with which he walks. If he asks Me, I shall surely give him; and if he seeks refuge with Me, I shall surely grant him refuge.⁵⁵

Notice the order in it, because it is the correction of a whole class of pious errors. The obligatory is the most beloved. The voluntary comes after, and it is the voluntary which does the climbing, and a man who is generous with his nawāfil and careless with his farḍ has built the roof and left out the walls.

And *Allāh is Shākīr*, which is the name to end on. He is the One who appreciates. The servant does a small thing of his own accord, something nobody asked him for and nobody saw, and the Lord of the worlds calls Himself, in that connection, the Appreciative.

Those Who Conceal What We Sent Down

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَكْتُمُونَ مَا أَنزَلْنَا مِنَ الْبَيِّنَاتِ وَالْهُدَىٰ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا بَيَّنَّاهُ
لِلنَّاسِ فِي الْكِتَابِ أُولَٰئِكَ يَلْعَنُهُمُ اللَّهُ وَيَلْعَنُهُمُ اللَّعْنُونَ

Those who conceal the clear proofs and the guidance which We sent down, after We had made it clear to the people in the Book, upon those is the curse of Allāh, and the curse of those who curse.

al-Baqara 2:159

The immediate reference is to what the sūra has already told us twice, that a party of the People of the Book were hiding what they knew about this Prophet ﷺ, and the sūra has already said, at the hundred and forty-sixth āyah, that a party of them conceal the truth while they know. This āyah is the sentence passed on that conduct.

But the wording is left open, and the earliest generations understood it to be open. Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه said: were it not for an āyah in the Book of Allāh, I would

not have narrated a single ḥadīth to anybody. And then he recited: *truly those who conceal what We sent down of the clear proofs and the guidance.*⁵⁶

Sit with that for a moment. The man who transmitted more of the Sunnah than anybody else says that he would have kept his mouth shut for the rest of his life, and would have preferred to, and that the only thing which moved him to open it was the fear of this āyah. He did not narrate because he enjoyed narrating. He narrated because he had read the punishment for the alternative.

And the Messenger ﷺ made the matter general:

مَنْ سُئِلَ عَنْ عِلْمٍ فَكَتَمَهُ أُجِمَ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ بِلِجَامٍ مِنْ نَارٍ

*Whoever is asked about knowledge and conceals it will be bridled on the Day of Resurrection with a bridle of fire.*⁵⁷

A bridle goes in the mouth. The punishment has been fitted to the organ, and the man who would not open his mouth when it was needed will have it held open with something he cannot bear.

And What ‘Alī Said

Now, before any reader takes the āyah and goes out to empty his head over the first person he meets, the balance. ‘Alī رضي الله عنه said: speak to the people according to what they can understand. Do you want Allāh and His Messenger to be denied?⁵⁸

The two things are not in tension, and a man who thinks they are has not understood either. The concealment which is cursed is the hiding of what a man needs in order to be guided. What ‘Alī رضي الله عنه is warning against is the dumping of what a man cannot yet carry, which will breed doubt in him and may push him into a denial he would never have reached on his own. So the ‘ālim has two duties and they pull in opposite directions and he must hold both. He must not hide the religion. And he must not hand a man a thing which will break him.

And for the ordinary worshipper the application is nearer than he thinks. We do not conceal the Qur’ān; we believe in the whole of it. What we do, and what this āyah touches, is share a version of Islam which has had the difficult parts taken out of it, because we are amongst people we would rather not be embarrassed in front of. That is a kind of concealing, and it is done by people who would never dream of hiding an āyah.

The Curse of Allāh and of the Coursers

The wording of the punishment repays attention. Three things in it.

The first is the shift of person. The āyah has been in the first person: *what We sent down, after We had made it clear*. And then, at the point of the curse, it turns to the third: *upon those is the curse of Allāh*. He steps back and names Himself from a distance. The ‘ulamā’ of balāgha have said that the turn expresses His remoteness from these people, and that the naming of Himself by the name Allāh, which gathers every attribute of majesty and retribution into one word, is heavier here than *My curse* would have been.⁵⁹ The reader will see the opposite movement in the very next āyah and should watch for it.

The second is that Allāh ﷻ does not say who the cursers are. *Wa yal‘anuhum al-lā’inūn*, and those who curse, curse them, and the phrase is left without an identification, so that it takes in whoever curses. Mujāhid رحمه الله said that when the earth is struck with drought the beasts say: this is because of the sinners amongst the children of Ādam; may Allāh curse the sinners amongst the children of Ādam.⁶⁰

Turn that around and you have the other side of the coin, which is the greatest encouragement available to a man who teaches. The one who makes the truth known is the one for whom the whole of creation asks forgiveness, down to the fish in the sea and the ant in its hole.⁶¹ The one who hides it is cursed by the same creation. The same congregation, the same universe, and the direction of the prayer depends entirely on what a man did with what he knew.

The third is that they will curse each other. Allāh ﷻ describes it in Sūrat al-Aḥzāb, where the followers say: our Lord, we obeyed our chiefs and our great men and they led us astray from the way; our Lord, give them a double punishment and curse them with a mighty curse.⁶² The men who hid the knowledge will be cursed by the very people they hid it from, and those people were their following, and they were the reason it was hidden.

إِلَّا الَّذِينَ تَابُوا وَأَصْلَحُوا وَبَيَّنُوا فَاُولَٰئِكَ أَتُوبُ عَلَيْهِمْ وَأَنَا التَّوَّابُ
الرَّحِيمُ

*Except those who repent and put right and make clear; those, I turn to them; and I
am the Ever-Relenting, the Merciful.*

al-Baqara 2:160

And there is the movement the reader was told to watch for. In the āyah of the curse, *the curse of Allāh*, in the third person, from a distance. In the āyah of repentance, *I turn to them, and I am the Ever-Relenting*, in the first person, twice, as near as language can put Him. He is far from the concealer and He is close to the one who comes back, and the grammar is doing the work of a whole sermon.

The door is opened, as it always is, and it has three conditions on it, and the third is the one which distinguishes this repentance from the ordinary kind.

The first is *tābū*, that they repent, which is the remorse, the turning of the back on what was done. The second is *aṣlahū*, that they put right, which is the mending of the man's own conduct, because a repentance which changes nothing is a sentence and not a repentance. And the third is *bayyanū*, that they make clear.

Consider what that third condition is asking. The man's sin was that he hid something. It is not enough for him to stop hiding it, and it is not enough for him to be sorry that he hid it. He has to go out and say the thing he was concealing, in public, to the people he concealed it from. He was a hider; he must now become a caller. Allāh ﷻ is not asking him to undo the sin. He is asking him to reverse it.

There is a rule in that for the rest of us, and it is not a comfortable one. A man whose sin had a public shape has a public repair to make. A man who spread a lie has to spread the truth. A man who put people off the religion by his conduct has to be seen doing something else. Silence is not the opposite of a wrong which was itself a silence.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَمَاتُوا وَهُمْ كُفَّارٌ أُولَٰئِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ لَعْنَةُ اللَّهِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ
وَالنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِينَ

*Truly those who disbelieve and die while they are disbelievers, upon them is the
curse of Allāh, and of the angels, and of all mankind.*

al-Baqara 2:161

خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا لَا يُخَفَّفُ عَنْهُمُ الْعَذَابُ وَلَا هُمْ يُنظَرُونَ

*Abiding in it forever; the punishment will not be lightened for them, and they will
not be given respite.*

al-Baqara 2:162

The door which was opened at the hundred and sixtieth āyah is now shown to have a closing time, and the closing time is death. *And die while they are disbelievers.* Every word of the curse is conditional on that clause. A man is not sentenced for what he was; he is sentenced for what he was still holding when the hand came for him.

Why Forever?

The question is old and honest, and the reader deserves an answer rather than a reproach for asking. How is an endless punishment a just return for a finite life?

The answer the ‘ulamā’ have given from the earliest times is that a man is raised in the state he died in, and that he is judged on what he was, and not merely on the number of years he had to be it in. The disbeliever who dies in kufr dies in a settled and permanent condition. Had he been given a thousand years he would have gone on as he was; had he been returned he would have returned to it, and Allāh ﷻ says exactly this, that if they were sent back they would return to what they were forbidden, and they are liars.⁶³ The permanence of the punishment answers a permanence in him. The shortness of his life was an accident of the world and was never the measure of the thing.

And then the two closing clauses, and they should be read slowly because they take away the two things a man in pain lives on. *The punishment will not be lightened*, so there is no hope of the pain reducing. *Nor will they be given respite*, so there is no hope of a pause. Everything a sufferer in this world holds onto has been removed by name.

May We Curse Them?

The practical question follows from the āyah and it is asked in every masjid, so it should be answered.

A named individual who is still alive may not be cursed. The reason is in the āyah itself: the curse falls on the man who *dies* in that state, and no living man has yet done that, and he may repent tonight and be better than the one cursing him. The Messenger ﷺ was asked to curse the idolaters and said: I was not sent as a curser, and I was sent as a mercy.⁶⁴ And the men he was asked to curse at Uḥud, whose faces were bleeding as he asked, were the fathers of the Companions of tomorrow.

As for a class of people described by their conduct rather than their names, the Qur'ān does it in this very āyah, and the Prophet ﷺ did it in the qunūt, so it is permitted within the limits in which they did it. And the reader should notice where the limits sit. It is permitted to say what Allāh ﷻ said. It is not permitted to enjoy it.

Your God Is One God

وَاللَّهُمَّ إِلَهٌ وَحْدٌ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الرَّحْمَنُ الرَّحِيمُ

And your God is one God; there is no god but He, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful.

al-Baqara 2:163

Two āyahs of curse and eternity, and then this. The reader should notice the habit, because once he has noticed it he will find it everywhere in the Book: wherever a punishment is described, the mercy follows it, and usually within a line.

The Qur'ān is not a book of threats with occasional relief, and it is not a book of comfort with occasional threats. It holds the two together and will not let a man

settle into either. A man who reads only the punishment becomes hard and frightened and eventually cruel. A man who reads only the mercy becomes careless and eventually stops noticing that anything is required of him. So Allāh ﷻ puts the eternal fire and the two names of mercy on the same page, and requires the reader to hold both, and a heart which can hold both is what the Book is trying to produce.

And the two names are not decoration here. He has just described a permanent punishment. He then tells us who imposed it: the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful. The same One. The reader who feels the difficulty in that is feeling the āyah correctly, and the resolution of it is not a formula but a station, and it is reached by a man who has understood that his idea of mercy is a small and sentimental thing and that the Merciful is not obliged to match it.

Signs for a People Who Use Their Reason

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَالْفُلْكِ
الَّتِي تَجْرِي فِي الْبَحْرِ بِمَا يَنْفَعُ النَّاسَ وَمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مِنْ
مَاءٍ فَأَحْيَا بِهِ الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا وَبَثَّ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ دَابَّةٍ وَتَصْرِيفِ
الرِّيَّاحِ وَالسَّحَابِ الْمُسَخَّرِ بَيْنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ
يَعْقِلُونَ

Truly in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of the night and the day, and the ships which run in the sea with what benefits people, and the water Allāh sends down from the sky with which He gives life to the earth after its death, and He has scattered in it every kind of creature, and the turning about of the winds, and the clouds pressed into service between the sky and the earth, are signs for a people who use their reason.

al-Baqara 2:164

The āyah before this one made the claim. This one gives the evidence, and it does not give it from a book. It gives it from the window.

Eight things are named, and the reader should take them one at a time rather than let them run together, because the āyah is long and the eye slides.

The Eight

The creation of the heavens and the earth. Ibn Kathīr رحمه الله pauses here on the two of them together: the sky, with its height and its intricacy and its vastness and the bodies turning in it; and this earth, with its density and its lowlands and its mountains and seas and deserts and valleys and everything useful in it.⁶⁵ The one is a roof we did not build and the other is a floor we did not lay, and a man walks about between them all his life without once being astonished, which is the only strange thing in the whole arrangement.

The alternation of the night and the day. This one comes and then goes and is followed by the other, which does not delay for a moment. And Allāh ﷻ has put the argument to us directly: tell me, if Allāh made the night perpetual over you until the Day of Resurrection, which god other than Allāh could bring you light? Will you not then hear? And tell me, if Allāh made the day perpetual over you until the Day of Resurrection, which god other than Allāh could bring you a night to rest in? Will you not then see?⁶⁶ And of His mercy He made for you the night and the day, that you may rest in it and seek of His bounty, and that you may be grateful.

The ships which run in the sea. The sign is not the ship, which we built. The sign is the sea, which was shaped so that a ship will float on it and travel across it, so that the people of one land can carry to another what they have and bring back what they lack. Every economy that has ever existed has rested on a property of water which nobody arranged.

The water sent down from the sky. And with it, the giving of life to the earth after its death, which is the argument of the resurrection made small enough to watch. Allāh ﷻ says that He sends the winds as good news before His mercy, until, when they have carried heavy clouds, He drives them to a dead land and sends down water and brings out with it every kind of fruit; and then: *thus shall We bring out the dead, that you may take heed.*⁶⁷ A man who has seen a brown field turn green in March and still finds the resurrection unimaginable has not been paying attention to March.

And He has scattered in it every kind of creature. In every shape and colour and size and use, the very small and the very large, and Allāh ﷻ knows every one of them and provides for it, and not one of them is hidden from Him.

The turning about of the winds. And the word is *taṣrīf*, a turning this way and that. Sometimes the wind brings mercy and sometimes it brings punishment. Sometimes it announces the clouds, and sometimes it drives them, and sometimes it scatters them. It comes from the north and it comes from the south, and from the east, striking the face of the Ka'ba, and from the west, striking its back. And Allāh ﷻ says: if He willed, He could still the wind, and they would lie motionless on the surface of it.⁶⁸ Every ship in that clause is at the mercy of a thing which has no substance at all.

The clouds pressed into service between the sky and the earth. *Musakbkhbar*, made to serve. A cloud is water, and water falls, and this water is held up in the air over our heads for as long as it is needed and then let go over the field which needs it. A man who has watched a rain cloud cross a valley has watched something being carried.

Signs for Whom?

And then the closing, which is the point of the whole āyah: *signs for a people who use their reason.*

The signs are not for everybody. They are in front of everybody, and they are signs for the ones who think. Everything in the list is visible to the disbeliever exactly as it is to the believer; the astronomer sees more of the sky than we do and the sailor knows more about the sea. The difference is not in the eyes.

And the āyah in Āl 'Imrān adds what this one leaves out, that these are signs for those of understanding, *who remember Allāh standing and sitting and on their sides, and reflect upon the creation of the heavens and the earth: our Lord, You did not create this in vain; glory be to You, so protect us from the punishment of the Fire.*⁶⁹ There is the method. Remembrance and reflection together, and the reflection ends in a *du'ā* rather than in a theory. A man may look at the stars and come away with an opinion, and a man may look at the stars and come away afraid of the Fire, and the second man has understood the sky.

Rivals Loved as Allāh Is Loved

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَتَّخِذُ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ أَندَادًا يُحِبُّونَهُمْ كَحُبِّ اللَّهِ
وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَشَدُّ حُبًّا لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ يَرَى الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا إِذْ يَرُونَ الْعَذَابَ
أَنَّ الْقُوَّةَ لِلَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعَذَابِ

And amongst the people are those who take rivals besides Allāh, loving them as Allāh is loved; and those who believe are stronger in love for Allāh. If only the wrongdoers could see, when they see the punishment, that all power belongs to Allāh, and that Allāh is severe in punishment.

al-Baqara 2:165

A whole āyah has just been spent on the evidence, and now we are told what men do with it. They look at the sky and the sea and the rain, and then they take a rival.

The word is *andād*, plural of *nidd*, which is not merely a partner. A *nidd* is a peer, an equal, a thing set up as a match for something else. And the word for what is given to it is *ḥubb*, love. Allāh ﷻ did not say that they worship them, or that they bow to them, or that they sacrifice to them. He said they love them the way He is loved, and He treated that as the whole of the offence.

Which lifts the āyah out of the ancient world and puts it in ours. A man reads about the idols of Quraysh and is quite sure the matter does not touch him, because he has never bowed to a stone. But the āyah is not about stones. It is about a rival love.

Where the Sacrifice Goes

Every man has something he will sacrifice for. It is not optional; a man is built that way and cannot help it. So the only question a man ever faces is what the thing is going to be, and he can find out what it is without any introspection at all, by simply looking at what he does.

We are meant to get up in the night for Allāh ﷻ, and we get up in the night to watch a fight. We are meant to be generous to the poor, and we are generous to a season ticket. There is a man who cannot find twenty minutes for the Qur'ān and can find four hours for a match, and it is not that he has decided the match is more

important; he has never decided anything. But the hours have decided for him, and they are on the record.

Your god is the thing which gets you out of bed in the morning. Your love is measured by your sacrifice, and by nothing else, and certainly not by your feelings on the subject, because everybody's feelings about Allāh ﷻ are excellent. The signs of a real love are three, and they can be checked: that a man prioritises the beloved, that he remembers him often, and that he gives things up for him. Take those three to your own week and the answer will be there.

And then the reply: *and those who believe are stronger in love for Allāh*. The idolater's love is divided, because a man with several gods must portion himself out amongst them, and it is spent on things which will fail him besides. The believer's love has one object and therefore all of him, and that is the meaning of *ashaddu hubban*. Not that he feels more strongly. That he is not split.

The Wrongdoers Are the Disbelievers

And *alladhīna ḡalamū*, the wrongdoers, here means the disbelievers, and Allāh ﷻ makes this plain at the end of the passage by saying of these same people that they will not come out of the Fire.⁷⁰ The Qur'ān explains its own vocabulary if a man reads enough of it. Luqmān عليه السلام told his son not to associate anything with Allāh, because shirk is a great wrong.⁷¹ And Allāh ﷻ says: and the disbelievers, they are the wrongdoers.⁷² And He says: and do not call besides Allāh upon what neither benefits you nor harms you, for if you did, you would then be of the wrongdoers.⁷³

Four places, one meaning. The greatest wrong a man can do is not to another man at all.

إِذْ تَبَرَأَ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوا مِنَ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوا وَرَأَوُا الْعَذَابَ وَتَقَطَّعَتْ بِهِمُ
الْأَسْبَابُ

When those who were followed disown those who followed them, and they see the punishment, and every tie between them is cut.

al-Baqara 2:166

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوا لَوْ أَنَّ لَنَا كَرَّةً فَنَتَبَرَّأَ مِنْهُمْ كَمَا تَبَرَّءُوا مِنَّا كَذَلِكَ يُرِيهِمُ اللَّهُ أَعْمَالَهُمْ حَسَرَاتٍ عَلَيْهِمْ وَمَا هُمْ بِخَارِجِينَ مِنَ النَّارِ

And those who followed will say: if only we had a return, that we might disown them as they have disowned us. Thus will Allāh show them their deeds as regrets upon them, and they will not be coming out of the Fire.

al-Baqara 2:167

The scene is the leaders and the led, and it is one of the most repeated scenes in the Qur'ān, which suggests that Allāh ﷻ considers it a thing we need to watch several times before it lands.

The argument runs as it always runs. The weak say to the arrogant: had it not been for you, we would have been believers. And the arrogant say to the weak: did we turn you away from the guidance after it came to you? No, you were criminals yourselves. And the weak say: it was your plotting by night and by day, when you were ordering us to disbelieve in Allāh and to set up rivals to Him. And they will conceal their regret when they see the punishment.⁷⁴

And then Shayṭān stands up and gives the speech which ought to be pinned above every man's bed: when the matter has been decided, Shayṭān will say: Allāh promised you a true promise, and I promised you and I broke it; and I had no authority over you at all, except that I called you and you answered me. So do not blame me, blame yourselves. I cannot help you and you cannot help me. I disbelieve in your having associated me before.⁷⁵

Read the defence he offers. It is not a denial. He admits the whole charge and pleads that it makes no difference. *I called you and you answered me.* That is all he ever did. He has no power to compel, and every man who followed him did so on his own legs, and on the Day when it matters, the one who led us there will point that out in public.

Every Tie Cut

Wa taqaṭṭa'at bihim al-asbāb, and the ties between them are cut. *Asbāb* is the plural of *sabab*, a rope, and it came to mean any connection, any means, any relationship which links one man to another and gets things done. Every one of them is cut on

that Day, and the picture is of a man reaching for the rope which has always been there and finding the end of it in his hand.

And this is what the Qur'ān says of that Day again and again. The criminal will wish he could ransom himself from the punishment of that Day with his sons, and his wife, and his brother, and the kin who sheltered him, and everyone on the earth altogether, if only it would save him.⁷⁶ And when the deafening blast comes, on the Day a man will flee from his brother, and his mother and his father, and his wife and his children; every man amongst them, that Day, will have a concern to occupy him.⁷⁷

The people we spent this life arranging ourselves around will be the first people we run from. Every follower in that scene is a man who once thought he was in good company.

Their Deeds as Regrets

And here is a sentence which should stop a man where he stands. *Thus will Allāh show them their deeds as regrets upon them.*

Not their sins. Their *deeds*, *a'mālahum*, the works they did and were proud of. The whole record will be produced, and it will turn, in front of them, into grief. Allāh ﷻ describes it elsewhere: and the deeds of the disbelievers are like a mirage in a plain, which the thirsty man takes for water until he comes to it and finds it to be nothing.⁷⁸ He runs the whole way. The running was real; the water was not.

And then, *if only we had a return*. Which is the request Allāh ﷻ has already recorded and already answered, in the āyah where He says: until, when death comes to one of them, he says, my Lord, send me back, that I may do righteousness in what I left behind. Never. It is a word he is speaking; and behind them is a barrier until the Day they are raised.⁷⁹

They will be shown the way back and they will not be given it. And the reader is sitting here, on this side of the barrier, with the return they are asking for in his hands, and with the whole of today still in front of him.

Eat of What Is Lawful and Wholesome

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ كُلُوا مِمَّا فِي الْأَرْضِ حَلَالًا طَيِّبًا وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُواتِ
الشَّيْطَانِ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ

O mankind, eat of what is in the earth, lawful and wholesome, and do not follow the footsteps of Shayṭān. He is to you an open enemy.

al-Baqara 2:168

The address is *yā ayyuhā al-nās*, O mankind, and not *yā ayyuhā alladhīna āmanū*. This is one of the passages of the Qur'ān which speaks to everybody, because the benefit in the lawful and the wholesome is not a benefit reserved for Muslims. What a man puts into his body does something to him whether or not he believes anything, and Allāh ﷻ is addressing the human being as such.

The passage has come immediately after the rivals and the idols and the following of leaders into the Fire, and a reader might wonder what food is doing here. The connection is the following of footsteps. The men in the last āyah followed their chiefs into ruin; the men in this one follow Shayṭān one step at a time, and the first place he leads them is the plate.

Two Conditions, Not One

Ḥalālān ṭayyiban. Two words, and we have got into the habit of hearing only the first.

Ḥalāl is the legal condition: that the thing is permitted, that the animal was slaughtered as the Sharī'a requires, that the money which bought it was clean. *Ṭayyib* is something else. Ibn Kathīr رحمه الله defines it as *mustaṭāban fī nafsīhi ghayra ḍārrin li'l-'abdān wa lā li'l-'uqūl*, wholesome in itself, harmful neither to the bodies nor to the minds.⁸⁰

So a thing may be technically lawful and still fail the second word. Food which is certified and is doing damage to a man's body has passed the first test and not the second. Food which fogs the mind has failed it too, and Ibn Kathīr رحمه الله puts the minds in his definition alongside the bodies. The two words are two conditions and

the Qur'an joined them, and a community which has spent thirty years arguing about the first and has never once raised the second has taken half of an āyah.

Why the Stomach Comes First

Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه narrated that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَعَالَى طَيِّبٌ لَا يَقْبَلُ إِلَّا طَيِّبًا، وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ أَمَرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ بِمَا أَمَرَ بِهِ الْمُرْسَلِينَ، فَقَالَ تَعَالَى: يَا أَيُّهَا الرُّسُلُ كُلُوا مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَاعْمَلُوا صَالِحًا، وَقَالَ تَعَالَى: يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُلُوا مِنَ طَيِّبَاتِ مَا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ. ثُمَّ ذَكَرَ الرَّجُلَ يُطِيلُ السَّفَرَ أَشْعَثَ أَغْبَرَ يَمُدُّ يَدَيْهِ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ: يَا رَبِّ! يَا رَبِّ! وَمَطْعَمُهُ حَرَامٌ، وَمَشْرَبُهُ حَرَامٌ، وَمَلْبَسُهُ حَرَامٌ، وَغُذِيَ بِالْحَرَامِ، فَأَنَّى يُسْتَجَابُ لَهُ؟

*Allāh Most High is pure and accepts only what is pure. And Allāh commanded the believers with what He commanded the messengers, and said: O messengers, eat of the good things and do righteous work; and said: O you who believe, eat of the good things We have provided you. Then he mentioned a man who travels long, dishevelled and dusty, stretching out his hands to the sky: my Lord, my Lord! And his food is unlawful, and his drink is unlawful, and his clothing is unlawful, and he has been nourished on the unlawful; so how is he to be answered?*⁸¹

Look at the man in that ḥadīth, because the Messenger ﷺ has stacked the odds in his favour deliberately. He is a traveller, and the traveller's du'ā' is answered. He is dishevelled and dusty, which is the state of a man in need. His hands are raised. He is calling on the Lordship, *yā Rabb*, which is the name of nurture and provision, and he is repeating it. Every door which can be opened for a supplicant has been opened. And then one sentence closes all of them.

And the ḥadīth begins with the reason, which is the finest theological argument in it: *Allāh is pure and accepts only what is pure*. The refusal is not a punishment. It is a consequence of who He is.

Sā'd b. Abī Waqqāṣ رضي الله عنه asked the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ to supplicate that he be made one whose supplications are answered, and he ﷺ said: O Sā'd, make your food pure, and you will be one whose supplication is answered.⁸² He did not tell him to pray more. He told him to check his kitchen.

If You Cannot Govern Your Stomach

And here is the reason the āyah opens the whole passage of commands rather than sitting somewhere near the end. A man who cannot control what goes into his mouth will not control anything else. The stomach is the first appetite and the easiest to satisfy and the one which asks most often, and a man who says yes to it whenever it asks has trained himself, three times a day, in the habit of saying yes. He will then be astonished to find that he cannot say no to his eyes, or to his tongue, or to his temper. He has been practising.

Which is also why the fasting is coming later in this same Juz'. Allāh ﷻ did not begin our training with the hard things. He began it with the plate.

Slaughter, Briefly

The details are the business of the fiqh, and the criteria which the certifying bodies of this country work to are a matter of public record and any reader may go and look at them. In outline, what is being checked is that the animal is of a permitted species and is alive and healthy before the slaughter; that the tasmiya is said by a Muslim over each animal; that the cut is swift and by hand and renders the animal insensible; that at least three of the four vessels of the throat are severed; and that there is no cross-contamination anywhere in the line.⁸³

And a word of restraint, because it is needed more than another argument. A man should be careful about declaring a thing unlawful without knowledge. The sūra will come to this in the eighth Juz', where Allāh ﷻ asks whether He gave them permission, or whether they are inventing lies against Allāh.⁸⁴ It is a heavy business to put a word into the mouth of Allāh ﷻ, and it is as heavy when the word is *forbidden* as when it is *permitted*.

إِنَّمَا يَأْمُرُكُم بِالسَّوِّءِ وَالْفَحْشَاءِ وَأَنْ تَقُولُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

He only commands you to evil and indecency, and that you say about Allāh what you do not know.

al-Baqara 2:169

Three things he asks for, and they are a ladder.

Sū' is anything which distresses a reasonable man, any wrong, any sin of the ordinary kind. *Faḥshā'* is the indecency, the shameless thing, the major sin which a man's own nature recoils from. And then the third, which is higher than either and which the reader should notice is the destination: *that you say about Allāh what you do not know.*

He starts a man with a small wrong and works him upwards, and where he is taking him is to a place where the man will speak in the name of Allāh ﷻ about a matter he has not studied. That is the summit of the whole climb. A man who declares things lawful and unlawful from his armchair, and who has never opened a book of fiqh in his life, thinks he is being pious, and the āyah has just told him whose staircase he is standing on.

And notice the verb: *ya'murukum*, he commands you. Shayṭān has no power to compel and he said so himself, so the command is a suggestion which we have obeyed as though it were a command. He whispers, and he makes the sin look profitable, and he lends a man the courage to do the thing he had already half decided on. Ibn Mas'ūd رضى الله عنه narrated from the Prophet ﷺ that the son of Ādam is approached by a touch from Shayṭān and a touch from the angel; the touch of Shayṭān is the promising of evil and the denying of the truth, and the touch of the angel is the promising of good and the affirming of the truth. So whoever finds the second, let him know that it is from Allāh, and let him praise Allāh; and whoever finds the other, let him seek refuge with Allāh from the accursed Shayṭān.⁸⁵

Both of them are just suggestions. The man is the one who acts. And Shayṭān will stand up on the Day of Judgement and say so.

What We Found Our Fathers Upon

قَالَ
وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ اتَّبِعُوا مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ قَالُوا بَلْ نَتَّبِعُ مَا أَلْفَيْنَا عَلَيْهِ آبَاءَنَا
أَوَّلًا كَانِ آبَاؤُهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَهْتَدُونَ

And when it is said to them, follow what Allāh has sent down, they say: rather, we follow what we found our fathers upon. And even if their fathers understood nothing and were not guided?

al-Baqara 2:170

The answer given in the āyah is one question, and it dismantles the whole position without a word of argument. *And even if their fathers understood nothing?*

Notice what is not being said. Allāh ﷻ does not say that following the fathers is wrong. He asks what the fathers had. The objection is not to the following; it is to the following of men who had nothing to follow. Their forefathers had no revelation, no reasoning, and no guidance, and they were being imitated for one reason, which was that they came first.

