

THE TRUTH OF THE LIFE OF THIS WORLD

**What is the life of this world
but play and amusement?
But best is the home in the hereafter,
for those who are righteous.
Will you not then understand?
(Surat al-An'am: 32)**

HARUN YAHYA

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A catalog record of this book is available from the British Library
ISBN 1 89794099 8

Printed and bound by:
Entegre Matbaacilik in Istanbul
Sanayi Cad. No: 17 Yenibosna - Istanbul / TURKEY
Tel: (+90 212) 451 70 70

Website: www.harunyahya.com

Copyright © Harun Yahya XXX/ 1999 CE
First Published by Vural Yayıncılık, Istanbul, Turkey in March 1999

First English Edition published in October 1999
Second English Edition published in August 2000
Third English Edition published in August 2002
Fourth English Edition published in September 2005

Published by:
Ta-Ha Publishers Ltd.
1 Wynne Road
London SW9 0BB
United Kingdom

Website: <http://www.taha.co.uk>
E-Mail: sales@taha.co.uk

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About The Author

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

Harun Yahya's works, translated into 41 different languages, constitute a collection for a total of more than 45,000 pages with 30,000 illustrations.

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

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

Harun Yahya enjoys a wide readership in many countries, from India to America, England to Indonesia, Poland to Bosnia, Spain to Brazil, Malaysia to Italy, France to Bulgaria and Russia. Some of his books are available in English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Urdu, Arabic, Albanian, Chinese, Swahili, Hausa, Dhivehi (spoken in Mauritius), Russian, Serbo-Croat (Bosnian), Polish, Malay, Uygur Turkish, Indonesian, Bengali, Danish and Swedish.

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

these books refute such ideologies from their very foundations. All contemporary movements of denial are now ideologically defeated, thanks to the books written by Harun Yahya.

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

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

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

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

In this effort, the books of Harun Yahya assume a leading role. By the will of Allah, these books will be a means through which people in the twenty-first century will attain the peace, justice, and happiness promised in the Qur'an.

To The Reader

The reason why a special chapter is assigned to the collapse of the theory of evolution is that this theory constitutes the basis of all anti-spiritual philosophies. Since Darwinism rejects the fact of creation, and therefore the existence of Allah, during the last 140 years it has caused many people to abandon their faith or fall into doubt. Therefore, showing that this theory is a deception is a very important duty, which is strongly related to the religion. It is imperative that this important service be rendered to everyone. Some of our readers may find the chance to read only one of our books. Therefore, we think it appropriate to spare a chapter for a summary of this subject.

In all the books by the author, faith-related issues are explained in the light of the Qur'anic verses and people are invited to learn Allah's words and to live by them. All the subjects that concern Allah's verses are explained in such a way as to leave no room for doubt or question marks in the reader's mind. The sincere, plain and fluent style employed ensures that everyone of every age and from every social group can easily understand the books. This effective and lucid narrative makes it possible to read them in a single sitting. Even those who rigorously reject spirituality are influenced by the facts recounted in these books and cannot refute the truthfulness of their contents.

This book and all the other works of the author can be read individually or discussed in a group at a time of conversation. Those readers who are willing to profit from the books will find discussion very useful in the sense that they will be able to relate their own reflection and experiences to one another.

In addition, it will be a great service to the religion to contribute to the presentation and reading of these books, which are written solely for the good pleasure of Allah. All the books of the author are extremely convincing. For this reason, for those who want to communicate the religion to other people, one of the most effective methods is to encourage them to read these books.

It is hoped that the reader will take time to look through the review of other books on the final pages of the book, and appreciate the rich source of material on faith-related issues, which are very useful and a pleasure to read.

In these books, you will not find, as in some other books, the personal views of the author, explanations based on dubious sources, styles that are unobservant of the

respect and reverence due to sacred subjects, nor hopeless, doubt-creating, and pessimistic accounts that create deviations in the heart.

INTRODUCTION

This woman is in her seventies. Have you ever wondered how somebody her age would assess her life?

If she recalls anything about her life, it is surely that it was a "fleeting life".

She would simply remark that her life has not been a "long" one as she dreamed in her teens it would be. It probably never crossed her mind that one day she would grow so old. Yet now, she is overwhelmed by the fact that she has put seventy years behind her. Earlier in life, she probably never thought that her youth and its desires would pass so quickly.