And the proof that the following of forefathers is not itself the fault is that the Qur'ān has a prophet doing it, in exactly these words. Yūsuf عليه السلام said in the prison: I have left the way of a people who do not believe in Allāh and who are disbelievers in the Hereafter; and I have followed the way of my fathers, Ibrāhīm and Ishāq and Ya'qūb.⁸⁶ He left one inheritance and took another, and the deciding factor was what the fathers had in their hands.

A Word About Taqlīd

The āyah is quoted in our time against the following of a madhhab, and it will not carry the weight, and the reader should see why in one sentence.

The people in the āyah were following men who had no revelation, against a revelation which had come to them. Taqlīd is the following of men whose whole occupation was the revelation, in order to act upon it. The two are opposites, and they have been made to look alike by putting the word *following* on both.

The ordinary worshipper knows this from his own life without needing the argument. He does not diagnose his own illnesses; he goes to a doctor, and the doctor is not standing between him and medicine, the doctor is how he gets any. The imāms of the madhāhib spent their lives on the Qur'ān and the Sunnah, and what they left us is a settled and tested way of acting on it, in the way that a cooked meal is a way of eating rice. A man is free to grow the rice himself if he has the field and the years. He should not pretend that opening a translation on his phone is the same as having the field.

And there is a question worth putting to the man who rejects the four. What is he proposing instead? He is not proposing that we go without a method. He is proposing a fifth, which is his own, or the one belonging to whoever he is listening to, and it is a method with no centuries behind it and no one to check it. The alternative to a madhhab has never once been no madhhab.

ج
وَمَثَلُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا كَمَثَلِ الَّذِي يَنْعِقُ بِمَا لَا يَسْمَعُ إِلَّا دُعَاءً وَنِدَاءً
صُمُّ بَكُمْ عُمِّي فَهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ

The likeness of those who disbelieve is as the likeness of one who shouts at what hears nothing except a call and a cry: deaf, dumb, blind, so they do not use their reason.

al-Baqara 2:171

The picture is a shepherd calling to his flock. The animals hear a noise and they know that a noise means something is wanted of them, and they move. What they never hear is the words. The man is saying something, and the sound arrives and the meaning does not.

That is what the Qur'ān says is happening when it is recited to a man who has closed himself. The sound reaches him. He can even repeat it. And the three faculties are named and every one of them has been shut: *deaf*, so he cannot hear the call; *dumb*, so he cannot answer it; *blind*, so that even if he wished to come he would not know which way to walk.

And the reader should be careful before he settles this āyah comfortably on somebody else, because the deafness described here is not a defect of the ear. Every man in that image has working ears. The āyah closes with *fabum lā ya'qilūn*, they

do not use their reason, which is the same phrase the āyah of the signs closed with, in the opposite direction. The heavens and the earth are signs for a people who use their reason. And a man who will not use it can be shouted at for a lifetime.

Eat of the Good Things

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُلُوا مِن طَيِّبَاتِ مَا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوا لِلَّهِ إِن
كُنْتُمْ إِيَّاهُ تَعْبُدُونَ

O you who believe, eat of the good things We have provided you, and be thankful to Allāh, if it is He whom you worship.

al-Baqara 2:172

The same instruction as the hundred and sixty-eighth āyah, and now addressed to the believers rather than to mankind, and with one thing added and one thing changed.

What is added is the reminder of the source: *mā razaqnākum*, what *We* have provided you. The believer is not merely told to eat well. He is told whose food it is. And what is changed is the ending, because when Allāh ﷻ addressed mankind He warned them about Shayṭān, and when He addresses the believers He asks them for thanks.

Which is the part we drop. We do the first half of the āyah with great enthusiasm. Most of us eat. Very few of us finish, because the āyah has two commands in it and the second one comes after the plate is empty, at exactly the moment when a man is least inclined to do anything at all. Shukr after eating is the smallest act of worship in the religion and it is the one which is most often skipped, and Allāh ﷻ has attached to it the sentence which should stop us where we are: *if it is He whom you worship*.

And having told us to eat the good things, He now tells us what is not amongst them.

ص
 إِنَّمَا حَرَّمَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَيْتَةَ وَالدَّمَ وَلَحْمَ الْخِنْزِيرِ وَمَا أُهِلَّ بِهِ لِغَيْرِ اللَّهِ
 فَمَنِ اضْطُرَّ غَيْرَ بَاغٍ وَلَا عَادٍ فَلَا إِثْمَ عَلَيْهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

He has forbidden you only carrion, and blood, and the flesh of swine, and what has been dedicated to other than Allāh. But whoever is compelled, neither desiring it nor exceeding, there is no sin upon him. Truly Allāh is Forgiving, Merciful.

al-Baqara 2:173

The word to notice first is *innamā*, only. The list is short. Four items, and a man who has been given the whole earth to eat from has been told that four things are shut to him, and we manage to speak about the religion as though it were the other way around.

The Four

Al-mayta, the carrion, which is the animal that died without a lawful slaughter. And the fuqahā' have been clear that the manner of death does not rescue it: an animal killed by a stun which kills, or by a gun, or by an electric shock, or by a machine, or which dies of itself, is mayta. And it is not only the eating which is forbidden; the buying and the selling of it are forbidden too, so a man who has no use for it should not attempt to recover his money by passing it on. Leave it out for the animals if it is fit for them and let the loss fall where it fell.

Al-dam, the blood, which means the blood which flows out. The blood which remains in the meat after it has been properly drained is not what is meant, and the meat of a bird which has been slaughtered correctly is lawful with what is left in it, as every housewife has always known and as the fuqahā' have always said.

Laḥm al-khinzīr, the flesh of swine, and the 'ulamā' have taken the whole animal, every part of it and every product derived from it, and the word *laḥm* is not a licence to look for a permitted portion.

Wa mā uhillā bihi li-ghayrillāh, what was dedicated to other than Allāh. And the reader should notice that this fourth item is not about the animal at all. The animal may be a perfectly good sheep, killed with a perfectly good knife. What ruins it is a name. Three of the four prohibitions are about the flesh and the fourth is about the

intention, and it is the fourth which is really the subject of the passage, because the passage began with rivals set up beside Allāh ﷻ.

Two Dead Things Made Lawful

The creatures of the sea are outside the list. Ibn ‘Umar رضي الله عنهما narrated:

أُحِلَّتْ لَنَا مَيْتَتَانِ وَدَمَانِ: الْحُوتُ وَالْجَرَادُ، وَالْكَبِدُ وَالطَّحَالُ

*Two dead things have been made lawful to us, and two bloods: the fish and the locust; and the liver and the spleen.*⁸⁷

The Ḥanafīs permit fish on the strength of this, and exclude from it the fish which dies of itself and decomposes and floats on the surface, which is what is called *al-ṭāfi*, and the distinction is a matter of the reports and is set out in the manuals.⁸⁸

The Man Who Is Compelled

And then the exception, with two conditions on it, and the conditions are the whole of it.

Ghayra bāghin, not desiring it. He must not want it. The moment a man begins to take pleasure in the concession, he has left the concession. And *wa lā ‘ādin*, nor exceeding, which means he takes what will keep him alive and not what will satisfy him. Enough, and no more, and then he stops.

The two conditions between them describe a man's inward state during a lawful act, which is a thing the Sharī‘a does more often than we notice. The eating is permitted. The enjoying of it is not. And a religion which can permit a man to eat carrion in a desert and still tell him not to enjoy it is a religion which is interested in something other than the rules.

Selling the Book for a Small Price

لَا
إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَكْتُمُونَ مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَيَشْتَرُونَ بِهِ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا
أُولَئِكَ مَا يَأْكُلُونَ فِي بُطُونِهِمْ إِلَّا النَّارَ وَلَا يُكَلِّمُهُمُ اللَّهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ
وَلَا يُزَكِّيهِمْ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ

Truly those who conceal what Allāh has sent down of the Book and sell it for a small price, those eat nothing into their bellies except the Fire; and Allāh will not speak to them on the Day of Resurrection, nor purify them, and for them is a painful punishment.

al-Baqara 2:174

The link with what came before is the eating, and it is deliberate. Allāh ﷻ has just told the believers what to put in their stomachs, and He now shows them a group of men who put fire in theirs, and the connection is that they made the unlawful lawful and the lawful unlawful and sold the ruling for a price. The warning is placed in a passage about food because that is where the trade in rulings does its business.

Ibn Kathīr رحمه الله explains what they were selling and why. They concealed what was in their Book about this Prophet ﷺ because exposing it would have cost them their position. They were the leaders of a community, and the Arabs around them honoured them on the assumption that the final prophet would come from amongst them, and the day they admitted where he had actually come from was the day the honour and the income stopped.⁸⁹

And the price is called *qalil*, small. Not because the money was little. Some of them were doing well. It is small because of what it was set against, and Allāh ﷻ is doing the arithmetic for us: whatever they got, weighed against what they gave up, is small, and the whole of this world at its highest price is small against a single āyah of guidance.

A Hand Over the Line

The concealing was not always metaphorical. There is a ḥadīth in al-Bukhārī which shows it being done with a hand, and it should be read once because it makes the abstraction physical.

A Jewish man and a Jewish woman were brought to the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ having committed adultery, and he asked them what the punishment was in their Book. They said: our rabbis have made it the blackening of the face and public humiliation. ‘Abdullāh b. Salām رضي الله عنه said: Messenger of Allāh, tell them to bring the Tawrāh. The Tawrāh was brought, and one of them put his hand over the āyah of stoning and read what came before it and what came after it. And Ibn Salām said to him: lift your hand. And he lifted his hand, and the āyah of stoning was underneath it. And the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ ordered that the two be stoned, and they were.⁹⁰

He knew the āyah was there. He knew it well enough to find it in the dark and cover it with his palm while he read fluently around it. And the man who exposed him was a man from his own community who had read the same Book and had made a different decision about it.

That is the whole of these āyahs in one image. A hand over a line. And the reader who thinks he has never done it should ask himself whether there is a passage of the Qur’ān he skips when he is explaining his religion to somebody at work.

Fire in the Belly

The expression is used elsewhere. Allāh ﷻ says: those who devour the wealth of orphans unjustly only devour fire into their bellies, and they will burn in a blaze.⁹¹ And the Messenger ﷺ said of the man who drinks from a vessel of gold or silver that he is only pouring the fire of Hell into his belly.⁹²

The mufasssirūn have understood this in two ways which do not exclude each other: that what a man consumes unlawfully will become fire in him on the Day, so that the thing itself is the punishment; and that what he is doing now, invisibly, already has that nature, and the Day will only show it. A man swallowing something bought with a sold ruling is swallowing fire this evening. He simply cannot feel it yet.

And He Will Not Speak to Them

Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه narrated that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said: three whom Allāh will not speak to on the Day of Resurrection, nor look at, nor purify, and for them is a painful punishment: an old man who fornicates, a king who lies, and a poor man who is arrogant.⁹³

Three men who had no excuse. The old man's appetite had left him and he went and found it. The king had no need to lie, since he could simply command. The poor man had nothing whatever to be arrogant about. Each of them committed a sin which his own condition had already argued him out of, and that is why they are grouped, and it is why the men of this āyah are grouped with them, since a man who has been given the Book has been given the last thing that could be given.

Now, the difficulty. Allāh ﷻ says elsewhere that He will question them: *by your Lord, We shall surely question them all, about what they used to do.*⁹⁴ So there is speech on that Day. The mufasssīrūn have resolved it plainly: the speech which is denied here is the speech of favour, the address of a Lord to a servant He is pleased with. They will be spoken to as a prisoner is spoken to in the dock. What they will not receive is a word of kindness, and it is the kindness which is being withheld, and the withholding of it is the punishment.

ج
أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ اشْتَرَوُا الضَّلَالََةَ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَالْعَذَابَ بِالْمَغْفِرَةِ فَمَا
أَصْبَرَهُمْ عَلَى النَّارِ

Those are the ones who bought error at the price of guidance, and punishment at the price of forgiveness. How patient they are with the Fire!

al-Baqara 2:175

The closing sentence is one of the sharpest in the sūra, and it is a rebuke dressed as astonishment. *Fa-mā aṣbarahum ‘alā al-nār.* How much ṣabr they have for the Fire.

Here is the argument inside it, and every reader should turn it on himself before he turns it on anybody else. A man will tell you that he cannot manage the religion. He cannot manage the Fajr in winter. He cannot manage the fasting with his job. He

cannot manage the lowering of his gaze, or the giving up of the interest on his savings, or the sitting with his relatives who annoy him. He has no ṣabr for any of it, and he says so quite openly and expects sympathy.

And the same man has, apparently, an unlimited ṣabr for the Fire, since he has looked at the two and chosen. So Allāh ﷻ expresses wonder at his endurance. You cannot bear a cold wuḍū' and you can bear that? What a strong man you must be.

The reader should notice that this is the only place in the passage where Allāh ﷻ does not argue. He simply holds the two things up next to each other, and a man who has understood what he has been holding up is not going to need the argument.

ذٰلِكَ بِاَنَّ اللّٰهَ نَزَلَ الْكِتٰبَ بِالْحَقِّ ۚ وَاِنَّ الَّذِیْنَ اٰخْتَلَفُوْا فِی الْكِتٰبِ
لَفِی شِقَاقٍ بَعِیْدٍ

*That is because Allāh sent down the Book with the truth; and those who differ
about the Book are in a distant schism.*

al-Baqara 2:176

The Book came down with the truth, so a difference about it is not a difference of the honest kind. This is not the disagreement of two scholars over a ruling, which the Ummah has always had and which is a mercy. This is *shiqāq*, a splitting, a taking of sides, and the men described here are not confused about the Book. They are in a quarrel with it, and the quarrel has a personal interest underneath it, and the interest is what is blinding them.

And the word to sit with is *ba'īd*, distant. A distant schism. The mufasssīrūn have taken the distance in more than one way and the readings are worth having together. It is a distance from the truth. It is a distance from any prospect of reconciliation, so that the two parties are so far apart that they will never be brought together again. And it is a distance which they made themselves, since Allāh ﷻ has not moved and the Book has not moved and the Ka'ba is where it always was.

A man who is far from Allāh ﷻ in this world is standing exactly where he put himself, and the reader should take the warning in the tense: the distance a man

keeps here is the distance he will find himself at there. Nobody is sent away on that Day who had not already walked.

Righteousness Is Not the Turning of Faces

Before the āyah, a word from Muftī Shafiʿ رحمه الله about where we have arrived, because the sūra is turning here and a reader who does not notice the turn will read the second half of it as though it were the first.⁹⁵

From its beginning to this point, Sūrat al-Baqara has been reaching its halfway mark. Until now the message has been addressed mostly to those who denied it, because the truth of the Qurʾān was the first thing which had to be established. In that setting we were shown those who accepted it and those who rejected it, and then given the proof of the Oneness of Allāh ﷻ and of the prophethood. Then came the favours upon the progeny of Ibrāhīm عليه السلام, running to the āyah of his testing. From there the matter of the Qibla began, and it continued until it was settled, and the status of al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa was named as a sign from Allāh ﷻ. Then the affirmation of the Oneness was followed, as it had to be, by a refutation of shirk in its principles and its branches. Everything so far has been warning, mostly to those who deny, and the Muslims were addressed only as a consequence.

The āyahs which follow contain nearly the other half of the sūra, and there the purpose is to teach the Muslims the principles and the branches of their religion, and any address to the non-Muslim is by implication. And the subject is opened by presenting the idea of *birr*, which is an umbrella word in Arabic for what is good in the absolute sense, and which gathers into itself every act of righteousness and obedience, inward and outward. So the āyah begins by insisting on belief in the Book, and the spending of wealth, and the keeping of promises, and patience in distress, which happen to be the principles behind all the injunctions of the Qurʾān. The articles of belief, the deeds which follow from them, and the character which grows out of both, are the essence of every religious injunction, and every detail falls under one of the three. This one āyah houses all of them.

* لَيْسَ الْبِرُّ أَنْ تَوَلَّوْا وُجُوهَكُمْ قِبَلَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ
 مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالْكِتَابِ وَالنَّبِيِّينَ وَآتَى الْمَالَ
 عَلَى حُبِّهِ ذَوِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسَاكِينَ وَابْنَ السَّبِيلِ وَالسَّائِلِينَ
 وَفِي الرِّقَابِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَى الزَّكَاةَ وَالْمُوفُونَ بِعَهْدِهِمْ إِذَا
 عَاهَدُوا وَالصَّابِرِينَ فِي الْبَأْسَاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَحِينَ الْبَأْسِ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ
 صَدَقُوا وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقُونَ

*Righteousness is not that you turn your faces towards the east and the west.
 Righteousness is the one who believes in Allāh and the Last Day and the angels and
 the Book and the prophets; and gives wealth, despite loving it, to the near of kin and
 the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and those who ask, and for the freeing
 of necks; and establishes the ṣalāh and gives the zakāh; and those who keep their
 agreement when they have made an agreement; and those who are patient in
 hardship and in affliction and at the time of fighting. Those are the ones who have
 been true, and those are the God-fearing.*

al-Baqara 2:177

This is the last word on the change of the Qibla, and it is the word the Companions needed. Allāh ﷻ knew what the turning had cost them. He knew that a community had been made to argue about a direction for a year, and that the direction had begun to fill the whole horizon, and that men were now in danger of thinking that the religion *was* the direction. So He closed the matter by telling them that the facing of a wall was never the point of it.

The parallel is the sacrifice, where He says: their flesh will not reach Allāh, nor their blood, but the taqwā from you reaches Him.⁹⁶ The animal is real and the command is real and the blood is not what is being collected.

Abū al-Āliya رحمه الله said that the Jews faced the west and the Christians faced the east, and Allāh sent down this āyah.⁹⁷ Two communities, each convinced that its

wall was the religion, and the Muslims had just been handed a wall of their own and were about to make the same mistake.

The Word Birr

Birr is a width. It is the goodness which spreads out and takes everything in, and the Arabic uses it for the land as opposed to the sea, for the same reason: it is what is broad. So *birr al-wālidayn* is not one act towards the parents, it is the whole of a man's conduct with them, and the Ḥajj which is accepted is called *mabrūr*, because the goodness has got into every part of it.

Which is why the āyah is the answer to the two kinds of Muslim we all know. There is the ritualist, who is at the masjid for every prayer and whose family are frightened of him. And there is the man of the heart, who tells you that religion is about how you treat people while he has not prayed since Ramaḍān. The āyah takes both of them by the collar. Belief, and then money, and then the ṣalāh, and then the promises, and then the ṣabr in the worst hour. Nobody gets to pick.

What Is Actually in It

Take the list slowly, because it is a definition and every item in it is load-bearing.

Belief in five things: Allāh ﷻ, the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets. That is the creed, and it is put first because nothing which follows it means anything without it.

The giving of wealth, *‘alā ḥubbibi*, despite loving it. The condition is in three words and it changes everything. The giving which counts is the giving which hurts, which is why the Messenger ﷺ said, when asked which charity is greatest in reward: that you give while you are healthy and tight-fisted, fearing poverty and hoping for wealth.⁹⁸ Not the man on his deathbed distributing what he can no longer spend.

And notice the order of the recipients. **The near of kin first.** Before the orphans, before the needy. Your family have the first right over you, and a man who is generous in the masjid appeal and mean to his sister has inverted the āyah. And it is not a lesser deed: the Prophet ﷺ told a man that what he spends on his family is a charity, and if a man intends it as such, it is written for him as such.⁹⁹

Then the orphans, and the sūra has told us before why they come before the poor: the orphan is a child, and a poor man can go out and earn or at least ask, and a child

who has lost his father can do neither and has nobody whose business it is to notice him.

Then the masākīn. Ibn Kathīr رحمه الله defines them as those who do not find what suffices them in their food and their clothing and their housing, and who are therefore to be given what closes that gap.¹⁰⁰ The definition is practical. It is not a category of person; it is a gap, and the instruction is to fill it.

Then the wayfarer, and those who ask. And on the one who asks, the Messenger ﷺ said: the beggar has a right, even if he comes on a horse.¹⁰¹ Which is aimed exactly at what we do, which is to inspect the man's shoes and reach a verdict. The ruling is that the asking creates the right, and what he does with it afterwards is between him and Allāh ﷻ, and the man who was deceived out of a pound was not the one being tested.

And for the freeing of necks, wa fi'l-riqāb, which was the freeing of slaves, and which the 'ulamā have extended to every neck under a weight: the prisoner, the debtor, the man held for a ransom he cannot raise.

Then the ṣalāh and the zakāh, named after the general spending and separately from it, because the general spending is virtue and these two are law, and a man does not discharge an obligation with a donation.

A Change in the Grammar

Now something the reader would miss in a translation and which repays the noticing. Up to this point the āyah has used verbs: *āmana*, he believed; *ātā*, he gave; *aqāma*, he established. And then it changes to nouns of the doer: *al-mūfūna*, the keepers of the agreement; *al-ṣābirīna*, the patient ones.

The verb describes an act. The *ism al-fā'il* describes a man. And the shift is precisely at the point where the āyah stops asking for deeds and starts asking for a character, because a man who keeps his promises on Tuesday and breaks them on Thursday is not a keeper of promises at all. Ṣabr and trustworthiness are not things a man does. They are things he is, or he is not.

And on the promises, the Messenger ﷺ gave the sign of the hypocrite: three, and when he speaks he lies, and when he promises he breaks it, and when he is trusted he betrays. And in another wording: and when he makes an agreement he is treacherous, and when he disputes he is foul.¹⁰²

Then the three ṣabrs: *al-ba'sā'*, hardship, which the mufasssīrūn take as poverty; *al-darrā'*, affliction, which they take as sickness; and *ḥīn al-ba's*, the hour of fighting, when the lines meet. Poverty, illness, and terror. The three places a man's religion actually goes.

Those Are the Ones Who Have Been True

And then the seal, and it is a double one: *ulā'ika alladhīna ṣadaqū*, those are the ones who have been true; *wa ulā'ika hum al-muttaqūn*, and those are the God-fearing.

Imām Abū al-Su'ūd رحمه الله has a remark on this āyah which is worth the price of the commentary. He says that the āyah, as you can see, contains the whole of human perfection, expressly or by implication, because for all its many branches and its scattered concerns it is confined to three things: soundness of belief, good dealing with the servants of Allāh ﷻ, and the disciplining of the self. The first is pointed to by the belief in what is listed; the second by the giving of wealth; the third by the establishing of the ṣalāh and what follows. And that is why those who hold these qualities are described as having been true, with regard to their belief, and as God-fearing, with regard to their dealings with the creation and their conduct with the Truth.¹⁰³ And he closes with the ḥadīth: *whoever acts by this āyah has completed his faith*.

Ibn Kathīr رحمه الله reports that Abū Dharr رضي الله عنه asked the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ what īmān was, and he recited this āyah to him. And he asked again, and he recited it to him again. And he asked again, and he ﷺ said: when you do a good deed and your heart loves it, and you do a bad deed and your heart hates it.¹⁰⁴

The chain is broken and Ibn Kathīr رحمه الله says so, and the meaning is a mercy to anybody who has read the āyah and despaired. The list is long and no man will complete it. And the sign that a man is inside it is not the completing. It is that his heart has taken sides.

In Retribution There Is Life

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْقِصَاصُ فِي الْقَتْلِ ^{صَل} الْحُرُّ بِالْحُرِّ
وَالْعَبْدُ بِالْعَبْدِ وَالْأُنْثَىٰ بِالْأُنْثَىٰ فَمَنْ عَفِيَ لَهُ مِنْ أَخِيهِ شَيْءٌ فَاتَّبَعْ
بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَأَدَاءٌ إِلَيْهِ بِإِحْسَانٍ ذَلِكَ تَخْفِيفٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ وَرَحْمَةٌ
فَمَنْ اعْتَدَىٰ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ فَلَهُ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ

O you who believe, retribution is prescribed for you in the matter of the slain: the free for the free, and the slave for the slave, and the female for the female. But whoever is pardoned anything by his brother, then let there be a following up in what is right and a payment to him with excellence. That is a lightening from your Lord, and a mercy. And whoever transgresses after that, for him is a painful punishment.

al-Baqara 2:178

The reader may be surprised at the turn. We have just had the highest definition of righteousness in the Book, and the very next thing is a homicide.

The connection is exactly that. The āyah of birr gathered belief and worship and money and character into one sentence, and Allāh ﷻ now begins to unpack it, and He begins with the hardest case in any society, which is what to do with a man who has killed. A religion which claims the whole of a man's life has to have an answer here, and the reader should notice that Islam does not hand the question to somebody else. It is holistic and it guides us about everything, and everything includes the mortuary.

The Word Akhīhi

Now the word which the ordinary reader should carry away from this āyah, because it is doing more work than the rulings around it.

The killer has just taken a man's life. The victim's family are standing in front of the Prophet ﷺ and they have the right of retribution in their hands. And Allāh ﷻ describes the pardon in these words: *whoever is pardoned anything by his brother.*

His brother. The man who killed him is called the brother of the family who are about to decide his fate. Allāh ﷻ has put the word into the sentence at the exact moment when the pardon is being considered, and He has done it because a man will not pardon a monster and he might pardon a brother. The word is placed there to make the mercy possible, and it costs Allāh ﷻ nothing to have placed it there and it may cost a man his life to have missed it.

That is the temper of the whole passage. The right is confirmed and the pardon is made attractive, and then the pardon is given a procedure so that it does not turn into a second quarrel: *let there be a following up in what is right and a payment to him with excellence*. The family who accept the blood money must ask for it decently, and the man who owes it must pay it well and promptly. Both sides are told to behave, because the ‘ulamā’ have seen what happens next, and what happens next is a family which pardoned a killing and then fell out over the instalments.

And *that is a lightening from your Lord, and a mercy*. The permission to take blood money is a concession to a community which the earlier communities did not have in the same way, and Ibn Kathīr رحمه الله notes it as a mercy of Allāh ﷻ upon this Ummah, that the door was opened between the two.¹⁰⁵

وَلَكُمْ فِي الْقِصَاصِ حَيَاةٌ يَا أُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

And in retribution there is life for you, O people of understanding, so that you may become God-fearing.

al-Baqara 2:179

Six words of Arabic which the Arabs themselves recognised as beyond them. Their own proverb on the subject was *al-qatlu anfā li'l-qatl*, killing is the greatest deterrent to killing, and it was admired for its brevity. Set the two beside each other and the difference is not decoration. Their sentence has killing twice in it and nothing else. This one puts *life* in the middle of a ruling about death, and says the thing they were reaching for and says more of it in fewer letters.

And the argument is one which every generation has to work out again. A man looks at the law of retribution and calls it harsh. And the āyah answers, without arguing: there is *life* in it. Whose life? The life of the man who would have been the

next victim and now will not be. The life of the killer himself, who did not kill because he knew what it would cost him. The life of the whole community, which is not being torn apart by the blood feud, because when the law does not take the matter in hand the family does, and a family which takes the matter in hand does not stop at one.

The *alternative* to this law is not a society in which nobody dies. It is a society in which the dying is unregulated. That is the reckoning the āyah is asking us to do, and it addresses itself to *ulī al-albāb*, the people of understanding, which is a plain statement that you will have to think in order to see it. The heart says harsh. The intellect, if it is used, says life. And Allāh ﷻ has told us which faculty to use before we form a view.

And the closing: *so that you may become God-fearing*. That is what the whole apparatus is for. Not order, and not deterrence, though it produces both. Taqwā.

The Bequest and What Follows Death

كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذَا حَضَرَ أَحَدُكُمُ الْمَوْتُ إِن تَرَكَ خَيْرًا الْوَصِيَّةَ
لِلْوَالِدَيْنِ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ حَقًّا عَلَى الْمُتَّقِينَ

Prescribed for you, when death comes to one of you and he leaves behind good, is the bequest to the parents and the near of kin, in what is right; a duty upon the God-fearing.

al-Baqara 2:180

The link with what came before is money and death, and it is direct. The previous āyahs dealt with a man who has been killed. This one asks the question which the family will be asking within the week: what happens to what he left?

And the first word is *kutiba*, it is prescribed, the same word which opened the retribution and which will open the fasting in three āyahs' time. It is the word of obligation, and the reader should notice the company it is keeping. The writing of a will is being placed in a list with the *ṣiyām*.

Wealth Is Called Khayr

In taraka khayran, if he leaves behind good. Allāh ﷻ called the money *khayr*. The Qur'ān is quite capable of calling wealth a trial and a distraction and a thing which makes a man rebel, and here, in the context of leaving it behind properly, it is called good. Wealth is not the difficulty. What a man does with it is the difficulty, and a man who has left his family provided for and his affairs in order has left behind a good.

Advice Before Money

And the 'ulamā' have noted the shape of the word *waṣiyya* itself, because it is not the word for a distribution. A *waṣiyya* is an instruction, a counsel, and the wills the Qur'ān actually records for us are not about property at all. Ya'qūb عليه السلام gathered his sons at his death, and the sūra has already given us the scene in the first Juz', and what he asked them was: what will you worship after me? Ibrāhīm عليه السلام enjoined it upon his sons, and Ya'qūb: my sons, Allāh has chosen the religion for you, so do not die except as Muslims.¹⁰⁶

He did not mention the flocks. A man on his deathbed with a house full of sons spoke about the one thing he could not leave them in a bank, and the ordinary worshipper who is writing his will this year should ask himself whether his own document says anything at all about what he actually cared about.

Was It Abrogated?

The āyah is one of the standing questions of the tafsīr, and the reader should have the three positions.

The first, which is reported from Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنهما, is that it was abrogated by the āyahs of inheritance in Sūrat al-Nisā': *for the men a share of what the parents and near relatives leave, and for the women a share of what the parents and near relatives leave, whether it be little or much, a fixed share*.¹⁰⁷ Allāh ﷻ Himself fixed the shares, and once He had fixed them a man could no longer bequeath to his parents or his heirs beyond what the Sharī'a states. And the Sunnah sealed it: 'Amr b. Khārija رضي الله عنه heard the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ say in a khuṭba: Allāh has given every possessor of a right his right, so there is no bequest to an heir.¹⁰⁸

The second, which is al-Rāzī's رحمه الله, is that there is no abrogation here at all, and that the āyahs of inheritance explain this one rather than remove it.¹⁰⁹

The third is the middle ground, and it is where most of the ‘ulamā’ have settled and where the reader will find it easiest to stand. The particular instruction, that a man must bequeath to his parents, is no longer in force, because their shares are now fixed and cannot be added to. The general theme is entirely in force, that a man should leave something for the relatives who will not inherit, up to a third of his estate. So the āyah is not a dead letter in the Book. It is the licence for the third, and every will written by a Muslim today is written on the authority of this āyah.

A Note on the Third

The limit is from the Sunnah, and it was set in a conversation which is worth having in full because of who was in it. Sa’d b. Abī Waqqāṣ رضى الله عنه was ill, and he said: Messenger of Allāh, I have wealth, and only one daughter to inherit from me. Shall I bequeath two thirds of my wealth? He said: no. He said: then a half? He said: no. He said: then a third? He said: a third, and a third is a lot. And then he said the sentence which the ordinary worshipper needs more than the ruling:

إِنَّكَ أَنْ تَذَرَ وَرَثَتَكَ أَغْنِيَاءَ خَيْرٌ مِنْ أَنْ تَذَرَهُمْ عَالَةً يَتَكَفَّفُونَ النَّاسَ

*That you leave your heirs wealthy is better than that you leave them destitute, begging from people.*¹¹⁰

A Companion of the Messenger ﷺ wanted to give two thirds of his estate to charity and was told no, twice. And Ibn ‘Abbās رضى الله عنهما looked at that ḥadīth and said: if only people would come down from the third to the quarter, for the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said, *a third, and a third is a lot.*¹¹¹

In What Is Right

And the bequest must be *bi’l-ma’rūf*, in what is right, which the fuqahā’ have explained as: no wrong to anybody, not excessive, not too little. A man may not use his third as a weapon. He may not use it to punish a son he fell out with in 1998, or to correct what he considers an unfairness in the shares Allāh ﷻ fixed, and any man who reads the fixed shares and reaches for his pen to improve them should read the next āyah before he starts.

The Arab poet said that the wrong done by relatives is more bitter than the fall of a well-tempered Indian blade upon a man, and he was talking about exactly this, that a man will take from a stranger what he cannot take from his own brother.¹¹²

The Aḥādīth on the Matter

Ibn ‘Umar رضي الله عنهما narrated that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said: it is not right for a Muslim man who has anything to bequeath to pass two nights without having his will written with him. And Ibn ‘Umar said: not a night has passed over me, since I heard the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ say that, except that my will has been with me.¹¹³

Two nights. That is the outside limit the Messenger ﷺ gave, and Ibn ‘Umar رضي الله عنهما did not even take the two; he kept it under his pillow for the rest of his life. And the reader should count the nights he has passed.

And a ḥadīth qudsī which is a mercy: Allāh Most High says: son of Ādam, two things, neither of which was yours. I made for you a share in your wealth at the moment I took you by the throat, so that I might purify you and cleanse you with it; and the prayers of My servants over you after your term has ended.¹¹⁴

The third is a gift. At the moment when everything is being taken away from a man, he is handed a portion of it back and told to spend it, and the spending is a purification. The will is not an administrative task. It is the last act of worship a man performs with his money, and most of us die without performing it.

What Actually Has to Happen

The gathering asked for the practical order, and it is worth setting down, because a family in the first week after a death is in no condition to work it out and will do whatever the loudest person in the room says.

The estate pays, in this order. First the funeral costs: the funeral directors, if there is no community group to take charge of the arrangements; the cost of the kafn, if the deceased did not have one ready; the cost of the ghusl, if the masjid charges for it; and the cost of the grave and the boards, which is arranged with the cemetery. Then the clearance of debts, and the reader should notice what counts as a debt: the unpaid bills, and the mahr if it was never given, and the fidya for the acts of worship which were missed, where that applies. Then the execution of the will, up to a third. And then the distribution of the inheritance according to the fixed shares, which is the remaining two thirds, and over which the deceased had no say at all.

All of that comes out of the estate. Family and friends may choose to pay for some of it themselves, and it is a fine thing to do and a rewarding one, and it is not an obligation and nobody should be made to feel that it is.

Do You Know What You Own?

Ask yourself a question which sounds foolish and is not. Who owns your house? Who owns the family car, the mobile, the computer on the kitchen table, the furniture? A man will say *we* own it, and *we* is not a category the Shari'a recognises when it comes to distributing an estate.

Why does it matter? Because where the ownership is not clear, the disputes arrive within days. Somebody will lay a claim to a share in the car, or the business, or the house, and there will be no document and no witness and the whole thing will turn on who remembers what. And there is a nearer question than that one, which is: how have you been calculating your zakāh, if you do not know what is yours?

And why do we not discuss it? Because the thought of death and of being separated from the people in the room terrifies us, and because a man who raises the subject is afraid of being thought greedy, or of being thought not to trust his own family. So we say nothing, and we proceed on an assumption which is steeped in ignorance of the Shari'a, which is that the spouse will simply get everything.

What now? Identify your assets and your liabilities and put them in a document. Learn to have the difficult conversation, because it is a great deal less difficult than the one your children will have without it. And ask yourself the plain question: if you were to die tonight, have you left, in one place, the information which makes clear what you own, so that there is no ambiguity for the heirs and no room for a dispute? If not, then the answer is not to feel bad about it. The answer is to do it this week.

Ownership lasts until the deathbed. That is the whole of the matter, and it is why the discussion frightens us, and it is why it cannot be avoided.

Debts

Keep a paper trail of every debt you owe, and let your family know where it is. This is a religious obligation before it is a practical convenience, and it happens also to be what the tax authorities of this country require, because a debt which cannot be evidenced will not be deducted from the estate and your heirs will pay tax on money you did not have.

If your family do not know what you owed, they should make an announcement at the funeral, so that anybody who is owed anything can come forward. It is not a pleasant thing to do and it is a great deal better than the alternative.

And the reason for the seriousness is in the Sunnah. Muḥammad b. ‘Abdullāh b. Jaḥsh رضي الله عنه said: we were sitting with the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ when he raised his head to the sky, then put his palm on his forehead and said: *subḥānallāh*, what a severe thing has been sent down! We fell silent and were alarmed. And the next day I asked him: Messenger of Allāh, what was this severe thing which was sent down? And he said:

وَالَّذِي نَفْسِي بِيَدِهِ، لَوْ أَنَّ رَجُلًا قُتِلَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ أُحْيِيَ، ثُمَّ قُتِلَ، ثُمَّ أُحْيِيَ، ثُمَّ قُتِلَ، ثُمَّ أُحْيِيَ، ثُمَّ قُتِلَ، وَعَلَيْهِ دَيْنٌ، مَا دَخَلَ الْجَنَّةَ حَتَّى يَقْضَى عَنْهُ دَيْنُهُ

*By the One in whose hand is my soul, if a man were killed in the way of Allāh and then brought to life, and then killed, and then brought to life, and then killed, and he had a debt upon him, he would not enter the Garden until his debt was paid for him.*¹¹⁵

Three martyrdoms, and the debt is still standing. And the Messenger ﷺ would refuse to lead the janāza of a man who had died owing money for which no arrangement had been made, until somebody stood up and took it on.¹¹⁶ He did not do this to shame the dead. He did it so that the living would understand what they were looking at.

Inheritance in Islam

A short word on the system itself, because the ordinary worshipper in this country is living under two laws and often knows neither.

The shares are dictated by the Qur’ān and the Sunnah, and the general principles, which change with every particular case, are contained in some fourteen āyāhs of Sūrat al-Nisā’. There is no hierarchy of the kind English law has, in which a whole class must be exhausted before the next is considered. The closest relatives inherit, and only in their absence do the more distant ones come in, and it happens automatically.

The written will is a maximum of one third of the estate. The other two thirds are fixed, they belong to your family, and you cannot bequeath them to anybody else. And the order matters: the two thirds are distributed *after* the will has been fulfilled.

A man who has understood that has understood why the Sharī'a is so severe about the will. The third is the only part he controls, and it is the only part he will be asked about.

Last-Minute Wills

And a warning which needs to be said plainly, because a great deal of harm is done here by people who meant well.

A will made on the deathbed is not binding in the Sharī'a. Gifts given on the deathbed are not binding either. A gift to an heir would need the approval of all the remaining adult heirs after the person's death, and their approval before the death is of no consequence at all, because at that point they were not yet heirs and had nothing to approve. So the conversation in the hospital in which everybody agreed is worth nothing on the day it matters.

Which is why the will must be written beforehand, and why the Messenger ﷺ, when a man asked him which charity was greatest in reward, answered him in these words:

أَنْ تَصَدَّقَ وَأَنْتَ صَحِيحٌ شَحِيحٌ، تَخْشَى الْفَقْرَ وَتَأْمُلُ الْغِنَى، وَلَا تُتَمَهِّلُ حَتَّى إِذَا بَلَغَتْ
الْحَلْقُومَ قُلْتَ: لِفُلَانٍ كَذَا وَلِفُلَانٍ كَذَا، وَقَدْ كَانَ لِفُلَانٍ

*That you give charity while you are healthy and tight-fisted, fearing poverty and hoping for wealth; and that you do not delay until, when the soul reaches the throat, you say, so much for so-and-so and so much for so-and-so, when it already belonged to so-and-so.*¹¹⁷

The last clause is the sting. *It already belonged to so-and-so.* The man at the end is distributing what is no longer his to distribute. He is being generous with the property of his heirs, and he feels wonderful about it, and Allāh ﷻ has already assigned every pound of it to somebody else.

فَمَنْ بَدَّلَهُ بَعْدَ مَا سَمِعَهُ فَإِنَّمَا إِثْمُهُ عَلَى الَّذِينَ يُبَدِّلُونَهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

And whoever alters it after he has heard it, its sin is only upon those who alter it.

Truly Allāh is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.

al-Baqara 2:181

The dead man is safe. He said what he had to say, and the sin of the alteration falls on the man who altered it, and the reader should notice how carefully the responsibility has been placed, because it is a principle with a very long reach.

The wrong belongs to whoever did it. If the deceased wrote an unjust will, the sin is his. If he wrote a just one and the family carved it up in the kitchen after the funeral, the sin is theirs and he is not touched by it. Allāh ﷻ does not distribute the blame by proximity.

And the practical form of this rule in our own time is the fatwā. If a man goes to a muftī and misrepresents his situation, and receives a ruling which suits him, the muftī is not accountable and the man has gained nothing whatever, because the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said it about his own judgements:

فَمَنْ قَضَيْتُ لَهُ بِحَقِّ أَخِيهِ شَيْئًا فَلَا يَأْخُذْهُ، فَإِنَّمَا أَقْطَعُ لَهُ قِطْعَةً مِنَ النَّارِ

*So whoever I rule in favour of, in something belonging to his brother, let him not take it; for I am only cutting off for him a piece of the Fire.*¹¹⁸

The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ himself. If his judgement, obtained by a good argument on false facts, does not transfer ownership, then no muftī's letter is going to. A man who has cleverly obtained a ruling has obtained a document. He has not obtained the money.

And the seal: *Allāh is All-Hearing, All-Knowing*. He heard what was said, and He knows what was intended by it, and the two names between them cover the whole of what a man can hide. Your plans, your arrangements, the reasoning you gave the muftī and the reasoning you gave yourself, and the desire at the bottom of your heart which you have never once put into words.

ج
فَمَنْ خَافَ مِنْ مَوْصٍ جَنَفًا أَوْ إِثْمًا فَأَصْلَحَ بَيْنَهُمْ فَلَا إِثْمَ عَلَيْهِ إِنَّ
اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

But whoever fears from a testator a leaning or a sin, and puts things right between them, there is no sin upon him. Truly Allāh is Forgiving, Merciful.

al-Baqara 2:182

The previous āyah forbade the altering of a will, and a reader might have concluded that a will is untouchable whatever is in it. This one opens the door for the one case where it must be touched.

Two words are used, and they are two different problems. *Janaf* is a leaning, an unintentional tilt, an error of the ordinary sort, a man who miscounted or misremembered or misunderstood the law. *Ithm* is a sin, which is the deliberate wronging of somebody. The first is a mistake and the second is a crime, and the āyah covers both, because a family which is being wronged by an error is being wronged just the same.

And the man who steps in and sets it right is not an alterer. He is a *muṣliḥ*, and the word is the word Allāh ﷻ uses for the repairers of things, and he is told that there is no sin on him. That permission is needed, because otherwise the previous āyah would have frozen every executor in the country.

Sixty Years

Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه narrated that the Prophet ﷺ said: a man may work in the obedience of Allāh for sixty years, and then, when death comes to him, he causes harm in his will, and the Fire becomes due for him. And then Abū Hurayra recited: *after a bequest which is made, or a debt, without harm being caused; a bequest from Allāh.*¹¹⁹

Sixty years. Read that again slowly. A lifetime of obedience, and a document signed in the last month of it, and the whole account is turned over. And notice that the man in the ḥadīth is not an evil man. He is a worshipper. He spent sixty years at it. What he did at the end was to arrange his money in a way which harmed somebody, and he probably had reasons which sounded excellent to him, and possibly he thought he was correcting an injustice.

And the reason it costs him everything is worth putting plainly. The Garden is an inheritance. Allāh ﷻ calls it that: *those are the inheritors, who shall inherit* Firdaws.

¹²⁰ A man who spends his last strength cutting somebody off from an inheritance should not be surprised at what he is cut off from.

And the principle reaches past the will, as Muftī Shafī رحمه الله notes, into every arrangement a man makes with other people. You make a contract. It is lawful. You are entitled to what is in it. And you look at it again and see that a clause of it is going to hurt somebody, and you improve it so that it does not, and Allāh ﷻ calls

that iṣlāḥ and takes the sin off you.¹²¹ The Shari‘a is not asking for the minimum. It is asking a man, at every point where he holds an advantage, to put the thing right.

Fasting Is Prescribed for You

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ
قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may become God-fearing.

al-Baqara 2:183

A whole way of teaching is contained in the second clause, and the reader should have it before anything else.

Allāh ﷻ could have said: fasting is prescribed for you. Full stop. It is His command and He owes no explanation to anybody. Instead He added: *as it was prescribed for those before you*. Why? Because a man who is told to do a hard thing wants to know that it can be done. The clause is not a piece of history. It is an encouragement, and it says: this is not a new burden invented for you; people have carried it, ordinary people, in every community, and they managed, and so will you.

This is the psychology of the Qur’ān and it appears everywhere once a man starts looking. And there is a maxim of the fuqahā’ which points the same way: *idhā ‘ammat al-balwā khaffat*, when a difficulty becomes general, it becomes lighter. A thing everybody is doing is easier than the same thing done alone, which every Muslim in this country knows from the difference between fasting in Ramaḍān and making up a missed fast in October.

And notice the mercy in the frequency, which we never mention. The ṣiyām is farḍ once a year. It is not a daily obligation like the ṣalāḥ. Allāh ﷻ asks for a month and gives us eleven.

So That You May Become God-Fearing

And the purpose is stated in the last word, and it is the only purpose named. Not health. Not discipline. Not solidarity with the poor, which is a fine thing and is not what the āyah says. *Taqwā*.

And the logic of the training is exact. For a month a man stays away from things which are entirely lawful: his own food, his own water, his own wife. Nobody would blame him for taking any of them, and at four in the afternoon nobody would even know. And when he has spent thirty days proving to himself that he can stand back from the lawful, the argument is finished. He can no longer tell himself that he is unable to stand back from the unlawful. He has just done something harder for a month.

A Word on *Taqwā*

The word is one of the most important in the religion and one of the most badly served in English, so it is worth setting out properly, since the gathering asked for it and since the whole of Ramaḍān is aimed at it.

It comes from the root *waqā, yaqī*, to protect, to shield, to guard against. So *taqwā* is a protection a man builds around himself, and the word says nothing about fear at all in its origin. Some translate it as the fear of Allāh ﷻ, and fear is one aspect of it and it is not the whole, and the translation has done a great deal of harm, because it has produced a generation which thinks the religion is about being frightened.

Here is a nearer picture. *Taqwā* is the reason a man does not disobey his father. It is not that he expects to be hit. He is a grown man and his father is old. It is that he cannot bear the displeasure, whatever the displeasure would lead to, and the feeling comes from reverence and not from fright. That is the temper of it.

Or take it from the road. *Taqwā* is not driving through a red light at three in the morning on an empty street with no police in sight, because you know there is a camera and you know that the letter will arrive. It is the awareness that the thing is being recorded and that a day is coming when the record will be read out.

Allāh ﷻ says: *and He is with you wherever you are.*¹²² He is not absent and He is not missing. What is absent is our awareness of Him. He is with us at every step and we are away from Him at every moment, and *taqwā* is the closing of that gap. It is a state of alertness against slipping into a sin through simple carelessness, the

condition of a man who is always on guard and never quite off duty, and who is therefore never quite alone.

And the definition which settles it is 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz's رحمه الله: taqwā is not by praying all night and fasting all day; it is by leaving what Allāh has forbidden and doing what Allāh has commanded, and whatever is given beyond that is a good on top of a good.¹²³

Take that to the man who prays all night in Ramaḍān and is short in his weights all year. The nights are a good on top of a good. The weights are the taqwā, and he does not have any.

What the Qur'ān Says the Muttaqī Looks Like

The reader need not speculate about the word, because the Book defines its own vocabulary if a man will gather the places.

At the opening of this sūra: *a guidance for the God-fearing*, and then the description: those who believe in the unseen, and establish the ṣalāh, and spend out of what We have provided them, and believe in what was sent down to you and what was sent down before you, and are certain of the Hereafter.¹²⁴

In Āl 'Imrān: *a Garden whose breadth is the heavens and the earth, prepared for the God-fearing*, and then: those who spend in ease and in hardship, and who swallow their rage, and who pardon people; and Allāh loves the doers of good.¹²⁵ Read the list. Spending in the bad times as well as the good. Swallowing anger. Forgiving people. Every one of them is about somebody else.

In al-Anbiyā': *and We gave Mūsā and Hārūn the criterion, and a light and a reminder for the God-fearing*, and then: those who fear their Lord in the unseen, and who are apprehensive of the Hour.¹²⁶

In al-Zumar: *and the one who brought the truth and confirmed it, those are the God-fearing*.¹²⁷

And the promise: *truly Allāh is with those who are God-fearing and those who do good*.¹²⁸

The Girl With the Milk

And the story which teaches it better than any of the definitions, and which the ordinary worshipper never forgets once he has heard it.

‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb رضى الله عنه was leaning against a wall at night when he overheard a mother and her daughter. The daughter had brought in the milk for the day and it was less than expected, and the mother told her to mix water with it to make it go further. The girl objected and reminded her mother that the Khalifa ‘Umar had forbidden the mixing of milk with water for sale. The mother said that ‘Umar was not here and nobody would know. And the girl said: I cannot obey Allāh in public and disobey Him in private.

‘Umar رضى الله عنه went home and sent to find out about her, and when he learned that she was unmarried he offered her to his sons, and his son ‘Āṣim, who had not yet married, came forward and married her. And ‘Āṣim and his wife had a daughter, and that daughter married ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, and from the two of them came ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz رحمه الله.¹²⁹

The girl whose taqwā we have just quoted a definition from is the great-grandmother of the man who gave the definition. He got it from her. And her taqwā was a single sentence said in a dark room to her own mother, with nobody listening except the Khalifa, who was not the one she was worried about.

And there is the poet’s summary, which is worth memorising:

خَلَّ الذُّنُوبَ صَغِيرَهَا وَكَبِيرَهَا ذَاكَ التَّقَى
وَأَصْنَعَ كَمَا شِئَ فَوْقَ أَرْضِ الشَّوْكِ يَحْذَرُ مَا يَرَى
لَا تَحْقِرَنَّ صَغِيرَةً إِنَّ الْجِبَالَ مِنَ الْحَصَى

*Leave the sins, the small of them and the great of them; that is taqwā. And be like a man walking over ground full of thorns, wary of what he sees. And never think a small thing small: the mountains are made of pebbles.*¹³⁰

What He Gives for It

And the reader should know what is on the other side of the ledger, because Allāh ﷻ has been generous in naming it. *And whoever fears Allāh, He makes for him a way out, and provides for him from where he does not reckon.*¹³¹ *And whoever fears Allāh, He makes his affair easy for him.*¹³² *And whoever fears Allāh, He will remove his evil deeds from him and magnify his reward.*¹³³

A way out of what he is stuck in. Provision from an account he did not know existed. Ease in his affairs. His sins removed and his wage increased. Four things, in three āyahs, all of them hanging on one word.

And a Word About Happiness

Ramaḍān teaches us something which the whole of the modern world is arranged to prevent us from learning, and it teaches it by accident, and the ordinary worshipper notices it every year and never says it out loud.

On a normal day we eat several times and we do not look forward to any of it. In Ramaḍān we eat once and we look forward to it all day. We have less, and we are happier. That is the whole lesson, delivered without a sermon, and it is available to a man for thirty days a year: happiness has never once been about quantity, and the proof is on his own kitchen table at Maghrib.

ج
أَيَّامًا مَّعْدُودَاتٍ فَمَنْ كَانَ مِنْكُمْ مَّرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَى سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِنْ أَيَّامٍ
أُخْرٍ وَعَلَى الَّذِينَ يُطِيقُونَهُ فِدْيَةٌ طَعَامُ مِسْكِينٍ فَمَنْ تَطَوَّعَ خَيْرًا فَهُوَ
خَيْرٌ لَهُ وَأَنْ تَصُومُوا خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ

For a number of days. So whoever amongst you is ill or on a journey, then a number of other days. And upon those who can hardly bear it is a ransom: the feeding of a needy man. And whoever does good of his own accord, it is better for him; and that you fast is better for you, if you only knew.

al-Baqara 2:184

The first words are a consolation, and they are placed before any of the rulings. *Ayyāman ma'dūdāt*, a number of days. Counted days. Days you could count on your fingers if you wanted to.

The obligation has just been announced and Allāh ﷻ immediately tells us that it has an end, and that the end is near, and that we will be able to see it from the beginning. He knows the human being. Tell a man that a hardship is permanent and he will not start; tell him it is thirty days and he will get up in the morning.

The Concessions

Then the two excuses, and the reader should notice how quickly they arrive. The command has barely been given and the exemptions are already being read out.

The *marīḍ*, the ill man, and the *musāfir*, the traveller, both make up the days later. And on the traveller, the ruling of the Ḥanafīs is that a man is a traveller for this purpose if he is not at home at the time of the ṣaḥar and will be a traveller in the legal sense that day, and the details belong to the fiqh.¹³⁴

And the wideness of the door for the sick man should be looked at, because we are harder on ourselves than the Sharīʿa is, and then harder on other people than we are on ourselves. Ḥamza b. ʿAmr al-Aslamī رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ asked the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ about fasting on a journey and he said:

إِنْ شِئْتَ فَصُمْ، وَإِنْ شِئْتَ فَأَفْطِرْ

*If you wish, fast; and if you wish, do not fast.*¹³⁵

And when he saw a man on a journey surrounded by a crowd who were shading him, and asked what was wrong, and was told that the man was fasting, he said:

لَيْسَ مِنَ الْبِرِّ الصَّيَامُ فِي السَّفَرِ

*It is not righteousness to fast on a journey.*¹³⁶

The ʿulamāʾ have read that in its setting, which is a man whose fast had put a crowd of people to trouble on his behalf. Which is the point worth taking home: the concession is widest exactly where the insistence would begin to cost other people something.

A Detail in the Wording

And Muftī Shafīʿ رحمه الله draws out something from the phrasing which a reader would not find on his own. Allāh ﷻ could have said simply that their replacement is upon them. Instead the wording is *fa-iddatun min ayyāmin ukhar*, a number of other days, which suggests days which will come, days the man will live to see. So the qaḍāʾ becomes due when the sick man is well and the traveller is home and has the days in front of him. A man who dies before that happens does not owe the fasts, and no bequest for a fidya is required of him.¹³⁷

Those Who Can Hardly Bear It

Wa 'alā alladbīna yuṭīqūnahu fidyatun ṭa'āmu miskīn.

Salama b. al-Akwa' رضي الله عنه said: when this āyah was revealed, whoever wished to break his fast did so and paid the fidya, until the āyah after it was revealed and abrogated it.¹³⁸ So in the earliest days of the ruling a man had a choice: fast, or feed a poor man for each day. Then the choice was withdrawn and the fasting became binding.

And yet the clause is not a dead letter, and the 'ulamā' have kept it alive in the reading which the Arabic supports. *Yuṭīqūnahu* is from a form which carries the sense of a thing done at the very limit of a man's strength, so it describes the man who can just barely manage it and no more. Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنهما read it as *lā yuṭīqūnahu*, and the 'ulamā' of the language have called this the *salb al-ma'nā*, the taking of the negative sense from the form itself. On that reading the clause is still in force for the elderly and the chronically ill, the man who will never be well enough to make the days up, and he feeds a poor man for each day and that is his fast.¹³⁹

Three Changes

Mu'adh b. Jabal رضي الله عنه described the whole development, and it is worth having in one place because it shows how the community was brought along.¹⁴⁰ The fasting came in three stages. First, the three days of each month and the day of 'Āshūrā', which was the practice before Ramaḍān was given. Then Ramaḍān, with the choice of fasting or paying the fidya. Then Ramaḍān without the choice, and the fidya kept back for the man who genuinely cannot. And the third change concerned the nights, which is coming at the hundred and eighty-seventh āyah.

A community was not handed the finished obligation on the first day. It was walked up to it. And a man who is trying to bring his own household to something should notice the method, because he is usually in a great deal more of a hurry than Allāh ﷻ was.

And Whoever Does Good of His Own Accord

The āyah ends where the āyah of al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa ended, with the voluntary. A man has been given an obligation, and then a concession, and then he is told: and whoever does good of his own accord, it is better for him.

Which is the shape of the whole religion in one line. There is the farḍ. There is the rukhṣa for the man who cannot manage it. And then there is the invitation, sitting

at the end, addressed to the man who has taken the concession and could perhaps do a little more.

And then the last words, which are not a ruling and are the reason the ruling works: *and that you fast is better for you, if you only knew*. Allāh ﷻ has just given a man permission not to fast, and then leans in and tells him that fasting would be better for him, and closes with a clause which suggests we do not entirely believe it.

The Month of Ramaḍān

شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنْزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ وَبَيِّنَاتٍ مِّنَ
الْهُدَىٰ وَالْفُرْقَانِ ۚ فَمَن شَهِدَ مِنْكُمُ الشَّهْرَ فَلْيَصُمْهُ ۖ وَمَن كَانَ مَرِيضًا
أَوْ عَلَىٰ سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِّنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ ۗ يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمُ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمُ
الْعُسْرَ وَلِتُكْمِلُوا الْعِدَّةَ وَلِتُكَبِّرُوا اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ مَا هَدَاكُم وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

The month of Ramaḍān, in which the Qur'ān was sent down, a guidance for mankind and clear proofs of the guidance and the criterion. So whoever amongst you witnesses the month, let him fast it; and whoever is ill or on a journey, then a number of other days. Allāh desires ease for you and does not desire hardship for you, and that you complete the number, and that you magnify Allāh for having guided you, and that you may be thankful.

al-Baqara 2:185

The month has been named twice in the sūra now without being named, and here it is given its name, and the reader should notice what Allāh ﷻ uses to introduce it.

He does not say: the month of Ramaḍān, in which fasting is obligatory. He does not say: the month of Ramaḍān, in which the devils are chained. He says: *the month of Ramaḍān, in which the Qur'ān was sent down*.

That is the identification. Ramaḍān is the month of the Qur'ān, and the fasting is the means and not the end, and a community which has made the month about food and about the length of the day and about what is on the table at Maghrib has taken hold of the instrument and left the work.

The name itself is from *ramiḍa*, to burn, and the ‘ulamā’ have offered more than one reason for it, and the one worth carrying is that it burns the sins away.

All the Books Came in It

Ibn Kathīr رحمه الله singles the month out for a virtue which is larger than our own portion of it. It is the month in which the divine books were sent down to their prophets, each of them, and he brings the ḥadīth of Wāthila b. al-Asqa’ رضي الله عنه that the ṣuḥuf of Ibrāhīm عليه السلام were revealed on the first night of Ramaḍān, and the Tawrah after six nights of it had passed, and the Injīl after thirteen, and the Qur’ān after twenty-four.¹⁴¹

As for the Qur’ān, the ‘ulamā’ have distinguished the two descents. The whole of it came down in one go to the lowest heaven on the Night of Qadr, and from there it was sent down to the Messenger ﷺ over twenty-three years as the events required. This is how Allāh’s ﷻ words are reconciled: *truly We sent it down on the Night of Qadr*, and *truly We sent it down on a blessed night*, with the plain fact that the revelation arrived piece by piece over a lifetime.¹⁴²

Guidance and Criterion

Two words are given for what the Qur’ān is, and they are not the same thing.