If she were asked late in life to tell her story, her reminiscences would only make a five or six-hour talk. That is all that remains from what she says was "a long life of seventy years".

The mind of a person, worn out with age, is occupied with many questions. These are actually important questions to consider and answering them truthfully is essential to understanding all aspects of life: "What is the purpose of this life that passes so quickly? Why should I remain positive with all the age-related problems I have? What will the future bring?"

The possible answers to these questions fall into two major categories: those given by people who trust Allah and those given by disbelievers who do not trust Him.

Someone who does not trust Allah would say, "I spent my life chasing vain pursuits. I have put seventy years behind me, but to tell the truth, I still have not been able to grasp what I lived for. When I was a child, my parents were the centres of my life. I found all happiness and joy in their love. Later in life, as a young woman, I devoted myself to my husband and children. During that time, I set many goals for myself. Yet by the time they were achieved, each of them proved to have been a passing whim. When I rejoiced in my success, I headed towards other goals and they occupied me so that I did not think about the real meaning of life. Now at seventy, in the tranquillity of old age, I try to find out what was the purpose of my past days. Is it that I lived for people of whom I have only dim memories now? For my parents? For my husband whom I lost years ago? Or my children whom I see rarely now that they have their own families? I am confused. The only truth is that I feel close to death. Soon I will die and I will become a faint memory in people's minds. What will happen afterwards? I really have no idea. Even the thought of it is frightening!"

There is surely a reason for why she falls into such hopelessness. That is simply because she cannot comprehend that the universe, all living things and human beings have predetermined purposes to fulfil in life. These purposes owe their existence to the fact that everything has been created. An intelligent person notices that plan, design and wisdom exist in every detail of the infinitely varied world. This draws him to recognition

of the Creator. He further concludes that since all living things are not the consequences of a random or mindless process they all serve important purposes. In the Qur'an, the last surviving authentic revealed guide to the true path for humanity, Allah repeatedly reminds us of the purpose of our life, which we tend to forget, and thereby summons us to clarity of mind and consciousness.

It is He Who created the heavens and the earth in six days when His Throne was on the water, in order to test which of you has the best actions. (Surah Hud: 7)

This verse provides a full understanding of the purpose of life for believers. They know that this life is a place where they are tried and tested by their Creator. Therefore, they hope to succeed in this test and attain the Paradise and hence the good pleasure of Allah.

However, for the sake of clarity, there is an important point to consider: those who believe in the 'existence' of Allah do not necessarily have true faith; they do not put their trust in Allah. Today, many people accept that the universe is the creation of Allah; yet, they little comprehend the impact of this fact upon their lives. Therefore, they do not lead their lives as they should. What these people generally regard as the truth is that Allah initially created the universe but then, they believe, He left it on its own.

Allah, in the Qur'an, addresses this misapprehension in the following verse:

If you ask them, who it is that created the heavens and the earth, they will certainly say, "Allah". Say: "Praise be to Allah!" But most of them understand not. (Surah Luqman: 25)

If you ask them, who created them, they will certainly say, "Allah." How then are they deluded away (from the truth)? (Surat az-Zukhruf: 87)

Due to this misapprehension, people cannot relate their daily lives to the fact that they have a Creator. That is the basic reason why each individual develops his or her personal principles and moral values, shaped within a particular culture, community and family. These principles actually serve as "life-guides" until death comes. People who adhere to their own values always find comfort in the wishful thinking that any wrong actions will be punished temporarily in Hell. The same rationale suggests that eternal life in paradise will follow this period of torment. Such a mentality unwittingly eases fears of the grievous penalty at the end of life. Some, on the other hand, do not even contemplate this issue. They merely remain heedless of the next world and "make the most of their lives".

However, the above is false and the truth is contrary to what they think. Those who pretend not to be aware of the existence of Allah will fall into deep desperation. In the Qur'an, those people are characterised as follows:

They know but the outer (things) in the life of this world: but of the end of things they are heedless. (Surat ar-Rum: 7)

Surely, little do these people grasp the real face and purpose of this world, and they never think that life in this world is not perpetual.

There are some phrases commonly used by people regarding the shortness of this life: "Make the most of your life while it lasts", "life is short", "one does not live forever" are phrases always referred to in definition of the nature of this world. Yet, these phrases contain an implicit attachment to this life rather than the next. They reflect the general attitude of people to life and death. Having such a strong affection for life, conversations about death are always interrupted with jokes or by raising other subjects thus attempting to alleviate the seriousness of the matter. These interruptions are always on purpose, a deliberate effort to reduce such an important subject to insignificance.

Mortality is surely a grave topic to ponder. Until this moment in his life, it may well be that the person is unaware of the significance of this reality. Yet, now that he has the chance to grasp its importance, he must reconsider his life and his expectations. It is never too late to repent to Allah, and to reorient all one's deeds and the conduct of one's life in submission to the will of Allah. Life is short; the human soul is eternal. During this short period, one should not allow temporary passions to control one. A person should resist temptation and keep himself away from everything that will strengthen his bonds to this world. It is surely unwise to neglect the next world just for the sake of the temporary joys of this one.

Nevertheless, disbelievers who cannot comprehend this fact spend their lives in vain being forgetful of Allah. Moreover, they know that it is impossible to attain these desires. Such people always feel a deep dissatisfaction and want even more of what they currently possess. They have endless wishes and desires. Yet, the world is not an appropriate arena in which to satisfy these desires.

Nothing in this world is perpetual. Time works against both what is good and what is new. No sooner does a brand-new car go out of fashion than another model is designed, manufactured and marketed. Similarly, someone may crave others' stately mansions or opulent houses with more rooms than occupants and with gold-plated fixtures, which once he has seen, he loses interest in his own house and cannot avoid regarding them with envy.

An endless search for the new and better, attaching no value to something once it has been achieved, deprecation of the old and placing all hopes in something new: these are the vicious circles that people have everywhere experienced throughout history. Yet

an intelligent person should stop and ask himself for a moment: why is he chasing after temporary ambitions and has he ever gained any benefit from such pursuit? Finally, he should draw the conclusion that "there is a radical problem with this viewpoint." Yet people, lacking this kind of reasoning, continue to chase after dreams they are unlikely to achieve.

Nobody, however, knows what will happen even in the next few hours: at any time one may have an accident, be severely injured, or become disabled. Furthermore, time flies in the countdown to one's own death. Every day brings that predestined day closer. Death surely eradicates all ambitions, greed and desires for this world. Under the soil, neither possessions nor status prevail. Every possession with which we are being stingy, including the body, will also vanish and decay in the earth. Whether one is poor or wealthy, beautiful or ugly, one will be wrapped in a simple shroud one day.

We believe that *The Truth of The Life of This World* offers an explanation regarding the real nature of human life. It is a short and deceptive life in which worldly desires seem fascinating and full of promise, but the truth is otherwise. This book will enable you to perceive your life and all of its realities, and help you reconsider your goals in life, if you want to.

Allah enjoins on believers to warn others about these facts, and calls upon them to live only to fulfil His will, as He says in the following verse:

Verily, the promise of Allah is true: let not then this present life deceive you.... (Surah Luqman: 33)

THE LIFE OF THIS WORLD

Our universe is perfectly orderly. Countless billions of stars and galaxies move in their separate orbits yet in total harmony. Galaxies consisting of almost 300 billion stars flow through each other and, to everyone's astonishment, during this gigantic transition no collisions occur. Such order cannot be attributed to coincidence. What is more, the velocities of objects in the universe are beyond the limits of man's imagination. The physical dimensions of outer space are enormous when compared to the measurements we employ on earth. Stars and planets, with masses of billions or trillions of tons, and galaxies, with sizes that can only be grasped with the help of mathematical formulae, all whirl along their particular paths in space at incredible velocities.

For instance, the earth rotates about its axis so that points on its surface move at an average velocity of about 1,670 km an hour. The mean linear velocity of the earth in its orbit around the sun is 108,000 km an hour. These figures, however, only relate to the earth. We encounter tremendously larger figures when we examine dimensions beyond the solar system. In the universe, as systems increase in size, velocities also increase. The solar system revolves around the centre of the galaxy at 720,000 km an hour. The velocity of the Milky Way itself, comprising some 200 billion stars, is 950,000 km an hour. This continual movement is inconceivable. The earth, together with the solar system, each year moves 500 million kilometres away from its location of the previous year.