Hudā is guidance: the signs and the information a man needs in order to find his way, the map and the road and the directions. And it is *budan li’l-nās*, for mankind, not for the believers only, so the offer is open to everybody who will take it.

Furqān is the discriminator, the thing which separates. It is what tells a man that this is right and that is wrong, and it is the only objective instrument he will ever hold. Everything else which claims to sort right from wrong is a consensus, and a consensus moves. It moved in the last century and it will move again in this one, and the man who took his moral compass from it will find that the north he was using has quietly shifted while he slept. The Furqān does not move.

Whoever Witnesses the Month

Fa-man shahida minkum al-shahra fa’l-yaṣumbu. Whoever witnesses the month, let him fast it. And now the question which divides our communities every single year in this country, and which is asked in every masjid in March, and which the reader deserves an honest treatment of rather than a slogan.

Let us begin with what is agreed, because a great deal is agreed and it is forgotten in the arguing. Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه narrated that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said:

صُومُوا لِرُؤْيَيْهِ وَأَفْطِرُوا لِرُؤْيَيْهِ، فَإِنْ غُبِيَ عَلَيْكُمْ فَأَكْلُوا الْعِدَّةَ ثَلَاثِينَ

*Fast upon sighting it and break the fast upon sighting it; and if it is hidden from you, then complete the number as thirty.*¹⁴³

And Ibn ‘Umar رضي الله عنهما narrated that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said: Allāh has made the crescents timings for the people, so fast upon its sighting and break upon its sighting, and if it is obscured from you, then count thirty days.¹⁴⁴

Every party to this dispute is holding that ḥadīth. That is the thing to understand before anything else. Nobody in it is ignoring the Sunnah, and nobody in it has decided to be modern. They are all trying to obey the same sentence, and they differ about what it requires of a man standing in a cloudy country a long way from Madīnah.

The Positions

Six approaches are held amongst the Muslims of Britain, and I set them out as their own people would set them out.

Global sighting. The month begins when the crescent has been reliably sighted anywhere in the world. The argument is unity, and it is that the ḥadīth says *ṣumū li-ru’yatibi* without naming a place, and that the Ummah is one body and should not be beginning a pillar of the religion on three different days in one city.

Regional sighting. A region is defined within which sightings count, and for Britain that might be the country itself or might take in continental Europe. A real sighting is still required and must be reliably witnessed, and a sighting from outside the region does not count. The argument rests on the ḥadīth of Kurayb, which is coming below, and on the plain fact that the calendars of Makkah and Madīnah differed in the Prophet’s ﷺ own lifetime.

Local sighting. The same, with the acceptable range narrowed to one’s own locality, the city or the town of one’s residence.

Sighting, with calculation used to exclude the impossible. This is fundamentally a sighting method and rests on the principles of any of the first three. The difference is that astronomical calculation is used to make sure that no claim is

accepted which could not physically have occurred, where the crescent at that location was not old enough to be seen by the eye or by any instrument. And on this method, if the sky is wholly covered and no sighting is reported, thirty days are counted, even where the calculation says the crescent would have been visible.

Calculation where sighting is not possible. This accepts traditional sighting in places which have good visibility, and argues that in a cloudy climate such as ours a different approach has a use: that calculation can tell us accurately what *would* have been seen had the cloud not been there, and can therefore decide whether thirty days must be counted. Like the fourth, it can be built on a global, regional or local base.

Pure calculation. The calendar is determined by astronomical calculation alone, with sighting reports playing a corroborative role if any. This too can be global, regional or local, and it depends on what parameters are set, such as the minimum time from the birth of the new moon before a new month may be declared.

The Evidence Each Side Leans On

The ḥadīth of Kurayb is the great text of the regional position and every reader should know it. Kurayb said that Umm al-Faḍl bint al-Ḥārith sent him to Mu'āwiya رضي الله عنه in Shām. He said: I came to Shām and did what she needed, and Ramaḍān began while I was there, and I saw the crescent on the night of Friday. Then I came to Madīnah at the end of the month, and 'Abdullāh b. 'Abbās رضي الله عنهما asked me, and then mentioned the crescent and said: when did you see it? I said: we saw it on the night of Friday. He said: you saw it yourself? I said: yes, and the people saw it and fasted, and Mu'āwiya fasted. He said: but we saw it on the night of Saturday, so we shall go on fasting until we complete thirty, or we see it. I said: is the sighting of Mu'āwiya and his fasting not enough for you? He said: no. This is how the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ commanded us.¹⁴⁵

A Companion in Madīnah was told of a confirmed sighting in Shām, by an eyewitness he trusted, and did not act on it, and said that this was the command he had received.

Alongside it, the historians have noticed something in the sīra itself. The Farewell Ḥajj was on Friday, the ninth of Dhū al-Ḥijja in the tenth year, in Makkah; and the demise of the Messenger ﷺ was on Monday, the twelfth of Rabī' al-Awwal in the eleventh year, three months later, in Madīnah. A lunar month is twenty-nine or

thirty days. Work it through and the two calendars cannot be made to agree; even if all three months are given thirty days, the Madīnan calendar comes out a day short and the demise falls on a Sunday. Mullā ‘Alī al-Qārī رحمه الله resolved it by observing that the people of Madīnah began Dhū al-Ḥijja of that year one day after the people of Makkah did.¹⁴⁶

Two cities a few days apart, in the Prophet’s ﷺ own lifetime, on different days of the month.

And on the other side, the evidence that a sighting from outside one’s own town is acceptable. ‘Ikrima narrated that the people doubted the appearance of the crescent of Ramaḍān and intended neither to pray the tarāwīḥ nor to fast. A bedouin came from al-Ḥarra and testified that he had sighted it, and he was brought to the Prophet ﷺ, who asked him: do you testify that there is no god but Allāh, and that I am the Messenger of Allāh? He said yes, and he testified that he had sighted the crescent. And he ﷺ ordered Bilāl to announce to the people that they should pray the tarāwīḥ and fast.¹⁴⁷

And the setting matters. It was cloudy in Madīnah at the end of Sha‘bān and the people had not seen the crescent. The news came from outside, from al-Ḥarra, which is a high place some three miles from Madīnah, near enough that the man could have walked. So a sighting from beyond the town was accepted when the town itself could not see.

And Where That Leaves Us

The differing views are all rooted in the desire to follow the teaching faithfully, and they differ about how that is best done. In this country the result is that Ramaḍān and Eid begin on different days depending on which method a community or an individual follows.

The ‘ulamā’ of Britain hold several of these positions, and they hold them after study, and a reader will find learned and God-fearing men on more than one side of it. This is a matter of ijtihād, and it is being conducted, on all sides, with good intentions, and I am not going to give my own view here, because the person most likely to be harmed by my giving it is the reader who would then have a stick to beat his neighbour with.

What I will say is this. A man should follow the position of the ‘ulamā’ he trusts and whose masjid he prays in, and he should not fast on a day his own community is not

fasting in order to make a point, and he should not stand outside a masjid on the night of Eid arguing about the moon. There is one ruling in this whole matter which is not disputed by anybody, and it is that we should be trying to sight it. That much is common ground, and hardly any of us do it.

Allāh Desires Ease for You

Yurīdullāhu bikum al-yusra wa lā yurīdu bikum al-ʿusr. The sentence is placed in the middle of the āyah of the obligation, and it is the reason the concessions are where they are.

And when he ﷺ sent Muʿadh and Abū Mūsā رضي الله عنهما to Yemen he said to them:

بَشِّرَا وَلَا تَنْفِرَا، وَيَسِّرَا وَلَا تُعَسِّرَا، وَتَطَاوَعَا وَلَا تَخْتَلِفَا

*Give good news and do not drive away; make things easy and do not make them hard; and agree with one another and do not differ.*¹⁴⁸

Six instructions to two men going out to teach. Half of them are about not making it hard.

And the ease is not a slogan. Look at the pillars and see it built into every one of them. The ṣalāh: a man who cannot stand may sit, and a man who cannot sit may lie down, and a traveller halves it. The ṣawm: the sick are excused, and the traveller, and the pregnant and the nursing mother. The zakāh: Allāh ﷻ asks two and a half in the hundred, which is a fraction so small that the Qurʾān compares the giving of it to a seed thrown into the ground, and we manage to speak about the two and a half and never once about the ninety-seven and a half He let us keep. The Ḥajj: it is required of the man who has the money and the strength and, for a woman, the maḥram; and if he has not, it is not asked of him.

Every pillar has a door in it for the man who cannot manage the whole. That is not a weakness in the religion. That is the religion.

And That You Magnify Allāh

Then the closing purposes, and there are four of them stacked: that you complete the number, and that you magnify Allāh for having guided you, and that you may be thankful.

Wa li-tukabbirullāha ‘alā mā badākum. Some of the ‘ulamā’ have taken this of the takbīrs of Eid, and it is the basis of the takbīr we say on the way to the muṣallā, and the reader should notice what it is a takbīr *for*. Not for having fasted. ‘*Alā mā badākum*, for having guided you. The man walking to the Eid prayer is not celebrating his achievement. He is thanking Allāh ﷻ for having been shown the door.

And this is Allāh’s ﷻ habit at the end of every act of worship. After the Ḥajj: *and when you have completed your rites, remember Allāh as you remember your fathers, or with a stronger remembrance.*¹⁴⁹ After the Jumu‘a: *and when the prayer is finished, disperse in the land and seek of the bounty of Allāh, and remember Allāh much, so that you may succeed.*¹⁵⁰ And morning and evening: *so be patient with what they say, and glorify the praise of your Lord before the rising of the sun and before its setting; and glorify Him in the night and after the prostrations.*¹⁵¹

Every ending is turned into a beginning. The worship stops and the dhikr does not.

And When My Servants Ask You About Me

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ ۖ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ
 ۖ فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِي وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا بِي لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ

And when My servants ask you about Me, then I am near. I answer the call of the caller when he calls Me. So let them answer Me, and let them believe in Me, so that they may be rightly guided.

al-Baqara 2:186

Read the āyah once for its grammar before anything else, because the grammar is the tafsīr.

Everywhere else in this passage, Allāh ﷻ speaks through His Prophet ﷺ. They ask you about the new moons: *say*. They ask you about wine and gambling: *say*. They ask you about the orphans: *say*. Every question in the sūra is answered through an intermediary, and the intermediary is the finest man who ever lived.

And here: *and when My servants ask you about Me*, and then no *say*. He answers Himself, directly, without passing it through anybody, and He does not wait for the question to be finished. And He calls them *‘ibādī*, My servants, with the possessive attached.

Count what is in that one sentence. The intermediary is removed. The possessive is used. The *say* is dropped. Allāh ﷻ is demonstrating the nearness in the way the āyah is built, before He has told us about it in words. And then He tells us in words: *fa-innī qarīb*. I am near.

Why It Is Here

The āyah sits in the middle of the fasting, between the ruling of the month and the ruling of the nights, and Ibn Kathīr رحمه الله notes the placement: it is here because the du‘ā’ of the fasting man is answered.¹⁵² A man who is hungry and has been obeying all day is in a state Allāh ﷻ likes, and the āyah has been put where he will find it.

And several reports give us the questions which produced it. A bedouin said: Messenger of Allāh, is our Lord near, so that we may whisper to Him, or far, so that we must call out to Him? And the Prophet ﷺ was silent, and Allāh sent this down. In another report the Companions asked: where is our Lord? And Allāh sent this down. And ‘Aṭā’ رحمه الله was told that when the āyah *call upon Me and I will answer you* was sent down, the people said: if only we knew what hour to call in. And this was sent down.¹⁵³

Look at the third one. They wanted a timetable. And the answer they were given contains no hour at all: *I answer the call of the caller when he calls Me*. The time is whenever he calls. The question assumed a schedule and the answer removed the schedule.

What Du‘ā’ Is

The word is simply a calling out, any expression of a need. Which is worth saying, because we have made du‘ā’ into a ceremony with a beginning and an end and a particular voice, and then we tell ourselves that we have not had time to do it.

A baby cries when it wants milk. It has no words and no theology and no idea who it is calling to. That is a du‘ā’. A man who cannot speak expresses his need to Allāh ﷻ without a tongue, and that is a du‘ā’, and it is heard on the same terms as the eloquent man in the front row.

What He Has Promised

The reports on this āyah are amongst the best things in the Book of Allāh ﷻ, and the reader should have them together.

يَقُولُ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى: أَنَا عِنْدَ ظَنِّ عَبْدِي بِي، وَأَنَا مَعَهُ إِذَا دَعَانِي

*Allāh Most High says: I am as My servant thinks of Me, and I am with him when he calls Me.*¹⁵⁴

And this is like His words: *truly Allāh is with those who fear Him and those who do good*,¹⁵⁵ and like what He said to Mūsā and Hārūn عليهما السلام: *truly I am with you both, hearing and seeing*.¹⁵⁶

إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَعَالَى لَيْسَتْحِي أَنْ يَبْسُطَ الْعَبْدُ إِلَيْهِ يَدَيْهِ يَسْأَلُهُ فِيهِمَا خَيْرًا فِيرُدَّهُمَا خَائِبَتَيْنِ

*Allāh Most High is too modest to let a servant raise his two hands to Him asking for good, and then return them empty.*¹⁵⁷

And the ḥadīth which answers the question every one of us has actually been asking. Abū Saʿīd عنه رضي الله said: the Prophet ﷺ said: there is no Muslim who supplicates to Allāh with a supplication in which there is no sin and no severing of the ties of kinship, except that Allāh gives him one of three: either He hastens his supplication for him, or He stores it for him in the Hereafter, or He turns away from him an evil like it. They said: then we shall ask for more. He said: Allāh has more.¹⁵⁸

Three doors, and no fourth. There is no outcome in which the duʿāʾ was wasted. What there is, is an outcome in which the man does not recognise the answer, because the answer was one of the other two.

Do Not Be in a Hurry

And the one thing which can spoil it. Abū Hurayra عنه رضي الله said: the Prophet ﷺ said: the servant is continually answered so long as he does not supplicate for a sin or for the severing of kinship, and so long as he does not become hasty. It was said: Messenger of Allāh, what is the haste? He said: he says, I have called and I have called and I do not see it being answered; and he despairs at that, and gives up.¹⁵⁹

Notice what the fault actually is. It is not the asking twice. It is the accounting. The man has started keeping a ledger of his du‘ā’s and marking them unanswered, and the ledger itself is the sin, because it contains a claim about Allāh ﷻ which the man has no evidence for. And then he stops, and the stopping is the loss.

Two Conditions

And Allāh ﷻ attaches two things to the promise: *so let them answer Me, and let them believe in Me*. The ‘ulamā’ have taken these as the conditions of the answering, and they are worth stating in the way a man can act on.

The first is *fa’l-yastajībū lī*, let them answer Me. The verb is the same verb He used of Himself. He answers us; He asks that we answer Him. A man who has not responded to a single command all year and then raises his hands in Ramaḍān is asking for a correspondence he has not been keeping up. And the second is *wa’l-yu’minū bī*, let them believe in Me, which the ‘ulamā’ have read as the certainty that He is able to give and that He will, and it is exactly what the ḥadīth qudsī above said: I am as My servant thinks of Me.

And the whole matter is closed by a ḥadīth qudsī which sets out the accounts between us. Allāh Most High says: son of Ādam, one is for you, one is for Me, and one is between Me and you. As for the one which is for Me, you worship Me and do not associate anything with Me. As for the one which is for you, whatever you do of anything, I shall repay you in full for it. And as for the one which is between Me and you: from you is the supplication, and upon Me is the answer.¹⁶⁰

From you is the supplication, and upon Me is the answer. He has divided the work and taken the harder half.

The Nights of the Fast

أَحِلَّ لَكُمْ لَيْلَةَ الصَّيَامِ الرَّفَثُ إِلَىٰ نِسَائِكُمْ هُنَّ لِبَاسٌ لَّكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لِبَاسٌ
لَّهُنَّ عَلِمَ اللَّهُ أَنَّكُمْ كُنْتُمْ تَخْتَانُونَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ فَتَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَعَفَا عَنْكُمْ
فَالآنَ بَاشِرُوهُنَّ وَابْتَغُوا مَا كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا حَتَّىٰ
يَتَبَيَّنَ لَكُمُ الْخَيْطُ الْأَبْيَضُ مِنَ الْخَيْطِ الْأَسْوَدِ مِنَ الْفَجْرِ ثُمَّ أَتِمُّوا
الصَّيَامَ إِلَى اللَّيْلِ وَلَا تُبَاشِرُوهُنَّ وَأَنْتُمْ عَاكِفُونَ فِي الْمَسَاجِدِ تِلْكَ
حُدُودُ اللَّهِ فَلَا تَقْرَبُوهَا كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ آيَاتِهِ لِلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَّقُونَ

It has been made lawful for you, on the night of the fast, to go in to your wives. They are a garment for you and you are a garment for them. Allāh knew that you were deceiving yourselves, so He turned to you and pardoned you. So now go in to them, and seek what Allāh has written for you. And eat and drink until the white thread becomes clear to you from the black thread at the dawn; then complete the fast until the night. And do not go in to them while you are in retreat in the masājid. These are the limits of Allāh, so do not approach them. Thus does Allāh make His signs clear to the people, so that they may become God-fearing.

al-Baqara 2:187

The reader should notice, before the rulings, that these āyahs are in chronological order and are describing a community learning its religion in real time. The obligation came, and the people did their best with it, and something went wrong, and Allāh ﷻ answered it. This is not an abstract legal code being handed down. It is a conversation.

What Was Happening

Al-Barāʾ رضي الله عنه said: when the Companions of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ fasted, and a man slept before breaking his fast, he would not eat that night nor the following day until the next evening. And Qays b. Ṣirma al-Anṣārī was fasting, and he had been working in his land all day, and when the time to break the fast came he went to his wife and asked her: do you have any food? She said: no, but I will go and

find you some. And his eyes were overcome with sleep, and when she came back she found him asleep. She said: woe to you, did you sleep? And in the middle of the next day he lost consciousness. And it was mentioned to the Prophet ﷺ, and this āyah was sent down.¹⁶¹

That was the ruling before this āyah. A man could eat and drink and go to his wife only until the 'Ishā' prayer, or until he slept, whichever came first; and once he had prayed 'Ishā' or slept, everything was closed to him until the next sunset. And a labourer who fell asleep at Maghrib had lost his one meal and was starting the next day's fast on the previous day's food.

And the Muslims found it hard, and they said so. And some of them fell.

You Were Deceiving Yourselfs

'Alimallāhu annakum kuntum takhtānūna anfusakum. Allāh knew that you were deceiving yourselves.

The word is *takhtānūn*, from *khiyāna*, treachery, and it is in a form which turns the treachery back on the doer. The 'ulamā' have called it heavier than ordinary betrayal, because a man who betrays another has at least an opponent; a man who betrays himself has arranged for his own loss. He is putting himself in front of the Fire and pushing himself away from the mercy, with his own hands, and calling it a small thing.

Al-Bukhārī records from al-Barā' رضي الله عنه that when the fast of Ramaḍān was ordained, the Muslims used to keep away from their wives for the whole month, and some of the men were deceiving themselves; and Allāh revealed this āyah. And 'Alī b. Abī Ṭalḥa narrated from Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنهما that during Ramaḍān, after they had prayed the 'Ishā', they would not touch their wives nor eat until the following night; and then some of the Muslims, 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb رضي الله عنه amongst them, went to their wives and ate during Ramaḍān after the 'Ishā'. And they complained of it to the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ. And Allāh sent down this āyah.

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And here a word of adab, since the name of 'Umar رضي الله عنه is in the report and a reader might be startled by it. It is not permitted to us to speak ill of the Companions رضي الله عنهم. Whatever happened was not a deliberate defiance by men who knew the law of Allāh ﷻ and set it aside. It was a burden which had grown too heavy for human strength, borne by men who then went straight to the Prophet ﷺ

and confessed it, which is precisely what a person of taqwā does and precisely what most of us do not. And Allāh's ﷻ response was to lift the ruling.

Read the sequence again. *Allāh knew. Then, so He turned to you and pardoned you. Then, so now go in to them.* He knew what had happened, He forgave it, and then He removed the thing they had stumbled over, so that it could not happen again. That is not the response of a lawgiver. That is the response of somebody who is on your side.

A Garment for One Another

And in the middle of a legal ruling, one of the most beautiful sentences in the Qur'ān. *Hunna libāsun lakum wa antum libāsun labunn.* They are a garment for you, and you are a garment for them.

Allāh ﷻ uses the word elsewhere for the night: *and He is the One who made the night a garment for you,*¹⁶³ because the night envelops the sky and covers it entirely with its darkness. So a *libās* is what wraps a thing completely.

Turn the image over slowly, because there is a whole marriage in it.

Clothes cover. They hide what is underneath, and they are not embarrassed about it, and they do not report on it. That is what a husband and wife do with each other's faults. We do not publicise them. If somebody tries to tear the garment off, we pull it back. If somebody disrespects our spouse, we do not sit there and allow it.

Clothes are the nearest thing to you. There is nothing between your clothes and your skin. When a man is startled or ashamed he clutches at his clothes; it is the first thing he reaches for and the first line of protection he has. And he spends the whole day inside them without noticing them.

We have different clothes for different weather, and a husband and wife have different temperaments and the point of them is that they are different. Nobody wants two coats and no shirt.

Clothes beautify. A man is improved by what he wears and so is she, and a couple make each other look better to the world than either would alone, in this life and in the next.

And clothes are comfortable. A man comes home and takes off what he wore to work and puts on something soft, and that is what it should feel like to be in the same room as your wife. When one is with one's spouse, one relaxes, and the heart

settles, and the words they say to us when things are hard are the words which reach.

Every one of those is in the word. And Allāh ﷻ put it in the āyah which permits intimacy, so that nobody would think the permission was about appetite.

The White Thread and the Black

And eat and drink until the white thread becomes clear to you from the black thread at the dawn.

The last three words were not there at first. The āyah came down without *min al-fajr*, and men took the threads for threads. Some tied a black string and a white string to their legs and went on eating until they could tell them apart.

‘Adī b. Hātim رضي الله عنه said: I took two strings, one black and one white, and put them under my pillow, and I kept looking at them through the night and could not tell them apart. So in the morning I went to the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ and told him, and he said:

إِنَّ وَسَادَكَ إِذَا لَعْرِضٌ، أَنْ كَانَ الْخَيْطُ الْأَبْيَضُ وَالْأَسْوَدُ تَحْتَ وَسَادَتِكَ

Your pillow must be very wide, if the white thread and the black thread are underneath it.

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The joke is that the two threads in question are the horizon, so a pillow with both of them under it is a pillow the width of the world. In another wording he ﷺ said *innaka la-‘arīdu al-qafā*, your nape is broad, and then explained: rather, it is the blackness of the night and the whiteness of the day.¹⁶⁵ Some have said this second wording means that ‘Adī was slow-witted, and that is a weak opinion and an unkind one. And then Allāh ﷻ sent down *min al-fajr*, and it became clear that the threads were the night and the day.

Two things for the reader. The first is that a Companion made an honest mistake with the Book of Allāh ﷻ and was answered with a joke rather than a rebuke, and the Sunnah has preserved the joke, which tells us something about the room. The second is that the clarification was *sent down*. Allāh ﷻ did not leave them to work it out. When His servants misunderstood Him, He said it again more plainly.

The Blessed Meal

And from the permission to eat until dawn, the ‘ulamā’ have taken a proof that the saḥūr is encouraged, because it is a rukhṣa and Allāh ﷻ loves that His concessions be taken. And the Sunnah is explicit about it.

تَسَحَّرُوا فَإِنَّ فِي السَّحُورِ بَرَكَهً

*Take the saḥūr, for in the saḥūr there is baraka.*¹⁶⁶

إِنَّ فَصْلَ مَا بَيْنَ صِيَامِنَا وَصِيَامِ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ أَكْلَةُ السَّحْرِ

*The difference between our fasting and the fasting of the People of the Book is the meal of the saḥar.*¹⁶⁷

And Abū Saʿīd رضي الله عنه narrated: the saḥūr is a meal of baraka, so do not leave it, even if one of you takes a mouthful of water; for Allāh and His angels send blessings upon those who take the saḥūr.¹⁶⁸

A mouthful of water. That is the minimum, and it is enough to bring a man into the sentence about the angels.

And it should be delayed. *Do not let the adhān of Bilāl prevent you from your saḥūr, for he calls in the night; so eat and drink until you hear the adhān of Ibn Umm Maktūm, for he does not call until the dawn breaks.*¹⁶⁹ And Zayd b. Thābit رضي الله عنه said: we took the saḥūr with the Prophet ﷺ and then went and prayed. Anas asked him: how long was there between the adhān and the saḥūr? He said: the time it takes to recite fifty āyahs.¹⁷⁰

And Abū Dharr رضي الله عنه narrated: my Ummah will remain in good so long as they hasten the ifṭār and delay the saḥūr.¹⁷¹ Two habits, and the whole condition of the Ummah is hanging on them, which is a strange thing until a man sees what the two habits are made of. Both are the taking of what Allāh ﷻ permitted at the moment He permitted it, without adding to it out of piety.

The Rulings of I’tikāf

Wa lā tubāshirūhunna wa antum ākifūna fi’l-masājid.

The i’tikāf is a Sunnah of the last ten nights and the Messenger ﷺ kept it. Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه said that he ﷺ used to sit in i’tikāf for ten days every

Ramaḍān, and in the year in which he passed away he sat for twenty, ten of which were a making up of the year before, in which he had not been able to.¹⁷²

‘Alī b. Abī Ṭalḥa reported that Ibn ‘Abbās رضي الله عنهما said: this āyah is about the man who is in i’tikāf in the masjid, in Ramaḍān or in another month; Allāh has forbidden him to touch women, by night or by day, until he finishes his i’tikāf. And al-Ḍaḥḥāk said: formerly, a man in i’tikāf would go out of the masjid and, if he wished, go to his wife. And Allāh said this.¹⁷³

So the prohibition takes in the intimacy and anything which leads to it, the kissing and the embracing, for the whole of the retreat.

And what is permitted is worth knowing, because families make the i’tikāf harder than it is. The wife may help her husband. ‘Ā’isha رضي الله عنها said: the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ would put his head through to me while he was in the masjid and I would comb his hair, and I was menstruating; and he would only enter the house to attend to what a man needs.¹⁷⁴

These Are the Limits of Allāh

And now the closing, and there is a word in it which the reader should stop at. *Tilka ḥudūdullāhi fa-lā taqrabūhā*. These are the limits of Allāh, so do not *approach* them.

The Qur’ān elsewhere says *fa-lā ta’tadūhā*, do not transgress them, of other limits. Here it says do not come near. A man is not merely forbidden to cross the line; he is told to stay back from it, because a man who walks up to a line and stands with his toes on it is a man who is going to cross it eventually, and he knows this and so does everybody watching him.

And this is where Muftī Shafī رحمه الله draws the practical rulings which we have all been taught and few of us know the reason for.¹⁷⁵ Excessive gargling while fasting is makrūh, because the water may slip down the throat. The use of some medicines in the mouth is makrūh. The kissing and embracing of one’s wife while fasting is makrūh, for a man who does not trust himself. It is better to stop eating a couple of minutes before the time allowed for the saḥar, as a matter of precaution, and to delay the ifṭār by a moment or two. And a man who is careless in these things, and comfortable, and always eating right up to the second, is not committing a sin. He is standing on the line, and this āyah has told him to step back.

Do Not Devour Each Other's Wealth

وَلَا تَأْكُلُوا أَمْوَالَكُمْ بَيْنَكُمْ بِالْبَاطِلِ وَتُدْلُوا بِهَا إِلَى الْحُكَّامِ لِتَأْكُلُوا
فَرِيقًا مِّنْ أَمْوَالِ النَّاسِ بِالْإِثْمِ وَأَنتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ

And do not devour your wealth amongst yourselves wrongfully, nor offer it to the judges so that you may devour a portion of the wealth of the people sinfully, while you know.

al-Baqara 2:188

The link with the fasting is exact and the reader should see it, because it is the reason the āyah is here rather than in a chapter about commerce.

For a month, what was lawful in the night became unlawful in the day. That was a temporary prohibition, and it was a training exercise. Now comes a permanent one. The fasting was meant to make a man capable of abstaining from the unlawful, and Allāh ﷻ tests the training immediately, on the very next subject, and the subject is money.

Muftī Taqī Usmānī has put it in a phrase which is worth keeping: Ramaḍān was the *tathīr* of the self; now comes the *tathīr* of the wealth.¹⁷⁶

And there is a second link, which is the eating. Allāh ﷻ told us in this same Juz' to eat of what is in the earth, lawful and wholesome, and not to follow the footsteps of Shayṭān.¹⁷⁷ And He says in Sūrat al-Naḥl: *so eat of what Allāh has provided you, lawful and wholesome, and be thankful for the favour of Allāh, if it is He whom you worship.*¹⁷⁸ A man opens his fast at Maghrib, and what he opens it with had better be halal, and the āyah which tells him where the money came from is sitting right here, one āyah after the ruling on the nights of Ramaḍān.

Two Wrongs, Not One

The āyah forbids two things and the second is worse than the first.

The first is the taking of another man's property by an unlawful means, which is the plain sense of *lā ta'kulū amwālakum baynakum bi'l-bāṭil*. And the reader should notice that Allāh ﷻ says *your* wealth, *amwālakum*, and He is describing a man

taking somebody else's. The Ummah is being treated as one body, so that a man who steals from another Muslim has been described as eating his own flesh.