There is an incredible equilibrium within all this dynamic movement and it reveals that life on earth is based on a very delicate balance. Very slight, even millimetric variations in the orbit of heavenly bodies could result in very serious consequences. Some could be so detrimental that life on earth would become impossible. In such systems in which there is both great equilibrium and tremendous velocities, gigantic accidents may happen at any time. However, the fact that we lead our lives in an ordinary way on this planet makes us forget about the dangers existing in the universe at large. The present order of the universe with the almost negligible number of collisions of which we know, simply makes us think that a perfect, stable and secure environment surrounds us.

People do not reflect very much upon such matters. That is why they never discern the extraordinary web of interlocking conditions that makes life possible on earth nor do they apprehend that understanding the real aim of their lives is so important. They live without even wondering how this vast yet delicate equilibrium ever came to be.

Nevertheless, man is endowed with the capacity to think. Without contemplating one's surroundings conscientiously and wisely, one can never see the reality or have the slightest idea why the world is created and who it is who makes this great order move with such perfect rhythms.

One who ponders these questions and grasps their importance comes face to face with an inescapable fact: the universe we live in is created by a Creator, whose existence and attributes are revealed in everything that exists. The earth, a tiny spot in the universe, is created to serve a significant purpose. Nothing occurs purposelessly in the flow of our lives. The Creator, revealing His attributes, His might and wisdom throughout the universe, did not leave man alone but invested him with a significant purpose.

The reason why man exists on earth is recounted by Allah in the Qur'an as follows:

He Who created death and life, that He may try which of you is best in deed: and He is the Exalted in Might, Oft-Forgiving. (Surat al-Mulk: 2)

Verily We created Man from a drop of mingled sperm, in order to try him: So We gave him (the gifts) of hearing and sight. (Surat al-Insan: 2)

In the Qur'an, Allah further makes it clear that nothing is purposeless:

We did not create heaven and earth and everything in between them as a game. If We had desired to have some amusement, We could have found it in Our presence, if We would do (such a thing)! (Surat al-Anbiya: 16-17)

The Secret of the World

Allah indicates the purpose of man in the following verse:

We made everything on the earth adornment for it so that we could test them to see whose actions are the best. (Surat al-Kahf: 7)

In doing so, Allah expects man to remain His devoted servant all through his life. In other words, the world is a place where those who fear Allah and those who are ungrateful to Allah are distinguished from each other. The good and the evil, the perfect and the flawed are side by side in this "setting". Man is being tested in many ways. In the end, the believers will be separated from the disbelievers and attain the Paradise. In the Qur'an it is described thus:

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

In order to have an understanding of the essence of this test, one needs to have a deep understanding of one's Creator whose existence and attributes are revealed in everything that exists. He is the Creator, the Possessor of infinite power, knowledge, and wisdom.

He is Allah - the Creator, the Maker, the Giver of Form. To Him belong the most beautiful names. Everything in the heavens and earth glorifies Him. He is the Almighty, the All-Wise. (Surat al-Hashr: 24)

Allah created man from clay, endowed him with many features, and bestowed many favours upon him. Nobody acquires the traits of seeing, hearing, walking or breathing by

himself. Moreover, these complex systems were placed in his body in the womb before he was born and when he was without any ability to perceive the outer world.

Given all these traits, what is expected of man is to be a servant of Allah. However, as Allah makes clear in the Qur'an, the majority of people are "wrongdoers" and "ungrateful" to their Creator, for they refuse submission to Allah. They suppose that life is long and that they possess the individual strength to survive.

That is why their purpose is to "make the most of their lives while they last". They forget death and the hereafter. They endeavour to enjoy life and to attain better living standards. Allah explains the attachment of these people to this life in the following verse:

As to these, they love the fleeting life, and put away behind them a day (that will be) hard. (Surat al-Insan: 27)

Disbelievers endeavour to taste all the pleasures of this life. Yet, as the verse implies, life passes very quickly. This is the crucial point that the majority of people fail to remember.

Let us think about an example to further clarify the subject.

A Few Seconds or a Few Hours?

Think about a typical holiday: after months of hard work, you have your two weeks' vacation and arrive at your favourite holiday resort after an exhausting eight hours' ride. The lobby is crowded with holidaymakers like you. You even notice familiar faces and greet them. The weather is warm and you do not want to miss one moment enjoying the sunshine and the calm sea, so without losing any time, you find your room, put on your swimsuit and hurry to the beach. At last, you are in the crystal-clear water, but suddenly you are startled by a voice: "Wake up, you will be late for work!"

You find these words nonsense. For a moment, you cannot grasp what is happening; there is an incomprehensible discrepancy between what you see and hear. When you open your eyes and find yourself in your bedroom, the fact that it was all a dream astonishes you greatly. You cannot keep yourself from expressing this astonishment: "I rode eight hours to reach there. Despite the freezing cold outside here today, I felt the sunshine there in my dream. I felt water splashing on my face."

The eight hours' drive to the resort, the time you waited in the lobby, in short everything related to your vacation was actually a dream of a few seconds. Though indistinguishable from real life, what you experienced in a genuine way was merely a dream.

This suggests that we may well be awoken from life on earth just as we are awoken from dream. Then, disbelievers will express exactly the same type of astonishment. In the course of their lives, they could not liberate themselves from the misperception that

their lives would be long. Yet, at the time when they will be recreated, they will comprehend that the period of time which appears to have been a lifetime of sixty or seventy years was as if it were merely a few seconds' duration. Allah relates this fact in the Qur'an:

He will say: "What number of years did you stay on earth?" They will say: "We stayed a day or part of a day: but ask those who keep account." He will say: "You stayed not but a little, if you had only known!" (Surat al-Muminun: 112-114)

Whether it be ten years or a hundred, man will eventually realise the shortness of his life as the verse above relates. This is just like the case of a man who wakes up from dream bitterly witnessing the vanishing of all images of a nice, long holiday, suddenly realising that it had merely been a dream of a few seconds' length. Similarly, the shortness of life will most strike man when all else about his life is forgotten. Allah enjoins careful attention to this fact in the following verse of the Qur'an:

On the day that the hour (of reckoning) will be established, the transgressors will swear that they tarried not but an hour: thus were they used to being deluded! (Surat or- Rum: 55)

No less than those who live for a few hours or a few days, those who live for seventy years also have a limited time in this world... Something limited is bound to end one day. Be life eighty or a hundred years long, each day brings man closer to that predestined day. Man, in reality, experiences this fact throughout the course of his life. No matter how long-term a plan he devises for himself, one day he attains that specific time when he will accomplish his goal. Every precious objective or thing deemed a turning point in one's life soon turns out merely to have been a passing whim.

Think of a boy, for instance, who recently entered high school. Typically, he cannot wait for the day on which he will graduate. He looks forward to it with unrestrained eagerness. Yet soon he finds himself enrolling in college. At this stage of his life, he does not even recall the long years of high school. He already has other things on his mind; he wants to take advantage of these precious years to ease his fears for the future. Hence, he makes numerous plans. Before long, he becomes busy arranging his forthcoming wedding, a very special occasion that he eagerly awaits. Yet time passes faster than he expected and he leaves many years behind him and finds himself a man supporting a family. By the time he becomes a grandfather, an old man now in declining health, he faintly recalls the events from which he derived pleasure as a young man. Grim memories do fade. The troubles that obsessed him as a young man interest him no more. Only a few images of his life unfurl before his eyes. The appointed time

approaches. The time left is very limited; a few years, months or possibly even just days. The classic story of man, without exception, ends here with a funeral service, immediate family members, close friends and relatives attending. The reality is that no man is immune to this end.

Nevertheless, from the beginning of history, Allah has instructed man about the temporary nature of this world and described the Hereafter, his real and eternal residence. Many details pertaining to paradise and hell are depicted in the revelations of Allah. Despite this fact, man tends to forget this essential truth and tries to invest all his efforts in this life, even though it is short and temporary. However only those who assume a rational approach to life are summoned to clarity of mind and consciousness and realise that this life is not worth anything compared to the eternal one. That is why man's objective in life is only to attain paradise, an eternal place of Allah's benevolence and enduring abundance. Seeking the contentment of Allah with true faith is the only way to obtain it. However, those who try not to think about the unavoidable end of this world, and who lead a life in keeping with such an attitude surely deserve eternal punishment.