The second is the taking of the case to the courts. *Wa tudlū bibā ilā al-ḥukkām*, and the verb is from the lowering of a bucket into a well, which is a picture of a man letting his case down carefully into a place where he cannot see the bottom. The āyah forbids the filing of a false claim, the taking of a false oath, and the giving or the commissioning of false testimony, and it closes with *wa antum ta'lamūn*, while you know, which removes the last excuse, because a man in this position always has an argument and he always knows.

The Occasion

The reason for the revelation is recorded, and it is a fine story. There was a dispute over land between two of the Companions رضي الله عنهم. The case came before the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ. The claimant had no witnesses, and so, by the ordinary rule of the Sharī'a, the Prophet ﷺ asked the defendant to take an oath. And the man was ready to take it. And before he did, the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ recited to him, as a piece of good counsel: *truly those who sell the covenant of Allāh and their oaths for a small price, there is no share for them in the Hereafter*.¹⁷⁹

And the man, hearing an āyah about those who take property through a false oath, abandoned the oath and gave the land to the claimant.

Nothing was proved against him. The law was entirely on his side and he would have won. What defeated him was one āyah recited by a man who was not accusing him of anything.

I Am Only a Human Being

And the ḥadīth which every lawyer and every litigant amongst us should have on his wall. Umm Salama رضي الله عنها narrated that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said:

إِنَّمَا أَنَا بَشَرٌ، وَإِنَّكُمْ تَخْتَصِمُونَ إِلَيَّ، وَلَعَلَّ بَعْضَكُمْ أَنْ يَكُونَ الْحَنُّ بِحُجَّتِهِ مِنْ بَعْضٍ،
فَأَقْضِي لَهُ عَلَى نَحْوِ مَا أَسْمَعُ، فَمَنْ قَضَيْتُ لَهُ بِحَقِّ أَخِيهِ شَيْئًا فَلَا يَأْخُذْهُ، فَإِنَّمَا أَقْطَعُ
لَهُ قِطْعَةً مِنَ النَّارِ

I am only a human being, and you bring your disputes to me; and perhaps one of you is more eloquent in his argument than the other, and I rule for him according to what I hear. So whoever I rule in favour of, in something belonging to his brother, let him not take it; for I am only cutting off for him a piece of the Fire.¹⁸⁰

The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ is saying that a man can win in his court and lose. A judgement is not a transfer of ownership; it is a decision made on the evidence, and the evidence is what was said, and the man who spoke better has an advantage which has nothing to do with the truth. So the winner walks out with a piece of the Fire in his hand and a judgement to prove it is his.

And the modern applications write themselves. The divorce settlement. The inheritance which was arranged rather than distributed. The business dissolution in which the man who knew where the documents were did rather well. Every one of them can be perfectly lawful in this country and be exactly what this āyah is describing, and the man who has done it will have a file of paperwork and a solicitor's letter and a piece of the Fire.

And the Messenger ﷺ said of land in particular: whoever takes a handspan of land unjustly, it will be collared around his neck to the depth of seven earths.¹⁸¹ A handspan. And the punishment is measured downwards, which is where the land goes.

The Four Questions

And a man who has taken something should think about the day he will be asked, because he will be asked, and the Messenger ﷺ has told us the questions:

لَا تَزُولُ قَدَمَا عَبْدٍ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ حَتَّى يُسْأَلَ عَنْ أَرْبَعٍ: عَنْ عُمُرِهِ فِيمَا أَفْنَاهُ، وَعَنْ
جَسَدِهِ فِيمَا أَبْلَاهُ، وَعَنْ عَلَيْهِ مَاذَا عَمَلَ فِيهِ، وَعَنْ مَالِهِ مِنْ أَيْنَ اكْتَسَبَهُ وَفِيمَا أَنْفَقَهُ

The two feet of a servant will not move on the Day of Resurrection until he is asked about four: about his life, in what he spent it; and about his body, in what he wore it out; and about his knowledge, what he did with it; and about his wealth, where he earned it from and in what he spent it.¹⁸²

Four questions, and the wealth gets two of them. Where it came from, and where it went. Every other item is asked about once.

Halal Brings Baraka

And the reason for all of this severity is one sentence in Sūrat al-Mu'minūn: *O messengers, eat of the good things and do righteous work; truly I know what you do.*¹⁸³

The mufasssīrūn have all noticed the order. Eat, and then work righteousness. The hint is that righteous deeds can come out of a man only when what he eats and drinks is lawful. The action follows the food. Which is why the ḥadīth of the dusty traveller, which we read at the hundred and sixty-eighth āyah, ends where it ends: *so how is he to be answered?*

And a final observation on ownership itself, since the āyah is about property. There are things nobody owns, and were never meant to be owned: the air, the water in a river, the forest. And then there are things which are owned, and where the ownership must be clear, and where the transactions which move them from one hand to another must be clean. The Sharī'a has governed both, and the second is where our trouble lives, because a community which does not know who owns what is a community which will be in court within a generation.

They Ask You About the New Moons

﴿يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْأَهِلَّةِ ۖ قُلْ هِيَ مَوَاقِيتُ لِلنَّاسِ وَالْحَجِّ وَلَيْسَ الْبِرُّ بِأَنْ تَأْتُوا الْبُيُوتَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهَا وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنِ اتَّقَىٰ وَأَتُوا الْبُيُوتَ مِنْ أَبْوَابِهَا وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ﴾

They ask you about the new moons. Say: they are timings for the people, and for the Hajj. And it is not righteousness that you come to the houses from their backs; rather, righteousness is the one who fears Allāh. So come to the houses from their doors, and fear Allāh, so that you may succeed.

al-Baqara 2:189

They asked about the crescent, about its phases, about why it grows and shrinks when the sun does not. And the answer given is not an answer to the question they asked.

They asked what it is. He told them what it is *for*. *Hiya mawāqītu li'l-nās wa'l-ḥajj*, they are timings for the people and for the Ḥajj. And the 'ulamā' of balāgha have called this the *uslūb al-ḥakīm*, the wise style, in which a questioner is answered with what he needed rather than with what he asked for.¹⁸⁴

Because the mechanics of the thing would not have improved a single one of them. What they needed was the use: that Allāh ﷻ has hung a clock in the sky which every man on earth can read without instruments and without literacy, and by which a shepherd and a king can agree on a date. Your fasting, your Ḥajj, your debts, your 'idda, your rent: all of it is timed by a thing you can see from your doorstep.

Coming to Houses From the Back

And then, without a pause, a ruling about doors, and the reader is entitled to wonder what it is doing here.

Al-Barā' رضي الله عنه explained the custom: in the days of ignorance, when they entered iḥrām, they would come to the house from the back.¹⁸⁵ And the mufasssīrūn add the other form of it, that when a man set out on a journey and then changed his mind and came home, he would not come in through the front door as a normal man would. He would go round the back.

And why the back? Because it was harder. It was a smaller opening, or over a wall, or through a gap they made in it, and the difficulty was the point. They had decided that a hardship undertaken for its own sake was a piety, and they had invented it themselves, and they were quite sure it was religion.

So the āyah is not about doors. It is about who decides what counts as worship. And that is why it sits immediately after a question about the moon, because both are the same question: the people wanted to add something of their own to a matter Allāh ﷻ had already settled.

Only Allāh ﷻ decides what the religion is. A thing is not made worship by being difficult, and it is not made worship by being sincere, and it is not made worship by having been done for a very long time by people we loved. That is the whole

doctrine of bid'a in one sentence, and the Qur'ān delivered it by talking about a man climbing over his own garden wall.

And come to the houses from their doors. Which the 'ulamā' have read on two levels, and both are in the words. Come in through the door, as any sensible man would. And come to any matter by the way which was appointed for it, because a man who wants a thing and will not go to the door of it is not going to get it, however hard he works at the wall.

Fight Those Who Fight You

ج
وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْتَدُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ
الْمُعْتَدِينَ

And fight in the way of Allāh those who fight you, and do not transgress. Truly Allāh does not love the transgressors.

al-Baqara 2:190

This is the passage which is read badly more often than any other in the sūra, by our own people and by everybody else, and I have set out my fuller thinking on it in the addendum at the back and would ask the reader who finds it difficult to turn there. What follows here is the commentary.

Begin with the history, because a man who does not know when this was revealed will not understand a word of it. Fighting was not permitted in Makkah. For thirteen years the Muslims were beaten and boycotted and starved and killed, and they were not allowed to lift a hand, and men came to the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ with their backs opened and asked him to make du'ā' and he told them to be patient. And it was not permitted in the early years of Madīnah either.

Then permission came. Many of the 'ulamā', and Abū Bakr رضي الله عنه amongst them, held that the first āyah revealed on the subject was: *permission is given to those who are fought, because they have been wronged, and Allāh is able to help them; those who were driven from their homes without right, only because they said, our Lord is Allāh.*¹⁸⁶ Others held that this āyah of al-Baqara was the first. Either way, the reader

should notice the shape of the permission. It is given to those who *are being fought*. It is given because they *have been wronged*. It is given to men who were *driven from their homes*. Every clause of it is a description of somebody defending himself.

And this was revealed around Ḥudaybiya, when the Muslims had come for ‘Umra and were stopped, and then Allāh ﷻ restrained their hands as He says in Sūrat al-Fath.

And Do Not Transgress

The permission and the limit are in the same āyah. Not in a different sūra, and not in a later ruling which somebody has to go and find. In the same sentence.

Wa lā ta’tadū, and do not transgress. And then, so that nobody should treat it as a piece of advice: *truly Allāh does not love the transgressors*. The permission comes with the displeasure of Allāh ﷻ attached to its misuse, and the man who takes the first half and leaves the second half has not been given a licence, he has invented one.

And the limits are not left to the reader's judgement. The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ listed them:

اغْرُؤَا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ، قَاتِلُوا مَنْ كَفَرَ بِاللَّهِ، اغْرُؤَا وَلَا تَغْلُوا، وَلَا تَغْدِرُوا، وَلَا تَمْثُلُوا،
وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا وَلَدًا، وَلَا أَصْحَابَ الصَّوَامِعِ

*Fight in the way of Allāh. Fight those who disbelieve in Allāh. Fight, and do not steal from the spoils, and do not act treacherously, and do not mutilate, and do not kill a child, nor the people of the hermitages.*¹⁸⁷

Read the list. No stealing from what is captured. No treachery, which means that an agreement holds even with an enemy. No mutilation of the dead. No killing of children. And no killing of the people in the hermitages, who are the monks in their cells, men of another religion sitting in a building of that religion, and they are named specifically as protected.

And Ibn ‘Umar رضي الله عنهما said: a woman was found killed in one of the Prophet’s ﷺ battles, and the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ then forbade the killing of women and children.¹⁸⁸ One woman. Not a massacre; one body, found on a field, and a general prohibition issued over it which has bound the Ummah for fourteen hundred years.

Those rules were given in the seventh century to men fighting with swords. A man who holds this āyah and does not hold that ḥadīth is not following the Qur'ān more strictly than the rest of us. He is following half of an āyah.

وَأَقْتُلُوهُمْ حَيْثُ ثَقِفْتُمُوهُمْ وَأَخْرِجُوهُمْ مِنْ حَيْثُ أَخْرَجْتُمُوهُمْ وَالْفِتْنَةُ أَشَدُّ مِنَ الْقَتْلِ وَلَا تُقَاتِلُوهُمْ عِنْدَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ حَتَّى يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِيهِ ۖ فَإِنْ قَاتَلُوكُمْ فَاقْتُلُوهُمْ كَذَلِكَ جَزَاءُ الْكَافِرِينَ

And kill them wherever you come upon them, and drive them out from where they drove you out; and fitna is worse than killing. And do not fight them at the Sacred Masjid until they fight you in it; but if they fight you, then kill them. Such is the recompense of the disbelievers.

al-Baqara 2:191

Here is the sentence which is quoted at us and which is quoted by the worst of us, and the reader should look at what is actually attached to it in the same breath.

Kill them wherever you come upon them, and then, in the next clause: *and drive them out from where they drove you out*. Who are *they*? The people who drove the Muslims out of their homes. This is not a general instruction about mankind. It is an instruction about a specific enemy, identified by what he did, in the same sentence.

And then, before the sentence has ended: *and do not fight them at the Sacred Masjid until they fight you in it*. The permission has just been given and a place has already been carved out of it where it does not apply, and the place is the one where the enemy is most exposed and where a man who wanted to win would most want to fight him.

Fitna Is Worse Than Killing

The clause in the middle is the one which explains why any of this is permitted at all, and it is the clause the reader must understand or he will understand nothing.

Wa'l-fitnatu ashaddu min al-qatl. Fitna is worse than killing.

The mufasssirūn have taken fitna here as shirk, and as the persecution which was driving men out of their religion by torture, and both are in the word. The Muslims in Makkah were not being killed; they were being *broken*. A man was held down and worked on until he said a word he did not believe, and that is what the Qur'ān is calling worse than killing, because a man who is killed has lost his life and a man who is broken has lost the thing his life was for.

‘Alī Ūnal has set out the range of the word well, and it is worth having in full. Fitna is the reason war becomes unavoidable, and in most Qur’ānic contexts it means the association of partners with Allāh ﷻ and the adopting of that as a way of life, the spreading of unbelief and apostasy, the committing of major sins with a wilful and insolent abandon, open hostility to Islam, the destruction of collective security or the causing of public disorder, and oppression. Every one of those is worse than killing, and each can be a reason for war, and the word covers all of them.¹⁸⁹

And war, in the Qur’ānic view, is a thing which is disliked and abhorrent. Allāh ﷻ says: *fighting has been prescribed for you, and it is hateful to you*.¹⁹⁰ He does not pretend otherwise. He does not glorify it and He does not sell it. He says it is hateful, and He says it is prescribed, and the reason it is prescribed is that there are situations which are worse.

The Sanctuary

And the Sacred Masjid and the Sacred City are protected, except in self-defence. The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said on the day of the conquest:

إِنَّ هَذَا الْبَلَدَ حَرَّمُهُ اللَّهُ يَوْمَ خَلَقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ، فَهُوَ حَرَامٌ بِحُرْمَةِ اللَّهِ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ، وَلَمْ يَحِلَّ لِي إِلَّا سَاعَةٌ مِنْ نَهَارٍ، وَإِنَّا سَاعَتِي هَذِهِ حَرَامٌ بِحُرْمَةِ اللَّهِ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ، لَا يُعْضَدُ شَجَرُهُ، وَلَا يُخْتَلَى خَلَاهُ

*Allāh made this town sacred on the day He created the heavens and the earth; so it is sacred by the sanctity of Allāh until the Day of Resurrection. It was not made lawful for me except for an hour of a day, and it is, at this hour of mine, sacred by the sanctity of Allāh until the Day of Resurrection. Its trees may not be cut and its grass may not be uprooted.*¹⁹¹

And then he added: so if anyone should use the fighting of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ as a licence, tell him that Allāh permitted it to His Messenger and did not permit it to you.

He knew. He knew that within a generation somebody would point at what he had done at the conquest and use it to justify something of his own, and he closed the door on it while he was still standing in the city.

And what he had done at the conquest was this. He entered Makkah at the head of an army which could not be resisted, against the people who had tortured his Companions and killed his uncle and driven him from his home and hunted him for thirteen years. And he proclaimed:

مَنْ أَغْلَقَ بَابَهُ فَهُوَ آمِنٌ، وَمَنْ دَخَلَ الْمَسْجِدَ فَهُوَ آمِنٌ، وَمَنْ دَخَلَ دَارَ أَبِي سُفْيَانَ
فَهُوَ آمِنٌ

*Whoever closes his door is safe; and whoever enters the Masjid is safe; and whoever enters the house of Abū Sufyān is safe.*¹⁹²

Shut your door and you are safe. That is the whole of what was required. There was some fighting at Khandama and some of the idolaters were killed there, and it happened after that proclamation had been made and to men who had chosen not to close their doors.

فَإِنْ انْتَهَوْا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

But if they cease, then truly Allāh is Forgiving, Merciful.

al-Baqara 2:192

One line, and it undoes everything a man was building. The moment they stop, it stops.

And the reason given is not a strategic one. Allāh ﷻ does not say: if they cease, then cease, because you have achieved your objective. He says: *if they cease, then truly Allāh is Forgiving, Merciful*. He puts His own two names of mercy at the end of the sentence, and Ibn ʿĀshūr رحمه الله draws the conclusion which is sitting in the grammar: as Allāh ﷻ forgives, so must you.¹⁹³

The man who has been fighting has been wronged, and he has been driven from his home, and he has a grievance which is entirely just, and he is told that the moment the other man puts his hands down the matter is over and there is nothing left to collect.

وَقَاتِلُوهُمْ حَتَّى لَا تَكُونَ فِتْنَةٌ وَيَكُونَ الدِّينُ لِلَّهِ ^ص فَإِنْ انْتَهَوْا فَلَا
عُدْوَانَ إِلَّا عَلَى الظَّالِمِينَ

And fight them until there is no fitna, and the religion is for Allāh. But if they cease, then there is no hostility except against the wrongdoers.

al-Baqara 2:193

The objective is named and it has an end written into it. *Until there is no fitna*. Not until there are no disbelievers, and not until everybody has become a Muslim, which the Qur'ān has already ruled out by saying that there is no compulsion in the religion.¹⁹⁴ Until a man cannot be tortured out of his religion. That is the finish line, and once it is crossed the fighting has no further business.

And the best commentary on this āyah is a Companion's, and it should be read twice.

Two men came to Ibn 'Umar رضي الله عنهما during the fitna of Ibn al-Zubayr and said: the people have done what they have done, and you are the son of 'Umar and a Companion of the Prophet ﷺ; what prevents you from coming out? He said: what prevents me is that Allāh has made the blood of my brother unlawful. They said: did Allāh not say, *and fight them until there is no fitna*? He said: we fought until there was no fitna and the religion was for Allāh. And you want to fight until there is fitna, and until the religion is for other than Allāh.¹⁹⁵

Two men quoted this āyah at a Companion in order to get him into a civil war. He answered them with the āyah itself. The fighting it commands had an object, and the object had been achieved, and men who are quoting it in order to start a fight amongst Muslims have got the āyah upside down: they are producing the fitna which the āyah was revealed to end.

And Nāfi‘ narrated another exchange, and it belongs beside the first. A man came to Ibn ‘Umar رضي الله عنهما and said: Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, what makes you perform Ḥajj one year and ‘Umra another, and abandon fighting in the way of Allāh, when you know what Allāh has encouraged in it? He said: nephew, Islam is built on five: belief in Allāh and His Messenger, the five prayers, the fasting of Ramaḍān, the giving of zakāh, and the Ḥajj to the House. He said: Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, do you not hear what Allāh has mentioned in His Book? And he recited to him the āyah of the two groups of believers who fight, and this āyah. And Ibn ‘Umar said: we did that in the time of the Prophet ﷺ, when Islam was small and a man would be persecuted in his religion; they would either kill him or torture him, until Islam grew and there was no fitna.¹⁹⁶

A young man with a Qur’ān in his hand and an argument, and an old Companion who had been there, patiently explaining to him what the āyah had been about.

The Intention

And then the āyah which sorts the whole business out. Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī رضي الله عنه said: the Prophet ﷺ was asked about a man who fights out of bravery, and a man who fights to show off, and a man who fights out of tribal loyalty; which of them is in the way of Allāh? And he ﷺ said:

مَنْ قَاتَلَ لِتَكُونَ كَلِمَةُ اللَّهِ هِيَ الْعُلْيَا فَهُوَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ

*Whoever fights so that the word of Allāh may be the highest, he is in the way of Allāh.*¹⁹⁷

Three men on the same field doing the same thing, and only one of them is doing what the āyah says. The others are doing something which looks identical and has nothing to do with it. Which means that a man cannot tell, by looking at an act, whether it is jihād, and neither can the man performing it, unless he has been honest with himself about a thing men are rarely honest about.

No Hostility Except Against the Wrongdoers

And the closing clause is a limit again. *Fa-lā ‘udwāna illā ‘alā al-ẓālimīn*. The moment they cease, hostility is finished, except against a man who is still wronging somebody.

And the measure is fixed elsewhere and it is always the same measure. *So whoever transgresses against you, transgress against him in the like of what he transgressed*

against you.¹⁹⁸ And the recompense of an evil is an evil the like of it; and whoever pardons and puts right, his reward is with Allāh.¹⁹⁹ And if you punish, then punish with the like of what you were punished with; and if you are patient, that is better for the patient.²⁰⁰

Three times, and every one of them says *the like*, and every one of them adds that forgiving would be better. The Qur'ān will not let a man take more than he was given, and it will not let him feel good about taking the amount he was given either.

الشَّهْرُ الْحَرَامُ بِالشَّهْرِ الْحَرَامِ وَالْحُرُمَاتُ قِصَاصٌ ۚ فَمَنْ عَدَىٰ عَلَيْكُمْ
فَاعْتَدُوا عَلَيْهِ بِمِثْلِ مَا عَدَىٰ عَلَيْكُمْ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ
الْمُتَّقِينَ

*A sacred month for a sacred month, and the sanctities are a matter of retribution.
So whoever transgresses against you, transgress against him in the like of what he
transgressed against you; and fear Allāh, and know that Allāh is with the God-
fearing.*

al-Baqara 2:194

There are four sacred months: Dhū al-Qa'da, Dhū al-Hijja and Muḥarram, which run together, and Rajab, which stands alone. In them the Arabs did not fight, and the whole peninsula could travel and trade and make its pilgrimage in safety.

And they cheated. When a sacred month was inconvenient they would violate it and then substitute another month for it later, so that the account balanced and the piety was preserved and the fighting had gone ahead as planned. This was the *nasi'* which Allāh ﷻ condemns in Sūrat al-Tawba as an increase in disbelief.

So the Muslims were told that they might respond in the sacred month if they were attacked in it, and the reason is plain: without that ruling, the sanctity would have become a weapon in the hands of the men who did not respect it, and the Muslims would have been the only people in Arabia who could be attacked with impunity for a third of every year. This ruling stood until the seventh year after the Hijra.

Ḥudaybiya was in Dhū al-Qa'da, and the 'Umra of the following year, the 'Umrat al-Qaḍā', was in Dhū al-Qa'da too, and the Muslims went in fearing that the idolaters would break the agreement. And Jābir رضي الله عنه said: the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ would not fight in the Sacred Month unless he was attacked first; and otherwise he would remain still until the sacred months had passed.²⁰¹

And there is an incident which shows what that cost him. After the conquest of Makkah came Ḥunayn against the Hawāzin, and then the siege of Ṭā'if, where they had gone. And while Ṭā'if was still under siege, Dhū al-Qa'da arrived. And as the casualties amongst the Companions mounted, he ﷺ lifted the siege and went away without taking the city, and returned to Makkah and performed 'Umra from al-Ji'rāna and divided the spoils of Ḥunayn.²⁰²

He walked away from a city he was about to take, because the month had changed.

And Fear Allāh

And then the closing, and it is placed exactly where a man is least likely to hear it. He has just been given permission to retaliate. He has been wronged. He has the right and he has the measure, and he is angry. And Allāh ﷻ says: *and fear Allāh, and know that Allāh is with the God-fearing.*

Which is the whole difficulty of this passage in one clause, because a man who is exercising a right while he is angry will exceed it. He always does. The permission is exact and his temper is not, and Allāh ﷻ has put the taqwā at the end of the āyah so that the last thing a man reads before he acts is a reminder that the One who gave him the right is watching how he takes it.

Never respond out of anger. That is the ruling underneath the ruling.

Spend, and Do Not Throw Yourself Into Ruin

وَأَنْفِقُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تُلْقُوا بِأَيْدِيكُمْ إِلَى التَّهْلُكَةِ وَأَحْسِنُوا إِنَّ
اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

*And spend in the way of Allāh, and do not throw yourselves by your own hands
into ruin; and do good. Truly Allāh loves those who do good.*

al-Baqara 2:195

The āyah is quoted more often than almost any other and it is quoted, nearly always, for the opposite of what it was revealed for.

Aslam Abū 'Imrān said: a man from the Anṣār broke the enemy lines at Constantinople, and Abū Ayyūb al-Anṣārī رضي الله عنه was with us. And some people said: he is throwing himself into ruin. And Abū Ayyūb said: we know this āyah better than you, for it was revealed about us, the Companions of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ, who fought with him and aided him and supported him. When Islam became strong we, the Anṣār, met and said to one another: Allāh has honoured us by being the Companions of His Prophet and by supporting him until Islam became victorious and its followers increased. We had been neglecting our families and our estates and our children. The war has finished, so let us go back to our families and our children and attend to them. And Allāh sent down this āyah about us: *and do not throw yourselves by your own hands into ruin*. And the ruin was our staying with our families and our estates and abandoning the fighting.²⁰³

The men standing on that field used the āyah exactly as we use it, to mean: be careful, do not overreach. And a Companion who had been present at the revelation stood up and told them that it meant the reverse: that the ruin was the sitting at home.

The reader should take from this a lesson about method before he takes anything else. An āyah in Arabic, read by intelligent Muslims of the first generation, was understood to mean the opposite of what it was sent for, and the only thing which saved them was that a man who knew the occasion was standing there.

The Other Readings

The mufasssirūn have given other meanings and they do not contradict Abū Ayyūb's رضي الله عنه, since an āyah may bear more than one sense and the Qur'ān is generous that way.

One is that the ruin is stinginess, because the āyah begins with *spend*, and a man who is told to spend and does not is throwing himself somewhere by his own hand. The withholding of wealth is a self-destruction which feels, at the time, like prudence.

And Muftī Shafī' رحمه الله notes the reading from the other direction, that the ruin can be a spending which leaves a man's own family in need.²⁰⁴ A man who gives away everything and cannot feed his children has also thrown himself in, by his own hand, and with the best intention in the world.

Both readings sit in the same short āyah, which is the mercy of the wording: *spend*, and *do not throw yourselves into ruin*, and the two clauses hold each other up.

And Do Good

And then *wa aḥsinū*, and do good, and the word carries the whole of iḥsān.

Muftī Shafī' رحمه الله notes its two senses. The first is in worship, which is the ḥadīth of Jibrīl عليه السلام: that you worship Allāh as though you see Him, and if you do not see Him, then He sees you. The second is social: the giving of preference to others, the doing of more than a man owes.²⁰⁵

And the āyah closes on the second name in the Book which is worth building a life on: *Allāh loves those who do good*. He has just described fighting and spending and ruin, and the sentence He ends on is a sentence about love.

Complete the Hajj and the 'Umra for Allāh

وَأَتِمُّوا الْحَجَّ وَالْعُمْرَةَ لِلَّهِ فَإِنْ أُحْصِرْتُمْ فَمَا اسْتَيْسَرَ مِنَ الْهَدْيِ وَلَا تَحْلِقُوا رُءُوسَكُمْ حَتَّى يَبْلُغَ الْهَدْيُ مَحَلَّهُ فَمَنْ كَانَ مِنْكُمْ مَرِيضًا أَوْ بِهِ أَذًى مِنْ رَأْسِهِ فَفِدْيَةٌ مِنْ صِيَامٍ أَوْ صَدَقَةٍ أَوْ نُسُكٍ فَإِذَا أَمِنْتُمْ فَمَنْ تَمَتَّعَ بِالْعُمْرَةِ إِلَى الْحَجِّ فَمَا اسْتَيْسَرَ مِنَ الْهَدْيِ فَمَنْ لَمْ يَجِدْ فَصِيَامُ ثَلَاثَةِ أَيَّامٍ فِي الْحَجِّ وَسَبْعَةٍ إِذَا رَجَعْتُمْ تِلْكَ عَشْرَةٌ كَامِلَةٌ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ لَمْ يَكُنْ أَهْلُهُ حَاضِرِي الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ

And complete the Hajj and the 'Umra for Allāh. And if you are prevented, then whatever offering is feasible; and do not shave your heads until the offering reaches its place. And whoever amongst you is ill, or has an ailment of the head, then a ransom of fasting, or charity, or a sacrifice. And when you are secure, then whoever takes advantage of the 'Umra until the Hajj, let there be whatever offering is feasible; and whoever cannot find one, then a fast of three days during the Hajj and seven when you have returned; that is ten complete. That is for the one whose family are not present at the Sacred Masjid. And fear Allāh, and know that Allāh is severe in punishment.

al-Baqara 2:196

After the fasting and after the fighting, the Hajj. And the reader should notice the order of the whole Juz', because it has been laying the pillars in front of us one by one: the Qibla, the ṣalāh, the ṣiyām, and now the Hajj.

It is a pillar of Islam and it was made obligatory in the third year after the Hijra, and the āyah which made it so is in Āl 'Imrān: *and for Allāh, upon the people, is the pilgrimage to the House, for whoever is able to find a way to it.*²⁰⁶

And a warning about delay, from Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنهما: the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said: whoever intends the Hajj, let him hasten to it, for he may fall ill, or lose his

mount, or some need may arise.²⁰⁷ The reader who has been saying *next year* for eleven years should read that once more.

Do Not Push Me for More

And an incident which the ordinary worshipper should know, because it explains why the religion is as light as it is. Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه said: the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ gave a khuṭba and said: O people, Allāh has made the Ḥajj obligatory upon you, so perform the Ḥajj. A man said: every year, Messenger of Allāh? And he was silent, until the man had said it three times. Then he said: if I said yes, it would become obligatory, and you would not be able to do it. And then he said:

ذُرُونِي مَا تَرَكْتُكُمْ، فَإِنَّمَا هَلَكَ مَنْ كَانَ قَبْلَكُمْ بِكَثْرَةِ سُؤَالِهِمْ وَاخْتِلَافِهِمْ عَلَى
أَنْبِيَائِهِمْ، فَإِذَا أَمَرْتُكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ فَأَتُوا مِنْهُ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ، وَإِذَا نَهَيْتُكُمْ عَنْ شَيْءٍ فَدَعُوهُ

*Leave me as I have left you. Those before you were destroyed only by their many questions and their disputing with their prophets. So when I command you with something, do of it what you are able; and when I forbid you something, leave it.*²⁰⁸

The silence is the lesson. He did not answer, and he did not answer, and he did not answer, because the answer would have bound the Ummah forever. The man's question was not a bad question. It was a question with a cost, and the cost would have been paid by every Muslim who came after him.

And the reward, so that the reader knows what is at the other end. Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه narrated: the 'Umra to the 'Umra is an expiation for what is between them, and an accepted Ḥajj has no reward less than the Garden.²⁰⁹

If You Start It, Finish It

Wa atimmū al-ḥajja wa'l-'umrata lillāh. Complete them. Which is the first rule of the whole passage: if you begin an act of worship, you finish it, and the Ḥajj and the 'Umra are the two which a man can find himself unable to complete through no fault of his own, and so the āyah goes on to deal with exactly that.

Fa-in uḥşirtum. This was revealed at Ḥudaybiya, when they had come for 'Umra and were turned back and had to come out of their iḥrām without having done it. The Companions were at first hesitant, and would not move, and then they cut their hair, and he ﷺ said *rahimallāhu al-muḥalliqīn*, may Allāh have mercy on those who shaved, twice, and then, for those who only shortened, once.²¹⁰

The reasons for *iḥṣār* are whatever prevents a man: no visa, sickness, disability, being lost, the fear of an enemy. He pays for a goat to be slaughtered within the Ḥaram of Makkah, and two if he was a *qārīn*, and he shaves his head and is free of the *iḥrām*. And the Ḥajj or the ʿUmra remains owing, and he does it again when he can.

The *badī* may be any of the permitted animals: a sheep, a goat, a cow, a camel. And the *maḥill*, the place it must reach, is within the Ḥaram of Makkah.

Three Ways to Pay

And the man with an ailment of the head, who must shave before the time, is given a choice of three: a fast, or a charity, or a sacrifice. And this becomes the pattern for the violations of the *iḥrām* generally, and the *fuqahāʾ* have set out the three:²¹¹

The sacrifice of an animal. Or three *ṣāʿ*, which is about three kilogrammes to a *ṣāʿ*, given to six poor people, half a *ṣāʿ* each, which is about a kilogramme and a half to each of them, and which is the measure of the *Ṣadaqat al-Fiṭr*. Or three fasts.

Three doors again, and a man will always be able to walk through one of them, which is the point of there being three.

And a note which mattered a great deal at the time and which we pass over. The ʿUmra and the Ḥajj can both be done in the months of Ḥajj, and the people of the *Jāhiliyya* held that this was one of the worst sins on earth. The *āyah* of the *tamattuʿ* settles it, and the settling of it was a correction of a custom, not merely a convenience.

The Hajj Is in Months Well Known

الْحَجُّ أَشْهُرٌ مَّعْلُومَةٌ ۖ فَمَنْ فَرَضَ فِيهِنَّ الْحَجَّ فَلَا رَفَثَ وَلَا فُسُوقَ
وَلَا جِدَالَ فِي الْحَجِّ وَمَا تَفْعَلُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ يَعْلَمْهُ اللَّهُ وَتَزَوَّدُوا فَإِنَّ
خَيْرَ الزَّادِ التَّقْوَىٰ وَاتَّقُونِ يَا أُولِيَ الْأَلْبَابِ

The Hajj is in months well known. So whoever has made the Hajj binding upon himself in them, there is to be no obscenity, no wrongdoing and no quarrelling in the Hajj. And whatever good you do, Allāh knows it. And take provision, and the best provision is taqwā. So fear Me, O people of understanding.

al-Baqara 2:197

A man may intend the Hajj at any time of the year. What the āyah fixes is when it is performed, and the months are known and have always been known.

And then three prohibitions, and the reward for keeping them is in a ḥadīth which is amongst the best news in the religion. Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه narrated that the Prophet ﷺ said: whoever performs the Hajj and does not commit rafath and does not commit fusūq, he returns as on the day his mother bore him.²¹²

The Three

Rafath. The word has already appeared in this Juz', at the āyah of the nights of the fast: *it has been made lawful for you, on the night of the fast, the rafath to your wives.*²¹³ So it is the intimacy and everything which leads up to it, and in the Hajj it is closed.

Fusūq. The disobedience, and the mufassirūn have taken it particularly of the tongue, of the swearing and the abusing, and the Messenger ﷺ said: the abusing of a Muslim is fusūq, and the fighting of him is kufr.²¹⁴

Jidāl. The quarrelling. And it is worth being precise about what is forbidden here, because a man will tell you he was only making a point. Jidāl is the argument which upsets the other man. It is not a discussion and it is not a question. It is the exchange in which one of the two goes away hurt, and it is forbidden in the Hajj

entirely, which anybody who has stood in a queue at Minā in forty degrees will recognise as the hardest of the three.

And then, immediately after the three negatives, a positive: *and whatever good you do, Allāh knows it*. Do something. Anything. The three prohibitions have told a man what to stop, and this clause tells him not to spend his Ḥajj merely not-sinching, because the not-sinching is not the worship.

Take Provision

Wa tazawwadū fa-inna khayra al-zādi al-taqwā.

The occasion was practical. There were people who would set out for the Ḥajj without provisions, saying that they were putting their trust in Allāh ﷻ, and would then arrive and beg from the pilgrims. And Allāh ﷻ told them to take their food with them, and then turned the word over: *and the best provision is taqwā*.²¹⁵

So the āyah is teaching two things at once and the first is not the lesser of them. A man does not put his hand out to another man when he could have put a bag on his shoulder. Independence from the creation is a part of the religion, and the tawakkul which requires other people to feed you is not tawakkul, it is an arrangement in which somebody else does the work and you take the credit for the trust.

And *zād* is literally the food a traveller carries, and figuratively the companion he travels with, and the ‘ulamā’ have played on both. What you carry with you is what you will have when you arrive.

And al-Ghazālī رحمه الله has a remark on the two halves of this āyah which is worth the whole of it. Everybody can do some good; very few people can abstain from sin. And a bird needs both wings.²¹⁶

The āyah has given a man three things to leave and one thing to do, and it closes by addressing *ulī al-albāb*, the people of understanding, exactly as the āyah of retribution did. Twice in this Juz’, Allāh ﷻ has asked the reader to use his head before he forms his view.

No Sin in Seeking the Bounty of Your Lord

لَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ أَنْ تَبْتَغُوا فَضْلًا مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَإِذَا أَفَضْتُمْ مِنْ
عَرَفَاتٍ فَادْكُرُوا اللَّهَ عِنْدَ الْمَشْعَرِ الْحَرَامِ وَاذْكُرُوا كَمَا هَدَاكُمْ وَإِنْ
كُنْتُمْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ لَمَنِ الضَّالِّينَ

There is no sin upon you that you seek a bounty from your Lord. Then, when you flow down from 'Arafāt, remember Allāh at the Sacred Monument; and remember Him as He has guided you, though before it you were amongst the astray.

al-Baqara 2:198

A man reads the opening and wonders why it needed saying. Of course a pilgrim may buy his lunch. And the answer is in the history, and Muftī Shafī رحمه الله gives it plainly.²¹⁷

The people of Arabia had distorted every rule of worship and of dealing with one another by injecting into them all sorts of absurd customs, until the acts of devotion had turned into an amusement. They did not spare the rites of Ḥajj. At the great gathering at Minā they would set up special bazaars and hold exhibitions and put up devices for the promotion of trade. Then Islam came and brought everything back to truth and simplicity and sincerity, and some of the Companions رضي الله عنهم swung the other way and began to think that even a necessary trade was disliked. So they asked the Prophet ﷺ, and he waited for the revelation.

Abū Umāma al-Taymī said: I asked Ibn 'Umar رضي الله عنهما: we buy and sell during the Ḥajj, so do we still have a valid Ḥajj? He said: do you not perform ṭawāf around the House, and stand at 'Arafāt, and throw the pebbles, and shave your heads? I said: yes. He said: a man came to the Prophet ﷺ and asked him about what you have asked me, and the Prophet ﷺ did not answer him until Jibrīl عليه السلام came down with this āyah.²¹⁸

So there is the balance, and it is worth having both ends of it. It is not permitted to turn an act of worship into a marketplace. And it is not permitted to invent a

prohibition and call it piety, and the man who needs to eat may buy his food, and the man who has a stall may keep it.

And the lesson which is nearest to us is the first half of it rather than the second, because we are not in danger of thinking trade is forbidden. We are in danger of the bazaar. There is a photograph taken during the ṣalāh, and there is the Ḥajj which is being documented rather than performed, and there is the ‘Umra which comes home as a folder of images. The men who set up the exhibition at Minā did not think they were doing anything wrong either.

Faḍl

And the word Allāh ﷻ uses for the earnings is *faḍl*, a bounty, a grace, a thing given out of generosity. He did not call it a wage.

It is the word of the du‘ā’ we make on leaving the maṣjid, and it is the word of the āyah after the Jumu‘a: *disperse in the land and seek of the bounty of Allāh*. And it says, every time, that the rizq is not the product of your effort. It is His decision. Which is why a man with three degrees is at home and a plumber cannot answer his telephone, and why the arrangement never quite matches what we thought we had earned. Allāh ﷻ decides who earns and how much.

And in these days in particular, do not ask from anybody except Allāh ﷻ. The āyah has just called the trade a bounty from your Lord while your hand is on the money.

‘Arafāt

The plain of ‘Arafāt lies outside the Ḥaram, and the ninth of Dhū al-Ḥijja is named the Day of ‘Arafa after it, and the standing there between the zawāl and the Maghrib is a farḍ of the Ḥajj, and what a man is meant to be doing while he stands is du‘ā’ and dhikr.

The name has been explained in more than one way, and each is worth carrying.

Ibn Kathīr رحمه الله reports from the Companions رضي الله عنهم that Ibrāhīm عليه السلام was taught the Ḥajj by Jibrīl عليه السلام, and when the time came to perform it, he arrived at the plain and recognised it, and said *‘araftu*, I have recognised it.²¹⁹ And it is said that it is the place where Ādam and Ḥawwā’ عليهما السلام met again after they were sent down. And it is said that it is where men come to know their Lord through worship, and where the Muslims come to know one another.

Take the last one to the plain with you. Two million people who have nothing in common except the One they are standing for, in the same two sheets, on the same ground, and not one of them can tell what any of the others does for a living.

The Sacred Monument

Al-Mash'ar al-Ḥarām is a hill in Muzdalifa, as Ibn 'Umar رضي الله عنهما explained,²²⁰ and the staying of the night at Muzdalifa is wājib.

And *fadhkurullāh*, remember Allāh, takes in every kind of remembrance, and the mufasssirūn have said that here it means particularly the offering of the two prayers together at one time: the Maghrib prayed with the 'Ishā', with one adhān and two iqāmas.

As He Has Guided You

Wadhkurūhu kamā hadākum. Remember Him as He has guided you. Which is to say: in the manner He showed you, and not in the manner which seems best to you.

The joining of the two prayers at Muzdalifa is the example sitting in front of us. A man may ask why. There is no obvious reason. The two prayers have their times and the times are known, and here they are put together in a way they are not put together anywhere else in the year, and the answer is that this is how we were taught. Not everything needs a ḥikma. Not every command has a reason we are able to see, and a religion in which every instruction had to justify itself to us before we obeyed it would be a religion in which we were the authority.

And then the last clause, which is there to stop a man feeling clever about any of it: *though before it you were amongst the astray*. Every man on that plain arrived there by a guidance he did not generate. Which is why the people of the Garden will say, when they are inside it: *praise be to Allāh, who guided us to this; and we would not have been guided had Allāh not guided us*.²²¹

Then Flow Down From Where the People Flow

ثُمَّ أَفِيضُوا مِنْ حَيْثُ أَفَاضَ النَّاسُ وَاسْتَغْفِرُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ
رَحِيمٌ

*Then flow down from where the people flow down, and seek forgiveness from
Allāh. Truly Allāh is Forgiving, Merciful.*

al-Baqara 2:199

‘Ā’isha رضي الله عنها said: Quraysh and their allies, who used to be called al-Hums, would stay at Muzdalifa, while the rest of the Arabs stood at ‘Arafāt. And when Islam came, Allāh commanded His Prophet ﷺ to stand at ‘Arafāt and then proceed from there.²²²

The excuse they gave was religious. They were the people of the Ḥaram, they said, and they could not bring themselves to leave it. And the truth was that they liked to be seen to be different, and they made a point of keeping the common people at a distance, and the whole arrangement was a display.

Muftī Shafī رحمه الله draws it out. To behave as though one is special, and to stay disconnected from other people, is a standing act of arrogance which must almost always be avoided, and it is worse during the Ḥajj than anywhere else. The garment of iḥrām and the sameness of the place and the purpose exist to teach that all human beings are equal, and that the distinction of rich and poor, learned and ignorant, big and small, does not exist here. So a man who puts on a display of an assumed distinction, and does it while wearing two white sheets, has made the crime worse by the place he chose for it.²²³

So Allāh ﷻ did not correct their theology. He moved them. He made the noblest family in Arabia stand on the same plain as everybody else, and told them to flow down when the crowd flowed down, and the correction was administered with their feet.

And a ruling for the reader who has been: if you visit ‘Arafāt for ziyāra, outside the Ḥajj, you need not put the iḥrām on again, though you may if you wish.

And Seek Forgiveness

And now the astonishing part of the āyah, and the reader should stop at it.

A man has completed the greatest act of worship of his life. He has stood at ‘Arafāt. He has poured out everything he had. And the very next instruction is: *wa’stagh-firullāh*, and seek the forgiveness of Allāh.

For what? For the Ḥajj. For the standing itself, and for whatever was missing in it, and for the moments in it when he was thinking about the coach. It is the habit of the Book: *so glorify the praise of your Lord and seek His forgiveness*,²²⁴ revealed at the moment of the greatest victory the Prophet ﷺ was given. Every high point in the religion is closed with an istighfār, because the higher a man goes the more clearly he sees how little he brought.

The Two Protections

Allāh ﷻ says: *and Allāh was not going to punish them while you were amongst them; and Allāh was not going to punish them while they were seeking forgiveness*.²²⁵

And Ibn ‘Abbās رضي الله عنهما said of it: there were amongst them two protections: the Prophet ﷺ, and the istighfār. The Prophet ﷺ has gone, and the istighfār remains.²²⁶

Read that once more. We had two things standing between us and the punishment of Allāh ﷻ, and one of them has been taken away, and we cannot have it back. There is one left. And it is free, and it takes four seconds, and most of us do not use it.

And the Messenger ﷺ said: glad tidings to the one who finds in his record a great deal of istighfār. And: whoever keeps to seeking forgiveness, Allāh will make for him a way out of every difficulty, and a relief from every anxiety, and will provide for him from where he does not reckon.²²⁷

The Chief of Seekings of Forgiveness

And the words are given to us. Shaddād b. Aws رضي الله عنه narrated that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said: the chief of the seekings of forgiveness is that the servant says:

اللَّهُمَّ أَنْتَ رَبِّي، لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ، خَلَقْتَنِي وَأَنَا عَبْدُكَ، وَأَنَا عَلَى عَهْدِكَ وَوَعْدِكَ مَا
اسْتَطَعْتُ، أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ شَرِّ مَا صَنَعْتُ، أَبُوءُ لَكَ بِنِعْمَتِكَ عَلَيَّ، وَأَبُوءُ بِذَنْبِي، فَاعْفِرْ
لِي، فَإِنَّهُ لَا يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ

*O Allāh, You are my Lord; there is no god but You. You created me and I am Your servant, and I am upon Your covenant and Your promise as much as I am able. I seek refuge with You from the evil of what I have done. I acknowledge to You Your favour upon me, and I acknowledge my sin; so forgive me, for none forgives sins except You.*²²⁸

And Abū Bakr رضي الله عنه said: Messenger of Allāh, teach me a supplication with which I may supplicate in my ṣalāh. And he said: say:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي ظَلَمْتُ نَفْسِي ظُلْمًا كَثِيرًا، وَلَا يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ، فَاعْفِرْ لِي مَغْفِرَةً مِنْ
عِنْدِكَ وَارْحَمْنِي، إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ

*O Allāh, I have wronged myself with a great wrong, and none forgives sins except You; so forgive me with a forgiveness from You, and have mercy upon me. Truly You are the Forgiving, the Merciful.*²²⁹

Abū Bakr رضي الله عنه asked for that. The best of this Ummah, asking to be taught how to confess.

Remember Allāh as You Remember Your Fathers

فَإِذَا قَضَيْتُمْ مَنَاسِكَكُمْ فَادْكُرُوا اللَّهَ كَذِكْرِكُمْ آبَاءَكُمْ أَوْ أَشَدَّ ذِكْرًا فَمِنَ
النَّاسِ مَنْ يَقُولُ رَبَّنَا آتِنَا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَمَا لَهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنْ خَلَقٍ

And when you have completed your rites, remember Allāh as you remember your fathers, or with a stronger remembrance. For amongst the people is one who says: our Lord, give to us in this world; and he has no share in the Hereafter.

al-Baqara 2:200

Ṣaʿīd b. Jubayr said that Ibn ʿAbbās رضي الله عنهما said: during the time of ignorance the people would stand at the season, and one of them would say, my father used to

feed the poor, and used to settle the disputes of others with his money, and used to pay the blood money; and so on. The only remembrance they had was the remembering of the deeds of their fathers. And Allāh sent down this āyah.²³⁰

So at the close of the greatest gathering in Arabia, when everybody was in one place, the men would stand up and boast about their fathers. That was the ceremony. And Allāh ﷻ did not forbid it; He redirected it. Remember Allāh ﷻ the way you remember them, and then more.

And there is a second reading, which Muftī Shafī' رحمه الله takes from *Rūḥ al-Bayān*, and it is finer than the first. A man should remember Allāh ﷻ the way he remembered his father in his childhood, when he depended on him for everything. A child calls for his father for every small thing and does not stop to consider whether the matter is worth troubling him with, and does not think he has any other option, and is not embarrassed about it. And if a man would think, now that he is grown and rational, is he not far more dependent on Allāh ﷻ at every moment and in every condition than the child ever was on his father? And as for the boasting about the honour of the fathers, the āyah removes that too, by saying that the real honour comes through the remembrance of Allāh ﷻ.²³¹

The First Supplication

Then two men are put in front of us, and both of them are making du'ā', and one of them has nothing at all.

Rabbānā ātinā fi'l-dunyā. Our Lord, give to us in this world. That is the whole of his supplication. It is not a bad thing to ask for; the Qur'ān is about to praise a man who asks for exactly this. What ruins it is that he stopped there. He was standing in front of the One who owns everything, at the moment when the doors are open, and it did not occur to him to ask for anything beyond the next few decades.

And Allāh ﷻ says of him: *wa mā lahu fi'l-ākhirati min khalāq.* He has no share in the Hereafter. He asked for one thing and he was given it, and the account is settled, and there is nothing further owing to him.

So when you make du'ā', ask for more than the dunyā. It costs nothing. He is not going to run short.

وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ يَقُولُ رَبَّنَا آتِنَا فِي الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ حَسَنَةً وَقِنَا
عَذَابَ النَّارِ

*And amongst them is one who says: our Lord, give us good in this world and good
in the Hereafter, and protect us from the punishment of the Fire.*

al-Baqara 2:201

This is the du‘ā’ every Muslim knows and most of us say without hearing, and it is worth taking apart once so that it is never said carelessly again.

It was the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ to recite it during the ṭawāf, between the Yemeni corner and the Black Stone.²³² And Anas رضي الله عنه said that it was the supplication he ﷺ made most often.

And what it contains is everything. Ibn Kathīr رحمه الله lays it out. The good of this life takes in every material request: well-being, a spacious dwelling, a pleasing spouse, sufficient provision, beneficial knowledge, a good profession, comfortable transport, and a good name. All of those are a part of the good which is sought in this life. And the good of the Hereafter is the Garden, which also means safety from the greatest horror at the gathering place, and a light questioning, and the other favours of that Day.²³³

One sentence. It contains the whole of what a man could want in both houses, and it ends by asking for protection from the only thing he should be afraid of. A man who says it and means it has asked for everything there is.

The Man Who Asked for the Wrong Thing

Anas رضي الله عنه narrated that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ visited a Muslim man who had grown as weak as a sick chick. He said to him: were you asking Allāh for something, or supplicating to Him? He said: yes. I used to say: O Allāh, whatever punishment You have kept for me in the Hereafter, give it to me in this life. And the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said: *subḥānallāh*, you cannot bear it. Why did you not say: *rabbānā ātinā fi'l-dunyā ḥasanatan wa fi'l-ākhirati ḥasanatan wa qinā ‘adbāba'l-nār*? And he supplicated to Allāh with it, and the man was cured.²³⁴

The man's intention was excellent. He was trying to be brave. And he had asked for something a human being is not built to carry, and it very nearly killed him, and the Prophet ﷺ said *subḥānallāh* when he heard it. The correction he was given was this āyah.

And Saʿīd b. Jubayr said: a man came to Ibn ʿAbbās رضي الله عنهما and said: I worked for some people and settled for a part of my wages in return for their taking me on Ḥajj with them. Is that acceptable? And Ibn ʿAbbās said: you are amongst those whom Allāh described, and he recited this āyah.²³⁵

ج
أُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا كَسَبُوا وَاللَّهُ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ

Those shall have a share of what they have earned; and Allāh is swift in reckoning.

al-Baqara 2:202

Notice the word which has come back. The first man had *no share, min khalāq*. These have *a share, naṣīb*. The same currency, and one of them asked for it and one of them did not.

And *mimmā kasabū*, of what they have *earned*. The duʿāʾ was not a lottery ticket. Allāh ﷻ has just described two men who supplicated, and He credits the second with having earned something, which tells the reader what a duʿāʾ is: it is work.

And then *wallāhu sarīʿu al-ḥisāb*, and Allāh is swift in reckoning. It cuts two ways and both are in the words. The people who worked will not be kept waiting for their wage. And the people who did not work should not take the delay for an acquittal, because the reckoning of a man who spent his life asking for this world only will not take long. There is very little to go through.

Remember Allāh in the Numbered Days

ج
* وَادْكُرُوا اللَّهَ فِي أَيَّامٍ مَعْدُودَاتٍ فَمَنْ تَعَجَّلَ فِي يَوْمَيْنِ فَلَا إِثْمَ عَلَيْهِ وَمَنْ تَأَخَّرَ فَلَا إِثْمَ عَلَيْهِ لِمَنِ اتَّقَىٰ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّكُمْ إِلَيْهِ تُحْشَرُونَ

And remember Allāh in the numbered days. So whoever hastens in two days, there is no sin upon him; and whoever delays, there is no sin upon him. That is for the one who fears Allāh. And fear Allāh, and know that you shall be gathered to Him.

al-Baqara 2:203

The numbered days are the *ayyām al-tashrīq*, in which the takbīr is wājib and in which fasting is not permitted, and the Messenger ﷺ said of them:

أَيَّامُ التَّشْرِيقِ أَيَّامُ أَكْلِ وَشُرْبٍ وَذِكْرِ اللَّهِ

*The days of tashrīq are days of eating and drinking and the remembrance of Allāh.*²³⁶

Eating and drinking, and dhikr, in the same sentence and with no wall between them. Which is a small statement of the whole religion: the days of the greatest worship of a man's life close with an instruction to enjoy his food and to remember who gave it to him.

And Muftī Shafīʿ رحمه الله says why the dhikr is placed at the very end. The pilgrims are told to occupy themselves with the remembrance of Allāh ﷻ so that their Ḥajj meets a perfect ending, and so that the life which comes after the Ḥajj is correct and fruitful.²³⁷ The dhikr is the hinge between the pilgrimage and the rest of his life, and a man who lets go of it at the airport has taken the pilgrimage and left the point of it on the plain.

Why the Dhikr Is Greatest

We do dhikr anyway. It is repeated in this Juz' and in the Book more often than almost anything, and the repetition is the measure of the importance. Allāh ﷻ has said: *so remember Me, I will remember you.*²³⁸ And: *and whoever turns away from*

*My remembrance, for him is a constricted life, and We shall raise him blind on the Day of Resurrection.*²³⁹ And: *and the remembrance of Allāh is greater; and Allāh knows what you do.*²⁴⁰

And why is it *akbar*, greater? Because it has no conditions on it. There is no wuḍū' required, no qibla, no particular place, no appointed time. Every other act of worship has a gate a man has to pass through first. This one has none. A man may do it walking to the bus, and lying in bed, and at his desk, and in the state a man is in with his wife, and if his tongue cannot manage it his heart can.

And it is the only act of worship we are told to do *kathīra*, in abundance. We are told to pray, and there is a number. We are told to fast, and there is a month. Of the dhikr, He said: remember Allāh much.

Two Days or Three

And the ruling on the leaving. Some held that a pilgrim must remain at Minā until the thirteenth. The correct position is that he has the option of either of the two permissions the āyah gives, and it is better to stay through the third day.

The fuqahā' say that a man who leaves Minā before sunset on the twelfth need not perform the ramy for the third day. But if the sun sets while he is still at Minā, it is no longer permitted for him to leave until he has done the ramy of the third day; and the ramy of that day has a concession, that it may also be done between the morning and the noon.²⁴¹

And a note on the pelting itself, since the reader may not have been: on the tenth, only the large pillar is pelted; on the eleventh, the twelfth and the thirteenth, all three. And the place is where Shayṭān came to Ibrāhīm عليه السلام to turn him back from what he had been commanded, and where he was answered with stones.

And then the clause which governs both permissions: *li-mani ittaqā*. That is for the one who fears Allāh ﷻ. The two options are equal in law, and the man is warned that the choosing between them is not neutral, because a man who leaves early to beat the traffic and a man who leaves early because he has a reason are doing the same act and are not doing the same thing.

The Ḥajj Should Change You

Muftī Shafī رحمه الله relates that a pious man said: when I returned from Ḥajj, a suggestion of sin happened to creep into my heart, and I heard a voice from the

unseen: did you not perform the Ḥajj? Did you not perform the Ḥajj? And that voice became a wall between me and that sin, and Allāh Almighty protected me.²⁴²

That is the whole test of it, and it arrives about a fortnight after a man gets home. We make intentions before we go so that we come back different.

And look at what this short passage has been teaching, because every lesson has been attached to a physical act.

Zād: take your provision. Independence from people.

Afīḍū: flow down where they flow down. Humility, and the ending of every distinction between us.

Fadhkurūhu: the remembrance of Allāh ﷻ.

Rabbānā ātinā: the love of the dunyā taken out of the heart, and replaced with an ask which is bigger than it.

Wa'ttaqullāb: taqwā.

Tuḥṣharūn: and the whole thing closed with the Day you will be gathered, which is what the standing on the plain looked like anyway, and which every man on it noticed.

The Man Whose Speech Impresses You

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يُعْجِبُكَ قَوْلُهُ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَيُشْهَدُ اللَّهُ عَلَى مَا فِي
قَلْبِهِ وَهُوَ أَلَدُّ الْخِصَامِ

And amongst the people is one whose speech about the life of this world impresses you, and who calls Allāh to witness what is in his heart, and he is the fiercest of opponents.

al-Baqara 2:204

The sūra has done this before and it does it again here at the end of the Juz': two men are put side by side, and this āyah is the first of them, the man who sold his Hereafter for a portion of this world.

The reports name al-Akhnas b. Shurayq, who was known for his eloquence. He would come to the Prophet ﷺ and impress him with his declarations of allegiance to Islam, and no sooner had he walked out of the gathering than he was busy with his mischief against the Muslims.²⁴³

And Ibn ‘Abbās رضي الله عنهما narrated that these āyahs were revealed about some of the hypocrites who criticised Khubayb رضي الله عنه and his companions, who were killed at al-Rajī.²⁴⁴ Men had been killed while teaching the religion, and there were people who used the deaths as a talking point. And Allāh ﷻ answered them by condemning the talkers and praising the dead, in the āyahs which follow.

Three Things Wrong With Him

His speech is a lie. His belief is corrupt. And his actions are ugly. That is the summary the mufasssīrūn give of the three āyahs, and each of the three has an āyah of its own.²⁴⁵

Wa yush-hidullāha ‘alā mā fī qalbib, and he calls Allāh ﷻ to witness what is in his heart. Which is the most brazen thing in the āyah. He swears by Allāh ﷻ about the contents of his own chest, knowing what is actually in there, and he does it in order to be believed by men. The opening of Sūrat al-Munāfiqūn describes the temper of it exactly: *they hide themselves from the people and do not hide themselves from Allāh*.

²⁴⁶

And *aladdu al-khiṣām*, the fiercest of opponents. The word is from a root meaning to be twisted, so it is the man who cannot be pinned, who has an answer to everything and a reply to every reply, and who will not concede a point if you argue with him for a year. And the Messenger ﷺ said:

أَبْغَضُ الرِّجَالِ إِلَى اللَّهِ أَلَدُّ الْخِصَمِ

*The most hateful of men to Allāh is the fierce quarreller.*²⁴⁷

Not the ignorant man. Not the weak man. The man who argues and will not stop.

A Conversation Worth Preserving

Ibn Kathīr رحمه الله records that Abū Ma’shar Najīh said: I heard Sa’īd al-Maqburī discussing with Muḥammad b. Ka’b al-Qurazī, and Sa’īd said: it is in some of the books, that Allāh has servants whose tongues are sweeter than honey and whose hearts are more bitter than aloes; they wear for the people the skins of sheep, for

softness; they draw the world to themselves by means of the religion. Allāh Most High says: is it against Me that you are insolent? Is it by Me that you are deceived? By My might, I shall send upon them a fitna which will leave the forbearing amongst them bewildered.

And Muḥammad b. Ka'b said: this is in the Book of Allāh. And Sa'īd said: and where is it in the Book of Allāh? He said: the words of Allāh, *and amongst the people is one whose speech about the life of this world impresses you*. And Sa'īd said: I know about whom this āyah was revealed. And Muḥammad b. Ka'b said: an āyah is revealed about a man, and then it is general afterwards.²⁴⁸

Two scholars are talking, and one of them quotes a saying from the older scriptures, and the other says: that is in our Book. And when the first replies that he knows the man it was revealed about, he is given the principle which governs the whole of the tafsīr: *an āyah is revealed about a man, and then it is general afterwards*. And Ibn Kathīr رحمه الله says that this remark of al-Qurazī's is excellent and sound.

So the reader may not close this āyah by naming al-Akhnas and walking away. The occasion is a man. The āyah is a type. And the type is sitting in every community and is usually the most impressive man in the room.

ق
وَإِذَا تَوَلَّى سَعَى فِي الْأَرْضِ لِيُفْسِدَ فِيهَا وَيُهْلِكَ الْحَرْثَ وَالنَّسْلَ
وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْفُسَادَ

*And when he turns away, he moves about in the land to spread corruption in it,
and to destroy the tillage and the offspring; and Allāh does not love corruption.*

al-Baqara 2:205

The turning away is the moment the door closes behind him. In the gathering he is impressive; outside it he goes to work.

And what he did was concrete. Al-Akhnas, or whoever it was, went to the farms of the Muslims and burnt the crops, and then killed the camels. He wanted to make a statement, and the statement was to destroy the economy of a community which was already poor.

Al-ḥarth wa'l-nasl, the tillage and the offspring. The crop is what a man eats this year and the offspring is what he eats next year, and a man who takes both has not injured a community, he has ended it. And the 'ulamā' have read *nasl* more widely, because the harm this kind of man does is contagious and does not stop at the man he was aiming at. He wants to hurt you and your children after you.

And then *wallāhu lā yuḥibbu al-fasād*, and Allāh does not love corruption. The same construction as the āyah of fighting: *Allāh does not love the transgressors*. Twice in this Juz', the thing Allāh ﷻ declares He does not love is a man who was quite certain he was doing something necessary.

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُ اتَّقِ اللَّهَ أَخَذَتْهُ الْعِزَّةُ بِالْإِثْمِ فَحَسْبُهُ جَهَنَّمُ وَلَبِئْسَ
الْمِهَادُ

*And when it is said to him, fear Allāh, arrogance takes hold of him in the sin. So
Jahannam is enough for him, and it is an evil resting place.*

al-Baqara 2:206

Here is the sentence which decides everything, and it is a sentence about a reaction rather than an act.

He is not being punished for the sin. He is being punished for what he did when he was corrected. Somebody said three words to him, *fear Allāh*, which is the mildest thing a Muslim can say to another Muslim, and something rose up in him.

Ibn 'Āshūr رحمه الله describes it: he becomes angry when he is advised. He feels entitled. He behaves as though nobody can overpower him, as though he is untouchable.²⁴⁹

And 'Abdullāh b. Mas'ūd رضي الله عنه said: it is enough of a sin for a man that his brother says to him, fear Allāh, and he says: mind yourself; are you the one to be advising me?²⁵⁰

The reader has heard that answer this year. Possibly he has given it. The sin was small and the reply was the disaster, because the sin was a lapse and the reply was a position.

Only Allāh Can Judge Me

And here is the modern form of it, and it is worth naming because it is said in our masājīd by people who think it is a piece of humility.

A man is corrected and he says: only Allāh can judge me. Which is true, and which has nothing whatever to do with what just happened. Nobody judged him. Somebody told him that a thing he was doing was wrong, which is not a verdict on his soul and is not a claim about his final destination.

And if the sentence were true as he means it, then a whole obligation of the religion would fall. Where would *amr bi'l-ma'rūf* and *nahy 'an al-munkar* go? Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī رضي الله عنه narrated that the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said: whoever amongst you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; and if he cannot, then with his tongue; and if he cannot, then with his heart, and that is the weakest of faith.²⁵¹ That instruction is addressed to everybody, and the man who says *only Allāh can judge me* is telling his brother to take the weakest option and be quiet.

And the distinction which settles it is 'Umar's رضي الله عنه: in the lifetime of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ, some people were called to account through the revelation. Now the revelation has ended, and we shall judge you by your apparent acts. Whoever shows us good, we shall grant him peace and security and treat him as a near one, and we have nothing to do with his inward state; Allāh will call him to account for that. And whoever shows us evil, we shall not grant him security and we shall not believe him, even if he professes that his intention is good.²⁵²

There is the whole answer in a paragraph. Nobody is judging your heart. Your heart is His business and none of ours. Your hands are ours, because we have to live next to them.

And the Messenger ﷺ said: the angels are the witnesses of Allāh in the heaven, and you are the witnesses of Allāh on the earth.²⁵³ We were appointed. It is not an intrusion.

Whose 'Izza?

And there is a bitter thing in the word which the āyah chose. *Akhabathu al-'izzatu bi'l-ithm*. The 'izza took hold of him, in the sin.

'Izza is might, honour, an unassailable dignity. And Allāh ﷻ has told us whose it is: *and to Allāh belongs the might, and to His Messenger, and to the believers*.²⁵⁴ And

this Juz' closes the very next āyah with *fa'lamū anna'llāha 'azīzun ḥakīm*, know that Allāh is Mighty, Wise.

So the man has helped himself to an attribute which is not his, and he has done it at the exact moment he was being invited back. The 'izza was available to him and he could have had a share in it, and the price of it was the three words he refused to hear.

And *al-mihād*, the resting place. The word is for a bed, a thing spread out for a man to lie on, and the mufasssīrūn have noticed the mockery in it. Your bed covers your back and your sides and holds you comfortably. So will the Fire.

And Among Men Is One Who Sells His Soul

قُلْ
وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَشْرِي نَفْسَهُ ابْتِغَاءَ مَرْضَاتِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ رَءُوفٌ
بِالْعِبَادِ

*And amongst the people is one who sells his own soul, seeking the pleasure of Allāh;
and Allāh is Most Kind to the servants.*

al-Baqara 2:207

And there is the other man, put directly opposite the first, and the reader should hold the two in one glance. One sold his religion for the world. This one sold himself for the pleasure of Allāh ﷻ. The same verb of buying and selling in both. The Qur'ān is showing us two men at a market and telling us what each of them went home with.

Suhayb's Trade

The āyah was revealed in connection with Ṣuhayb al-Rūmī رضي الله عنه.²⁵⁵

Soon after he left Makkah on his emigration to Madīnah, he was accosted on the road by a group of the disbelievers of Quraysh. Seeing them, he dismounted, took up a position, pulled every arrow out of his quiver, and said to them: O tribe of Quraysh, you all know that I am a better archer than any of you here, and that my arrow does not miss. Now, I swear by Allāh that you shall not reach me while there remains one arrow in this quiver. And after the arrows I shall use my sword for as

long as I can. And after that you may do what you can. However, if you want to make a deal: I will tell you where my money is in Makkah. Go and take it, and let me go my way.

And they agreed. And when Ṣuhayb رضى الله عنه reached Madīnah, safe and unharmed, he went to the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ and told him what had happened. And he ﷺ said, twice:

رَبِّحَ الْبَيْعُ أَبَا يَحْيَى، رَبِّحَ الْبَيْعُ أَبَا يَحْيَى

The trade has profited, Abū Yahyā. The trade has profited, Abū Yahyā.

And then this āyah came down, which is Allāh ﷻ confirming from above the seven heavens what His Messenger ﷺ had just said in the street.

Look at what the man actually did. He had them. He was the better archer and they knew it, and he could have made them pay for every yard. And he offered them his entire savings instead, the whole of a life's work, in exchange for being allowed to walk to Madīnah. He did not fight because he did not need to win. He needed to arrive.

The Contract

And the sale in the āyah is not a metaphor, because Allāh ﷻ has written out the contract elsewhere: *truly Allāh has purchased from the believers their souls and their wealth, in exchange for the Garden being theirs. They fight in the way of Allāh, and they kill and are killed. A promise binding upon Him in truth, in the Tawrah and the Injil and the Qur'ān. And who is more faithful to his covenant than Allāh? So rejoice in the bargain you have made; and that is the great triumph.*²⁵⁶

He is the buyer. The price is fixed. The promise is recorded in three books, and the seller is told to rejoice at the deal he has struck, which is the only sale in history where the buyer congratulates the seller.

And *wallāhu ra'ūfun bi'l-'ibād*, and Allāh is Most Kind to the servants. He asked a man for his soul, and He closes the āyah by calling Himself Kind. Which the reader should sit with, because it is the answer to a whole class of doubts. The One asking for everything is the One who gave it in the first place, and He is not taking it from us. He is buying it, at a price we could never have set, from people who did not own it to begin with.

Enter Islam Completely

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ادْخُلُوا فِي السِّلْمِ كَافَّةً وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطَوَاتِ
الشَّيْطَانِ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ

O you who believe, enter into Islam completely, and do not follow the footsteps of Shayṭān. He is to you an open enemy.

al-Baqara 2:208

Some of those who had come to Islam from amongst the Jews of Madīnah thought that a synthesis of the two religions might be the right approach: that they might keep what they had and add what had come. And this āyah was sent down.

And the Messenger ﷺ said it himself when he saw a page of the Tawrah in ‘Umar’s hand and his face changed, and he said: even if Mūsā عليه السلام were alive, he would have no choice but to follow me.²⁵⁷

And Sūrat al-Kāfirūn had already rejected the arrangement in its finished form. They had offered exactly this: half of ours and half of yours, a year each. And the answer was six āyahs which do not concede a syllable.

Kāffatan

Udkbulū fi’l-silmi kāffatan. Enter it completely. All of you, and all of you.

Nothing half-baked. Not Islam with the culture kept underneath it, and not Islam with the parts of the old religion which were more convenient, and not Islam with the bits of this country’s habits which we have decided are close enough.

And the ‘ulamā’ have taken *kāffatan* as covering the whole of a man’s limbs and the whole of the religion, which they have divided into five and which the reader should check himself against one at a time. The *‘aqā’id*, what he believes. The *‘ibādāt*, his worship. The *mu‘āsharāt*, how he lives with people. The *akhlāq*, his character. And the *mu‘āmalāt*, his dealings and his money.

Most of us are excellent in one or two of them and have never once thought about a third. A man is punctual for every prayer and impossible to do business with. A man is scrupulous in his trade and speaks to his mother in a way you would not

speak to a stranger. And each of them believes himself to be inside the religion, and each of them has entered a portion of it.

And the places where the entering fails are predictable and the reader should be honest about his own diary: the weddings, the funerals, the business deals, the holidays. Those four are where the culture reasserts itself, every time, in every community, and where the man who is otherwise careful will do things he could not defend for a moment if he were asked about them at any other time.

Footsteps

And the prohibition which follows it has appeared in this Juz' before, at the hundred and sixty-eighth āyah, and it was about food. Here it is about the religion itself. *Wa lā tattabi'ū khuṭuwātī'l-shayṭān.*

Abū Zahra رحمه الله notices the word.²⁵⁸ Shayṭān barely ever makes a man dive into a sin. It is bit by bit, one step and then another, and the wording is deliberate: *footsteps*, and not a fall.

And Muftī Shafī رحمه الله adds the particular danger in this place: the enemy would cheat you into taking up something which looks very much like your faith and happens to be totally contrary to it in reality.²⁵⁹ Which is why the āyah about mixing the religions is the one which carries this warning. He does not usually come to a believer with something obviously foreign. He comes with something which looks like Islam and is one step to the side of it, and then he waits.

فَإِنْ زَلَلْتُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَتْكُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ فَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

*And if you slip after the clear proofs have come to you, then know that Allāh is
Mighty, Wise.*

al-Baqara 2:209

The word is *zalaltum*, from *zalla*, to slip, which is what a foot does on a wet stone. It is not the word for a rebellion. It is the word for a man who was walking and went down, and the Qur'ān has chosen it deliberately after having just described the footsteps, because that is how the footsteps end.

And the closing is not the closing a reader expects. He has just been warned about slipping, and the sentence he is given is: *know that Allāh is ‘Azīz, Ḥakīm.*

Abū al-‘Āliya and Qatāda and al-Rabī‘ b. Anas said: He is Mighty in His vengeance, Wise in His decision.²⁶⁰

The two names are put together and they hold each other. ‘Azīz alone would be a threat: He has the power and He will use it, and nothing you have will stop Him. Ḥakīm alone would be a comfort with nothing behind it. Together they say: He is able to do it, and He will not do it wrongly. Which is the right thing to know about a Judge, and it is the only thing a man needs to know about Him before the next āyah.

In Canopies of Cloud

هَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَأْتِيَهُمُ اللَّهُ فِي ظُلَلٍ مِنَ الْغَمَامِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ
وَقُضِيَ الْأَمْرُ إِلَى اللَّهِ تُرْجَعُ الْأُمُورُ

Are they waiting for anything except that Allāh should come to them in canopies of cloud, with the angels, and the matter is decided? And to Allāh all matters are returned.

al-Baqara 2:210

The Juz’ closes here, and it closes with a question rather than a statement, and the question is addressed to every man who has read the last sixty-eight āyahs and has not moved.

Are they waiting for anything except...? What are you waiting for? The Qibla was turned, and the fasting was given, and the du‘ā’ was answered before you finished asking, and the Book was called a guidance and a criterion, and Ṣuḥayb رضي الله عنه bought his passage with everything he owned, and here you are, waiting. For what? For the sky to open?

And Allāh ﷻ tells us what it will look like when it does, and He tells us in order to make the point that it will be too late. *Wa quḍiya al-amr*, and the matter is decided. The clause is in the past tense, and it is placed in the middle of a description of the

future, which is the Qur'an's way of saying that the thing is as good as done. By the time you see the cloud, the verdict is in. There is no part of that scene in which a man does anything at all.

What Comes in the Canopies

As for the coming of Allāh ﷻ in canopies of cloud, this is of the *mutashābihāt*, and the way of the Muslims is the way it has always been: we affirm what He said of Himself, without asking how, and without likening Him to anything, and without emptying His words of their meaning. He is not like His creation, and He described Himself, and both of those are true at once, and a man who tries to force them into a picture has already gone wrong.

And the 'ulamā' have said that the angels will come with a *tasbīḥ* of that Day, and the reader who has stood in the *tarāwīḥ* and heard the pause between the *rak'ahs* filled with a *tasbīḥ* has heard the shadow of it.

Al-Ṣābūnī رحمه الله says what the *āyah* is for. The aim is to show how grave the Day of Judgement will be: Allāh ﷻ as the final Judge, the Supreme, with no chance of appeal, with all the witnesses present, in front of the whole of His creation.²⁶¹

Every court a man has ever seen has a way out of it. There is an appeal, and there is a better lawyer, and there is the possibility that the witness will not turn up, and there is the hope that the man was more eloquent in his argument than the other, which the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ told us can win a case in his own court. None of it is available here. The Judge was the witness. The record is complete. And the matter is decided before the cloud has finished opening.

And to Allāh All Matters Are Returned

And the last words of the *Juz'*, and they are the words to close a volume on.

Wa ila'llāhi turja'u al-umūr. To Allāh all matters are returned.

Everything in this half of the *Juz'* has been a matter. The direction of a prayer. A woman running between two hills. A man's will and his debts and the question of who owns the car. A month of hunger. A crescent nobody could see through the cloud over Manchester. A dispute over a piece of land and a judgement obtained by a good argument. An army at the gate of a city and the month changing. Two men on a plain, one asking for the world and one asking for both houses.

And every one of them goes back to Him. Not some of them, and not the religious ones. *Al-umūr*, with the definite article, which in Arabic takes in the lot.

The reader who has come this far has been given the second Juz' of the sūra which the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ called the summit of the Qur'ān, and he has been given it in a form which asks something of him at every turn. May Allāh ﷻ make us of those who hear the word and follow the best of it, and may He accept this small effort from hands which are not equal to it. Āmīn.

Addendum: On Reading the Fighting Passages of al-Baqara

I said in the introduction that these āyahs are read badly rather often, and I promised the reader who found them difficult that I would say more about it here. This is that fuller word, and I have put it at the back rather than the front for the same reason I did in the volume before this one, that I did not want it standing between the reader and the Book. But I would rather he read it than not.

The difficulty is real and it should be named. Five āyahs, from the hundred and ninetieth to the hundred and ninety-fourth, and they contain the word *kill*, and they contain it in the imperative. A Muslim who reads them without care can come away with something the Qur'ān did not give him. He can come away frightened of his own Book, and quietly hoping nobody at work asks him about it. Or he can come away with a licence, which is worse, and which a small number of our young men have done in living memory, to the great cost of everybody. And in either case he will have read every word correctly and understood none of it.

So let me set out four things which I believe the ordinary worshipper needs in order to read this passage as it was meant.

The First: The Limits Are Inside the Āyah

This is the thing to see before anything else, and it is not a defence and it is not an apology. It is the plain shape of the text.

The permission is given in the hundred and ninetieth āyah: *and fight in the way of Allāh those who fight you*. And the limit arrives in the same āyah, before the sentence has finished: *and do not transgress; truly Allāh does not love the transgressors*. It is not in a different sūra. It is not in a ḥadīth which a man has to go and find. It is in the same breath, and the displeasure of Allāh ﷻ is attached to the misuse before the permission has cooled.

Then the hundred and ninety-first: *kill them wherever you come upon them*, and in the next clause, *and drive them out from where they drove you out*, which identifies who *they* are, in the same sentence, by what they did. And then, still in the same āyah, *and do not fight them at the Sacred Masjid until they fight you in it*, which carves an exception out of the permission at the one place where a commander would most want to use it.

Then the hundred and ninety-second, entire: *but if they cease, then truly Allāh is Forgiving, Merciful*. Then the hundred and ninety-third: *and fight them until there is no fitna*, which is an objective with a finish line written into it, and then again, *but if they cease*. And then the hundred and ninety-fourth, which fixes the measure at *the like of what he transgressed against you*, and closes with taqwā.

Count them. Five āyahs. One permission and something like six restraints, and the restraints are woven into the permission rather than following it. A man who has taken half of the hundred and ninety-first āyah and put it on a placard has not been reading the Qur'ān strictly. He has been reading a fragment, and there is a word for the men who took part of the Book and left part of it, and the sūra used that word about somebody else a hundred āyahs ago.

The Second: The Prophetic Rules Are Not Decoration

The reader should assemble what the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ actually said about this, because it is a great deal more specific than the slogans on either side.

Do not steal from the spoils. Do not act treacherously, which means that an agreement holds even with an enemy who would not keep one with you. Do not mutilate. Do not kill a child. Do not kill the people of the hermitages, who are monks of another religion sitting in a building of that religion, named and protected. And when one woman was found dead on one battlefield, a general prohibition on the killing of women and children was issued over her body and has bound this Ummah for fourteen centuries.

Then look at the conquest of Makkah, which is the one occasion in his life when he ﷺ held total power over the people who had done him the most harm. He announced: whoever closes his door is safe. That was the whole requirement. Shut your door.

And on the same day he said that Allāh ﷻ had made that town sacred on the day He created the heavens and the earth, and that it had been made lawful to him for

one hour of one day and would never be lawful again; and then he added that if anyone should use his fighting as a licence, the answer is that Allāh permitted it to His Messenger ﷺ and did not permit it to you.

He knew. Standing in the city, in the hour of the victory, he could see the man who would come along later and point at what he had just done, and he closed that door before he left. A Muslim who wants to argue from the conquest has been answered by the conqueror.

The Third: The Companions Faced This Exact Argument

What is most useful in this passage is that the misuse of it is not new, and that we have on record what a Companion said to a man who tried it on him.

Two men came to Ibn ‘Umar رضي الله عنهما during a civil war and quoted the hundred and ninety-third āyah at him to get him to take up arms. They had the Arabic. They had the āyah. What they did not have was the sense of it, and he told them so: we fought until there was no fitna and the religion was for Allāh; and you want to fight until there *is* fitna, and until the religion is for other than Allāh.

And another man came to him and asked why he was performing Ḥajj and ‘Umra and not fighting, when he knew what Allāh ﷻ had encouraged in it, and recited the āyahs at him. And Ibn ‘Umar رضي الله عنهما told him what the pillars of Islam are, and then explained that the fighting he was quoting belonged to a time when a man was tortured for his religion, and that the condition it addressed had passed.

So the pattern is old: a young man with a Qur’ān and an argument and no history, and an older man who was there. What has changed in our century is only that the young man now has a phone and can find the āyah in four seconds and cannot find the occasion of its revelation at all.

And the ḥadīth which sorts the whole business out is the one about the three men on the field. One fights out of bravery, one to be seen, one out of tribal feeling. Which is in the way of Allāh ﷻ? Only the one who fights so that the word of Allāh ﷻ may be the highest. Three identical acts, and two of them are worth nothing, and no observer can tell them apart, and neither can the man doing it unless he has been more honest with himself than men usually are when they are angry and armed.

The Fourth: Where the Politics Belongs

I have deliberately not brought a current conflict into the commentary on these āyahs, and I should say why, since I did bring current matters into the volume before this one and a reader may fairly ask what the difference is.

The difference is the risk. In the second volume the contemporary material illuminated the āyah and cost the reader nothing but some discomfort. Here, the contemporary material would be doing the opposite: it would be borrowing the authority of the āyah for a position of mine, and handing the reader a Qur'ānic justification for something he already felt. That is precisely the misuse this addendum exists to warn against, and I am not going to commit it in the course of warning against it.

What I will say is this, and it is the limit I set for myself in the last volume and I set it again. A political grievance, however just, is not a religious position, and the Qur'ān is not a newspaper. These āyahs give a community a right of self-defence and hedge it about with restraints on every side, and the working out of when and how a state exercises that right is a matter for the 'ulamā' and the people of authority who have the facts in front of them, and it has never in the history of this religion been a matter for the individual reading at his kitchen table. A man who reads these five āyahs and comes away with strong feelings about a war and no change in how he treats the man he shares an office with has not been improved by them.

And there is the other error, which is quieter and which I think is more common amongst us. It is the man who reads this passage and is embarrassed by it, and who would like it to say something gentler than it does, and who will explain it away if he is pressed. He should not. Allāh ﷻ says elsewhere in this very Juz' that *fighting has been prescribed for you, and it is hateful to you*, and He does not pretend otherwise and He does not sell it. He says it is hateful and He says it is prescribed, and the reason it is prescribed is that there are situations which are worse than it, and He names one of them: *fitna is worse than killing*. A world in which a man can be tortured out of his religion and nobody may lift a hand is not a peaceful world. It is a world in which the violence has been given to one side.

The commentary is meant to be the servant of the āyah. Where I have let it become the master, I have failed, and I would ask to be told.

May Allāh ﷻ protect us from reading His Book to our own harm, and make us of those who take the permission where He gave it and stop where He stopped. Āmīn.

Notes

Why Have They Turned From Their Qibla?

1. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAẓīm*, at 2:142. The point is made in almost the same words by al-Qurṭubī and by Abū al-Suʿūd.
2. al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān*, at 2:142, collects the reports naming each of the three groups, and concludes that the wording admits all of them.
3. al-Ṣābūnī, *Ṣafwat al-Tafsīr*, at 2:142.
4. al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmiʿ al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-Ṣalāh, on the āyah of the Qibla; also Muslim, *al-Musnad al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb al-Masājīd.
5. al-Bukhārī and Muslim, from Ibn ʿUmar رضي الله عنهما.
6. Ibn Kathīr, at 2:142–143, concluding: *wallāhu aʿlam*. The principle is treated at length in the works of uṣūl under the heading of *balāgh al-naskh*.
7. al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmiʿ*, Kitāb al-Manāqib, who graded it ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ; also Ibn Mājah and al-Nasāʾī in some wordings.

A Middlemost Community

8. Ibn Kathīr, at 2:143. The connection is that the middle of a thing is protected on every side, and so it is the part which is safest and therefore most valuable, as the centre of a necklace holds its finest stone.
9. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, from Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī رضي الله عنه; the same explanation is in al-Bukhārī in the Book of Tafsīr.
10. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, from Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī رضي الله عنه; a fuller version, with the questioning of the Ummah and their answer, is in al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Tafsīr, at this āyah.
11. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Janāʾiz; also al-Tirmidhī and al-Nasāʾī, from Abū al-Aswad al-Duʿālī.
12. al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, at 2:143, in his treatment of the witnessing of the Ummah.
13. The point is discussed by al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, at 2:143, and by Ibn ʿĀshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa-l-Tanwīr*, at the same place: the knowledge is the knowledge of realisation, *ʿilm al-wuqūʿ*, and Allāh's ﷻ eternal knowledge is not in question.
14. al-Tawba 9:124–125. Ibn Kathīr cites this comparison at 2:143.
15. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, from ʿĀʾisha رضي الله عنها; also Ibn Mājah in a similar wording.
16. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Adab, and Muslim, Kitāb al-Tawba, from ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb رضي الله عنه. Ibn Kathīr cites it at 2:143.

The Face Turned to the Sacred Masjid

17. The report is preserved by Ibn Ishāq and quoted by Ibn Kathīr at 2:144; the substance of it, the looking at the sky, is in the ṣaḥīḥ narrations of al-Barā' رضي الله عنه cited above.
18. Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa'l-Tanwīr*, at 2:144.
19. Muftī Muḥammad Shafī', *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*, at 2:144, where the question is raised and answered at some length. The summary here is his, condensed.
20. *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*, at 2:144. The rulings themselves are the settled positions of the Ḥanafī madhhab and are set out in the fiqh manuals; see Ibn 'Ābidīn, *Radd al-Muḥtār*, Kitāb al-Ṣalāh, bāb istiḳbāl al-qibla.
21. al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi'*, Kitāb al-Ṣalāh, who graded it ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ; also Ibn Mājah. The ruling is understood of the people of Madīnah and of those whose Qibla lies to the south, as the fuqahā' have explained.
22. See *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān* at 2:144, and the discussion in the Ḥanafī manuals on *jihat al-qibla* as against *'ayn al-qibla*, where the position is that facing the direction suffices for those distant from the House.

They Will Not Follow Your Qibla

23. Yūnus 10:96–97. Ibn Kathīr sets the two passages side by side at 2:145.
24. The argument is drawn out by al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, at 2:145, and is made in a similar way at al-Isrā' 17:73–75 and al-Ḥāqqā 69:44–46.
25. *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*, at 2:146.

Race One Another to the Good

26. The narrower reading, of the Qibla of each community, is in al-Ṭabarī at 2:148; the wider application, of the direction each man faces, is drawn out by Ibn 'Āshūr at the same place, who notes that the Qur'ānic phrasing is left general.
27. *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*, at 2:148.

From Wherever You Go Out

28. *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*, at 2:149–150, where the repetition is discussed and the threefold division which follows is set out.

As We Have Sent a Messenger Amongst You

29. al-Baqara 2:129. The two āyahs should be read side by side; the connection is noticed by all the mufasssīrūn, and Ibn Kathīr says at 2:151 that this is the answer to the supplication of Ibrāhīm عليه السلام and the good news of 'Īsā عليه السلام.
30. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, from al-'Irbāḍ b. Sāriya رضي الله عنه; also al-Ḥākim, *al-Mustadrak*.

31. The point is made by al-Rāzī at 2:151 and is the basis of the settled position that *tilāwa* is worship in its own right. See also the ḥadīth that whoever recites a letter of the Book of Allāh has a good deed for it, and the good deed is multiplied by ten: al-Tirmidhī, from Ibn Mas‘ūd رضي الله عنه.

Remember Me and I Will Remember You

32. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, and Muslim, Kitāb al-Dhikr, from Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه.
33. al-Qurṭubī, at 2:152, discussing the reality of dhikr and the difference between the tongue and the heart. The remark of Abū ‘Uthmān is transmitted in the works of the Sufis and is quoted by al-Qurṭubī and others in this connection.

Seek Help in Ṣabr and Ṣalāh

34. The threefold division is standard; see al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, Kitāb al-Ṣabr wa’l-Shukr, and Ibn al-Qayyim, *Uddat al-Ṣābirīn*.
35. Muslim, Kitāb al-Zuhd, from Ṣuhayb رضي الله عنه.
36. Abū Dāwūd, *al-Sunan*, Kitāb al-Ṣalāh, from Ḥudhayfa رضي الله عنه. Ibn Kathīr cites the practice at 2:153.
37. The report is transmitted from ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn رحمه الله and is quoted by Ibn Kathīr at 2:153 and by others in their treatment of ṣabr. It is a saying of a tābi‘ī and is offered as such.
38. al-Zumar 39:10.

Do Not Say of Them That They Are Dead

39. Muslim, Kitāb al-Imāra, from Ibn Mas‘ūd رضي الله عنه; the fuller narration which follows, with the questioning, is also in Muslim at the same place.
40. Āl ‘Imrān 3:169–170.

We Shall Surely Test You

41. The point is made by al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, at 2:155, on the force of the indefinite *shay’*, and is repeated by Abū al-Su‘ūd and by Ibn ‘Āshūr.
42. al-Naḥl 16:112. The expression is *libās al-jū‘ wa’l-khawf*, the garment of hunger and fear, which the mufasssīrūn explain as an affliction which surrounds a man on every side as a garment does.
43. The application to Tabūk is noted by the mufasssīrūn who treat the passage as preparing the community for what was coming; see Ibn ‘Āshūr at 2:155.
44. Ibn Kathīr, at 2:155, reporting the interpretation and rejecting it in those words. The reading is attractive and does not fit the wording, which is the reason for his hesitation.
45. On the derivation and its implications see al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Mufradāt*, under *ṣ-w-b*, and the treatment of the āyah in *Ṣafwat al-Ta’fāsīr*.

46. al-Baqara 2:3, *wa mimma razaqnāhum yunfiqūn*. The ‘ulamā’ have often noticed that the Qur’ān does not say *out of their wealth*.
47. Muslim, Kitāb al-Janā’iz, from Umm Salama رضي الله عنها; the narration of the proposal and her objections is also in Aḥmad, *al-Musnad*, and in the *Sunan*. The wording here is a rendering of the fuller version.
48. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, and al-Tirmidhī, from Abū Mūsā al-Ash’arī رضي الله عنه, who graded it ḥasan. Ibn Kathīr cites it at 2:157.

Al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa

49. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Ḥajj, and Muslim, Kitāb al-Ḥajj, from ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr, from ‘Ā’isha رضي الله عنها. Ibn Kathīr treats the exchange at length at 2:158.
50. Muslim, Kitāb al-Ḥajj, the long ḥadīth of Jābir رضي الله عنه describing the Farewell Ḥajj. Al-Nasā’ī has the wording *ibda’u bimā bada’a llāh bibi*, begin with what Allāh began with, in the imperative.
51. Muslim records *innahā mubārakatun, innahā ṭa’āmu ṭu’min* from Abū Dharr رضي الله عنه; the addition *wa shifā’u suqmin* is in al-Ṭayālīsī and al-Bazzār and is graded acceptable by a number of the ḥuffāz. Ibn Kathīr cites the wording at 2:158.
52. Ibn Kathīr, at 2:158; the passage is a summary of his words there.
53. The positions are as set out in *Ma’ārif al-Qur’ān* at 2:158; for the Ḥanafī ruling see Ibn ‘Ābidīn, *Radd al-Muḥtār*, Kitāb al-Ḥajj.
54. Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī and al-Nasā’ī record from Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه that the first thing a servant will be accounted for is his ṣalāh, and if it is deficient Allāh will say, look whether My servant has any voluntary prayers, and the deficiency will be completed from them, and then the rest of his deeds likewise.
55. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Riqāq, from Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه.

Those Who Conceal What We Sent Down

56. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-‘Ilm, and Kitāb al-Buyū’, from Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه.
57. Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī and Ibn Mājah, from Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه; al-Tirmidhī graded it ḥasan.
58. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-‘Ilm, from ‘Alī رضي الله عنه, as a mawqūf report.
59. The observation is of the rhetoricians; see al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, at 2:159, on the movement from the first person to the *ism al-dhāt*, and Abū al-Su‘ūd at the same place.
60. The report from Mujāhid رحمه الله is cited by Ibn Kathīr at 2:159 and by al-Ṭabarī. Similar reports are given from Ibn ‘Abbās رضي الله عنهما and others, and al-Baghawī notes that *al-lā’inūn* has been explained as the angels, the believers, and every creature besides men and jinn.

61. al-Tirmidhī and Abū Dāwūd, from Abū al-Dardā' رضي الله عنه: the angels lower their wings for the seeker of knowledge, and everything in the heavens and the earth asks forgiveness for the scholar, even the fish in the water.
62. al-Aḥzāb 33:67–68.
63. al-Anʿām 6:28. The argument from the settled intention is set out by al-Rāzī at 2:161–162 and is the standard answer of the mutakallimūn; Ibn al-Qayyim discusses it at length in *Ḥādī al-Arwāḥ*.
64. Muslim, Kitāb al-Birr wa'l-Ṣila, from Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه.

Signs for a People Who Use Their Reason

65. Ibn Kathīr, at 2:164; the treatment of the eight signs which follows draws on his commentary at this place throughout.
66. al-Qaṣaṣ 28:71–73.
67. al-Aʿrāf 7:57.
68. al-Shūrā 42:33.
69. Āl ʿImrān 3:190–191.

Rivals Loved as Allāh Is Loved

70. al-Baqara 2:167. The identification of the wrongdoers in this passage with the disbelievers is set out by al-Shinqīṭī, *Aḍwāʾ al-Bayān*, at 2:165, which is the source of the āyahs gathered here.
71. Luqmān 31:13.
72. al-Baqara 2:254.
73. Yūnus 10:106.
74. Sabaʾ 34:31–33.
75. Ibrāhīm 14:22.
76. al-Maʿārij 70:11–14. And then the answer: never; it is a blazing Fire.
77. ʿAbasa 80:33–37.
78. al-Nūr 24:39.
79. al-Muʾminūn 23:99–100.

Eat of What Is Lawful and Wholesome

80. Ibn Kathīr, at 2:168.
81. Muslim, Kitāb al-Zakāh, from Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه. The two āyahs cited within the ḥadīth are al-Muʾminūn 23:51 and al-Baqara 2:172.

82. al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-Awsaṭ*, and al-Bayhaqī, from Ibn ʿAbbās رضي الله عنهما. The chain is weak, as the ḥuffāz have noted, and it is quoted here for its agreement with the ṣaḥīḥ ḥadīth of Abū Hurayra عنه رضي الله عنه above and not as an independent proof.
83. The criteria are those published by the certifying bodies operating in Britain and are summarised here from their own published standards. The reader who wants the fiqh should consult *Maʿārif al-Qurʾān* at al-Māʾida 5:3 and the standard Ḥanafī manuals on *al-dhabāʾiḥ*.
84. Yūnus 10:59.
85. al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmiʿ*, Kitāb al-Tafsīr, from Ibn Masʿūd عنه رضي الله عنه, who graded it ḥasan gharīb.

What We Found Our Fathers Upon

86. Yūsuf 12:37–38.

Eat of the Good Things

87. Aḥmad, Ibn Mājah and al-Bayhaqī, from Ibn ʿUmar رضي الله عنهما; the ḥuffāz have discussed whether it is marfūʿ or mawqūf, and it is acted upon by the fuqahāʾ. Ibn Kathīr cites it at 2:173.
88. See Ibn ʿĀbidīn, *Radd al-Muḥtār*, Kitāb al-Dhabāʾiḥ, on *al-samak al-ṭāfi*. Matters such as rennet, and the treatment of blood transfusions and their permissibility, are dealt with in *Maʿārif al-Qurʾān* at this āyah and in the fatāwā of our own time, and the reader who has a practical question should ask a muftī rather than settle it from a book of tafsīr.

Selling the Book for a Small Price

89. Ibn Kathīr, at 2:174.
90. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Ḥudūd, from Ibn ʿUmar رضي الله عنهما; also Muslim in a similar wording.
91. al-Nisāʾ 4:10.
92. Muslim, Kitāb al-Libās, from Umm Salama رضي الله عنها.
93. Muslim, Kitāb al-Īmān, from Abū Hurayra عنه رضي الله عنه.
94. al-Ḥijr 15:92–93.

Righteousness Is Not the Turning of Faces

95. *Maʿārif al-Qurʾān*, introduction to 2:177. The summary which follows is his, given in shortened form.
96. al-Ḥajj 22:37.
97. The report is cited by al-Ṭabarī and by Ibn Kathīr at 2:177.
98. al-Bukhārī and Muslim, from Abū Hurayra عنه رضي الله عنه.

99. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Īmān, from Sa'd b. Abī Waqqāṣ **رضي الله عنه**: you will not spend anything seeking the face of Allāh except that you are rewarded for it, even what you put in your wife's mouth.
100. Ibn Kathīr, at 2:177.
101. Abū Dāwūd, *al-Sunan*, Kitāb al-Zakāh, from al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī **رضي الله عنهما**. The chain has been discussed by the ḥuffāz.
102. al-Bukhārī and Muslim, from Abū Hurayra **رضي الله عنه** and from 'Abdullāh b. 'Amr **رضي الله عنهما**.
103. Abū al-Su'ūd, *Irshād al-'Aql al-Salīm*, at 2:177. The passage is rendered here rather than translated word for word.
104. Ibn Kathīr, at 2:177, noting that the chain is munqaṭī'. It is given here for its meaning and not as a proof.

In Retribution There Is Life

105. Ibn Kathīr, at 2:178, where he reports from Ibn 'Abbās **رضي الله عنهما** and others that retribution was prescribed upon the Children of Isrā'īl without the option of the blood money, and that this Ummah was given both, and the pardon besides.

The Bequest and What Follows Death

106. al-Baqara 2:132–133.
107. al-Nisā' 4:7. The report from Ibn 'Abbās **رضي الله عنهما** is transmitted by Ibn Abī Ḥātim and cited by Ibn Kathīr at 2:180.
108. al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasā'ī and Ibn Mājah, from 'Amr b. Khārija **رضي الله عنه**; al-Tirmidhī graded it ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ.
109. al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb*, at 2:180, where he sets out the objection to abrogation and prefers the reading of specification.
110. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Waṣāyā, and Muslim, from Sa'd b. Abī Waqqāṣ **رضي الله عنه**.
111. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Waṣāyā, from Ibn 'Abbās **رضي الله عنهما**.
112. The line is Ṭarafa's, and it is much quoted by the mufasssīrūn in this connection.
113. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Waṣāyā, and Muslim, from Ibn 'Umar **رضي الله عنهما**.
114. The report is transmitted from Ibn Mājah and others from Ibn 'Umar **رضي الله عنهما** and is cited by Ibn Kathīr at 2:180. Its chain has been spoken of, and it is given here for its meaning.
115. al-Nasā'ī, *al-Sunan*, Kitāb al-Buyū', from Muḥammad b. 'Abdullāh b. Jaḥsh **رضي الله عنه**; also Aḥmad in *al-Musnad*.
116. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Kafāla, and Muslim, from Salama b. al-Akwa' **رضي الله عنه** and from Abū Hurayra **رضي الله عنه**.

117. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Zakāh, and Muslim, from Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه.
118. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Aḥkām, and Muslim, from Umm Salama رضي الله عنها. The full ḥadīth is given at 2:188 below.
119. Abū Dāwūd and al-Tirmidhī, from Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه; al-Tirmidhī said: ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ gharīb. The āyah recited is al-Nisā' 4:12.
120. al-Mu'minūn 23:10–11. The point is made in the same way of the people of the Garden at al-A'raf 7:43 and al-Zukhruf 43:72.
121. *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*, at 2:182.

Fastening Is Prescribed for You

122. al-Ḥadīd 57:4.
123. The statement is transmitted from 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz رحمه الله and is quoted in the works of zuhd and adab. Ibn Rajab cites it in *Jāmi' al-'Ulūm wa'l-Ḥikam*.
124. al-Baqara 2:2–4.
125. Āl 'Imrān 3:133–134.
126. al-Anbiyā' 21:48–49.
127. al-Zumar 39:33.
128. al-Naḥl 16:128.
129. The story is transmitted in the works of history and biography, notably by Ibn al-Jawzī in *Sīrat wa Manāqib 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz*, and is well known. It is given here as it is told and not as a ḥadīth.
130. The lines are attributed to Ibn al-Mu'tazz and are much quoted in the works of adab.
131. al-Ṭalāq 65:2–3.
132. al-Ṭalāq 65:4.
133. al-Ṭalāq 65:5.
134. See Ibn 'Abidīn, *Radd al-Muḥtār*, Kitāb al-Ṣawm, on the fast of the traveller and the point at which the intention is settled.
135. al-Bukhārī and Muslim, from Ḥamza b. 'Amr al-Aslamī رضي الله عنه.
136. al-Bukhārī and Muslim, from Jābir b. 'Abdullāh رضي الله عنهما. The 'ulamā' have understood it of the case in the ḥadīth, where the fasting had become a hardship on the man and an inconvenience to those with him.
137. *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*, at 2:184.
138. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Tafsīr, from Salama b. al-Akwa' رضي الله عنه.
139. The reading and the ruling are set out by al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr at 2:184, and the ruling is the settled position of the Ḥanafīs; see *Radd al-Muḥtār*, Kitāb al-Ṣawm, on *al-shaykh al-fānī*.

140. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, from Mu'ādh b. Jabal رضي الله عنه. For a detailed discussion of the three stages see Mawlānā Ashiq Ilāhī, *Anwār al-Bayān*, vol. 1, pp. 210–212.

The Month of Ramaḍān

141. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, from Wāthila b. al-Asqa' رضي الله عنه; cited by Ibn Kathīr at 2:185. The chain has been discussed.
142. al-Qadr 97:1 and al-Dukhān 44:3. The distinction between the two descents is reported from Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنهما and is set out by Ibn Kathīr at 2:185 and by al-Suyūṭī in *al-Itqān*.
143. Muslim, Kitāb al-Ṣiyām, from Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه; also al-Bukhārī in a similar wording.
144. Cited by Ibn Kathīr at 2:189 from Ibn 'Umar رضي الله عنهما; the substance is in the Ṣaḥīḥayn.
145. Muslim, Kitāb al-Ṣiyām, from Kurayb, from Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنهما.
146. The calculation and Mullā 'Alī al-Qārī's رحمه الله resolution are set out in the literature on moonsighting; the underlying dates are the standard ones given by the historians of the sīra.
147. Abū Dāwūd, *al-Sunan*, Kitāb al-Ṣawm. The report is mursal in some of its chains, and the fuqahā' have acted upon it.
148. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Maghāzī, and Muslim, from Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī رضي الله عنه.
149. al-Baqara 2:200, treated below.
150. al-Jumu'a 62:10.
151. Qāf 50:39–40.

And When My Servants Ask You About Me

152. Ibn Kathīr, at 2:186. The ḥadīth that three supplications are not rejected, amongst them that of the fasting man until he breaks his fast, is in al-Tirmidhī and Ibn Mājah from Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه.
153. The reports are gathered by Ibn Kathīr and al-Ṭabarī at 2:186. The āyah referred to in the last is Ghāfir 40:60.
154. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, and Muslim, from Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه; the wording *wa anā ma'abu idbā da'ānī* is in Aḥmad's *Musnad* from Anas رضي الله عنه.
155. al-Naḥl 16:128.
156. Ṭāhā 20:46.
157. Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī and Ibn Mājah, from Salmān al-Fārisī رضي الله عنه; al-Tirmidhī graded it ḥasan gharīb.
158. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, from Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī رضي الله عنه; also al-Bukhārī in *al-Adab al-Mufrad* and al-Ḥākim, who graded it ṣaḥīḥ.
159. Muslim, Kitāb al-Dhikr wa'l-Du'a', from Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه.

160. The report is transmitted in this wording by Ibn Kathīr at 2:186 and in the works of raqā'iq. Its meaning is established by the ṣaḥīḥ aḥādīth given above.

The Nights of the Fast

161. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Ṣawm, and Kitāb al-Tafsīr, from al-Barā' رضي الله عنه.

162. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Tafsīr; the report of Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنهما is cited by Ibn Kathīr and al-Ṭabarī at 2:187.

163. al-Furqān 25:47.

164. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Ṣawm, from 'Adī b. Ḥātim رضي الله عنه.

165. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Tafsīr, from 'Adī b. Ḥātim رضي الله عنه.

166. al-Bukhārī and Muslim, from Anas رضي الله عنه.

167. Muslim, Kitāb al-Ṣiyām, from 'Amr b. al-ʿĀṣ رضي الله عنه.

168. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, from Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī رضي الله عنه.

169. al-Bukhārī and Muslim, from Ibn 'Umar رضي الله عنهما and from 'Ā'isha رضي الله عنها.

170. al-Bukhārī and Muslim, from Zayd b. Thābit رضي الله عنه.

171. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, from Abū Dharr رضي الله عنه.

172. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-I'tikāf, from Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه; the explanation of the twenty is in Abū Dāwūd.

173. Both reports are cited by Ibn Kathīr at 2:187.

174. al-Bukhārī and Muslim, from 'Ā'isha رضي الله عنها.

175. *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*, at 2:187, from which the rulings in this paragraph are taken.

Do Not Devour Each Other's Wealth

176. Muftī Muḥammad Taqī Usmānī, *Tawḍīḥ al-Qur'ān*, at 2:188.

177. al-Baqara 2:168.

178. al-Naḥl 16:114.

179. Āl 'Imrān 3:77. The occasion is reported by al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, at 2:188, and by others.

180. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Aḥkām, and Muslim, Kitāb al-Aqḍiyya, from Umm Salama رضي الله عنها.

181. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Maḥālim, and Muslim, from Saʿīd b. Zayd رضي الله عنه.

182. al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi'*, from Abū Barza al-Aslamī رضي الله عنه, who graded it ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ.

183. al-Mu'minūn 23:51.

They Ask You About the New Moons

184. The device is discussed in the works of balāgha under *al-uslūb al-ḥakīm*; on this āyah see al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, at 2:189.

185. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Ḥajj, and Kitāb al-Tafsīr, from al-Barā' رضي الله عنه.

Fight Those Who Fight You

186. al-Ḥajj 22:39–40. Ibn Kathīr cites the position of Abū Bakr رضي الله عنه at 2:190 and discusses which of the two āyahs came first.

187. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, from Burayda رضي الله عنه; the substance is in Muslim, Kitāb al-Jihād, in the long ḥadīth of the instructions to the commanders.

188. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Jihād, and Muslim, from Ibn 'Umar رضي الله عنهما.

189. 'Alī Ünal, *The Qur'ān with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English*, at 2:191. The rendering here is condensed.

190. al-Baqara 2:216. The āyah falls in the second half of this Juz' and will be treated in the volume which follows.

191. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Janā'iz and Kitāb al-Ḥajj, and Muslim, from Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنهما.

192. Muslim, Kitāb al-Jihād, from Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه, in the long ḥadīth of the conquest.

193. Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa'l-Tanwīr*, at 2:192.

194. al-Baqara 2:256. The āyah falls in the second half of this Juz'.

195. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Tafsīr, from Nāfi', from Ibn 'Umar رضي الله عنهما.

196. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Tafsīr, from Nāfi', from Ibn 'Umar رضي الله عنهما. The āyahs recited to him were al-Ḥujurat 49:9 and al-Baqara 2:193.

197. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Jihād, and Muslim, from Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī رضي الله عنه.

198. al-Baqara 2:194.

199. al-Shūrā 42:40.

200. al-Naḥl 16:126.

201. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, from Jābir b. 'Abdullāh رضي الله عنهما; cited by Ibn Kathīr at 2:194.

202. The sequence is in the sīra literature and is summarised by Ibn Kathīr at 2:194.

Spend, and Do Not Throw Yourselves Into Ruin

203. Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī and al-Nasā'ī, from Aslam Abū 'Imrān; al-Tirmidhī graded it ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ gharīb. Cited by Ibn Kathīr at 2:195.

204. *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*, at 2:195.

205. *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*, at 2:195; the ḥadīth of Jibrīl عليه السلام is in al-Bukhārī and Muslim, from 'Umar رضي الله عنه.

Complete the Ḥajj and the 'Umra for Allāh

206. Āl 'Imrān 3:97.

207. Abū Dāwūd, Ibn Mājah and Aḥmad, from Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنهما.

208. Muslim, Kitāb al-Ḥajj, from Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه.

209. al-Bukhārī and Muslim, from Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه.

210. al-Bukhārī and Muslim, from Ibn 'Umar رضي الله عنهما. The incident at Ḥudaybiya is in al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Shurūṭ, from al-Miswar b. Makhrama and Marwān.

211. The three are set out at *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*, at 2:196, and in the Ḥanafī manuals on the *jināyāt* of the Ḥajj; see *Radd al-Muḥtār*, Kitāb al-Ḥajj, bāb al-jināyāt.

The Ḥajj Is in Months Well Known

212. al-Bukhārī and Muslim, from Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه.

213. al-Baqara 2:187.

214. al-Bukhārī and Muslim, from Ibn Mas'ūd رضي الله عنه.

215. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Ḥajj, from Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنهما: the people of Yemen would perform Ḥajj without taking provisions, and say, we are the people of tawakkul; and when they arrived they would beg from the people. So Allāh sent this down.

216. The observation is al-Ghazālī's رحمه الله in *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, in the Book of Repentance, where he sets the leaving of sins above the doing of good deeds in difficulty. The application to this āyah is the author's.

No Sin in Seeking the Bounty of Your Lord

217. *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*, at 2:198. The summary which follows is his, condensed.

218. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*; cited by Ibn Kathīr at 2:198.

219. The explanations of the name are gathered by Ibn Kathīr at 2:198 and by al-Ṭabarī; they are reported from the Companions and the Successors and are not marfū'.

220. Ibn Kathīr, at 2:198, from Ibn 'Umar رضي الله عنهما.

221. al-A'rāf 7:43.

Then Flow Down From Where the People Flow

222. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Ḥajj, from 'Ā'isha رضي الله عنها.

223. *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*, at 2:199.

224. al-Naṣr 110:3.

225. al-Anfāl 8:33.

226. The report from Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنهما is cited by Ibn Kathīr at al-Anfāl 8:33.

227. Abū Dāwūd and Ibn Mājah, from Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنهما; and Ibn Mājah from 'Abdullāh b. Bishr رضي الله عنه for the first. The chains have been discussed by the ḥuffāz.

228. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Da'awāt, from Shaddād b. Aws رضي الله عنه. He رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ added: whoever says it in the night and dies that night enters the Garden; and whoever says it in the day and dies, enters the Garden.

229. al-Bukhārī and Muslim, from 'Abdullāh b. 'Amr رضي الله عنهما.

Remember Allāh as You Remember Your Fathers

230. Cited by Ibn Kathīr at 2:200, from Sa'īd b. Jubayr, from Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنهما.

231. *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*, at 2:200, citing *Rūḥ al-Bayān*.

232. Abū Dāwūd, *al-Sunan*, Kitāb al-Manāsik, from 'Abdullāh b. al-Sā'ib رضي الله عنه.

233. Ibn Kathīr, at 2:201; the passage is condensed here.

234. Muslim, Kitāb al-Dhikr wa'l-Du'ā', from Anas رضي الله عنه; also Aḥmad in *al-Musnad*.

235. Cited by Ibn Kathīr at 2:201.

Remember Allāh in the Numbered Days

236. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*; the substance is in Muslim, Kitāb al-Ṣiyām, from Nubaysha al-Hudhalī رضي الله عنه.

237. *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*, at 2:203.

238. al-Baqara 2:152.

239. Ṭāhā 20:124.

240. al-Ankabūt 29:45.

241. The rulings are as set out in *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān* at 2:203; for the Ḥanafī detail see *Radd al-Muḥtār*, Kitāb al-Ḥajj.

242. *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*, at 2:203.

The Man Whose Speech Impresses You

243. The identification is in the works of tafsīr; see *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān* at 2:204 and Ibn Kathīr at the same place.

244. Cited by Ibn Kathīr at 2:204. Six Companions were sent by the Prophet ﷺ to teach the religion and were betrayed; three of them were killed, Khubayb b. ‘Adī رضي الله عنه amongst them.
245. The threefold summary is Ibn Kathīr’s at 2:204–206: *kalāmuhu kadhib, wa’tiqāduhu fāsid, wa af’āluhu qabīḥa*.
246. al-Nisā’ 4:108.
247. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Mazālim, from ‘Ā’isha رضي الله عنها.
248. Ibn Kathīr, at 2:204, who says of al-Quraṣī’s remark: *hādihā alladhī qālabu al-Quraṣī ḥasanun ṣaḥīḥ*.
249. Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa l-Tanwīr*, at 2:206.
250. The report from Ibn Ma’sūd رضي الله عنه is cited by Ibn Kathīr at 2:206.
251. Muslim, Kitāb al-Īmān, from Abū Sa’īd al-Khudrī رضي الله عنه.
252. al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Shahādāt, from ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb رضي الله عنه; quoted also in *Riyāḍ al-Ṣāliḥīn*.
253. al-Nasā’ī, *al-Sunan*, Kitāb al-Janā’iz, from Anas رضي الله عنه.
254. al-Munāfiqūn 63:8.

And Among Men Is One Who Sells His Soul

255. The report is transmitted by al-Ḥākim, al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Abī Ḥātim, and has been graded ḥasan. It is given in *Ma’ārif al-Qur’ān* at 2:207, which is the source of the wording followed here.
256. al-Tawba 9:111.

Enter Islam Completely

257. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, and al-Bayhaqī, from Jābir رضي الله عنه. The chain has been discussed and the meaning is established.
258. Muḥammad Abū Zahra, *Zabrat al-Taḥāsīr*, at 2:208.
259. *Ma’ārif al-Qur’ān*, at 2:208.
260. The three reports are cited by Ibn Kathīr at 2:209.

In Canopies of Cloud

261. Muḥammad ‘Alī al-Ṣābūnī, *Ṣafwat al-Taḥāsīr*, at 2:210.

Bibliography

The works of tafsīr drawn upon throughout are named in the author's introduction and at the point of use, and are not listed again here. What follows is the third-party material referred to in this volume.

al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl. *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*.

Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj al-Naysābūrī. *al-Musnad al-Ṣaḥīḥ*.

Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī. *al-Sunan*.

al-Tirmidhī, Muḥammad b. 'Īsā. *al-Jāmi'*.

al-Nasā'ī, Aḥmad b. Shu'ayb. *al-Sunan*.

Ibn Mājah, Muḥammad b. Yazīd. *al-Sunan*.

Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. *al-Musnad*.

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al-Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn. *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*.

Ibn 'Ābidīn, Muḥammad Amīn. *Radd al-Muḥtār 'alā al-Durr al-Mukhtār*.

al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid. *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*.

Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya. *Uddat al-Ṣābirīn wa Dhakhīrat al-Shākirīn*.

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Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī. *Jāmi' al-'Ulūm wa'l-Ḥikam*.

Ibn al-Jawzī, 'Abd al-Raḥmān. *Sīrat wa Manāqib 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz*.

Ashiq Ilāhī Bulandshahrī. *Anwār al-Bayān*.

Glossary

andād

Rivals; plural of *nidd*, a peer or an equal set up as a match for something else. In this sūra, whatever a man loves as Allāh ﷻ should be loved.

ayyām al-tashrīq

The days following the day of sacrifice, in which the takbīr is wājib and fasting is not permitted.

birr

Righteousness in the widest sense; a goodness which spreads out and takes everything in. Used of the land as opposed to the sea, for the same reason.

dhikr

Remembrance; the mentioning of Allāh ﷻ with the tongue or the heart. The one act of worship with no conditions attached to it.

fidya

A ransom; a payment made in place of an act of worship a man cannot perform.

fitna

A trial; and in the passages of fighting, the persecution which drives a man out of his religion, and the shirk which is its cause.

furqān

The criterion; what separates truth from falsehood. A name of the Qur'ān.

fusūq

Open disobedience; particularly of the tongue, the swearing and the abusing.

hady

The offering brought to the Ḥaram of Makkah and slaughtered there.

iḥrām

The state of consecration entered for Ḥajj or 'Umra, and the two unsewn garments worn in it.

iḥṣār

Being prevented from completing the Ḥajj or the 'Umra after entering iḥrām.

iṣlāḥ

Putting right; the mending of what has gone wrong between people.

istighfār

The seeking of forgiveness. One of the two protections named in the Book, and the only one which remains.

i'tikāf

Retreat in the masjid, kept as a Sunnah in the last ten nights of Ramaḍān.

jidāl

Quarrelling; the argument which leaves the other man upset. Forbidden in the Ḥajj.

libās

A garment; what wraps a thing completely. Used in the Qur'ān of the night, and of a husband and wife.

al-Mash'ar al-Ḥarām

The Sacred Monument; a hill in Muzdalifa named in the passage of the Ḥajj.

mayta

Carrion; an animal which died without a lawful slaughter.

muṣība

A calamity; from a root meaning to strike the target. The grammar of the word carries the doctrine: it was never going to miss.

naṣī'

The pre-Islamic postponement of a sacred month, so that the fighting could go ahead and the piety be preserved.

qiṣās

Retribution; the taking of the like of what was taken. In it, the Qur'ān says, there is life.

rafath

Intimacy and everything which leads to it. Permitted in the nights of the fast; closed in the Ḥajj.

rukḥṣa

A concession; a permission given to a man who cannot manage the whole.

ṣabr

Self-restraint; grip. Divided by the 'ulamā' into ṣabr away from sin, ṣabr upon obedience, and ṣabr upon affliction. Poorly served by the English "patience".

saḥūr

The meal taken before the dawn in Ramaḍān; the mark which distinguishes our fasting from that of the People of the Book.

sa'y

The going between al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa, preserving the running of Hājar رضى الله عنها.

sha'ā'ir

Symbols; markers set up so that something is made known. From *shu'ūr*, awareness.

shukr

Thankfulness. Its opposite in the Qur'ān is not forgetfulness but *kufṛ*, a covering over of the gift.

tamattu'

The performance of 'Umra in the months of Ḥajj followed by the Ḥajj, coming out of iḥrām between the two.

taqwā

From a root meaning to shield or guard against; the protection a man builds around himself by awareness of Allāh ﷻ. Badly served by "fear of God".

taḥīr

Purification. Ramaḍān is the taḥīr of the self; the āyah which follows it is the taḥīr of the wealth.

ṭayyib

Wholesome; good in itself and harmful neither to the bodies nor to the minds. The second of the two conditions on our food, and the one we have forgotten.

tilāwa

Recitation. Listed in the Qur'ān as a favour separate from teaching, which the 'ulamā' took as a proof that it is worship in its own right.

waṣīyya

A bequest, and more properly a counsel. Limited to a third of the estate; the only part of it a man controls.

zād

Provision; the food a traveller carries. The best of it, the Qur'ān says, is taqwā.