Allah in the Qur'an relates the awful end that will meet these people:

One day He will gather them together: (It will be) as if they had tarried but an hour of a day: they will recognise each other: assuredly those will be lost who denied the meeting with Allah and refused to receive true guidance. (Surah Yunus: 45)

Therefore patiently persevere, as did (all) Messengers of inflexible purpose; and be in no haste about the (disbelievers). On the Day that they see the (punishment) promised them, (it will be) as if they had not tarried more than an hour in a single day. (Yours is but) to proclaim the Message: but shall any be destroyed except those who transgress? (Surat al-Ahqaf: 35)

Unbridled Ambition

Earlier in this book, we mentioned that the time an ordinary man spends in this world is as short as "the blink of an eye". Yet, no matter what a man possesses in life, he does not attain real contentment unless he has faith in Allah and keeps himself occupied with His remembrance.

From the time he begins to become an adult he craves wealth, power or status. To one's astonishment however, he has limited resources to satisfy these cravings; there is no chance whatsoever to possess everything he desires. Neither wealth, nor success nor any form of prosperity, however, will placate his ambitions. Regardless of social status or gender, people's lives are most often limited to six or seven decades only. Upon the termination of this period, death renders all worldly tastes and joys meaningless.

One who is prone to unbridled desires always finds himself incurably "dissatisfied". At every stage of life, this dissatisfaction is always there, while the causes change according to time and conditions. The will to satisfy these desires can make some people indulge in almost anything. He may be so committed to his desires that he is willing to face every consequence, even if it means losing the love of immediate family or being an outcast. Yet by the time he accomplishes his goal, the "magic" disappears. He loses all interest in his accomplished purpose. Moreover, not being content with this accomplishment, he immediately starts to seek another and makes every effort to attain it until he at last achieves it in turn.

Having unbridled ambition is the typical characteristic of a disbeliever. This trait remains with him until he dies. He never feels satisfied with what he possesses. That is because he simply wants everything for his own selfish greed and not to obtain the contentment of Allah. Likewise, everything people possess and toil to possess is a reason for boasting, and people become heedless of Allah's limits. Surely, Allah will not allow one who is so rebellious against Him to have peace of mind in this world. Allah says in the Qur'anic verse:

Those who believe and whose hearts find satisfaction in the remembrance of Allah: for, without doubt, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find satisfaction. (Surat ar-Ra'd: 28)

A Deceptive World

Countless examples of the perfection of the creation surround man all over the world: gorgeous landscapes, millions of different kinds of plants, the blue sky, clouds heavy with rain, or the human body – a perfect organism full of complex systems. These are all breathtaking examples of creation, reflection on which provides deep insight.

Seeing a butterfly displaying its wings, the marvellously intricate patterns of which are statements of its identity, is an experience never to be forgotten. The feathers of a bird's head, so fine and lustrous that they look like rich black velvet, or the attractive colours and scent of a flower are all amazing to the human soul.

Everyone, almost without exception, appreciates a beautiful face. Opulent mansions, gold-plated fixtures and luxury cars for some people are the most cherished possessions. Man craves many other things in life, yet the beauty of whatever we possess is destined to perish in time.

A fruit gradually darkens and finally decays from the moment it is plucked from its branch. The scent of flowers fills our rooms only for a limited period. Soon, their colours fade and they wither away. The prettiest face wrinkles after a few decades: the effect of years on skin and the greying of hairs make that pretty face no different from those of other elderly people. No trace remains of the healthy complexion or ruddy cheeks of a teenager after the passage of years. Buildings need renovation, automobiles become old-fashioned and, even worse, rusty. In brief, everything surrounding us is subject to the ravages of time. This seems to be a "natural process" for some. However, this conveys a clear message: "Nothing is immune to the effects of time."

Above all, every plant, animal, and human being in the world – that is to say, every living thing – is mortal. The fact that the world population does not shrink over the centuries – due to births – should not make us ignore the fact of death.

Yet as an unbridled passion, the spell of possessions and wealth influences man greatly. The lust for possessions unwittingly captures him. However, one point should be grasped: Allah is the sole Owner of everything. Living things remain alive as long as He wills and they die when He decrees their death.

Allah calls upon man to reflect on this in the following verse:

The likeness of the life of the present is as the rain which We send down from the skies: by its mingling arises the produce of the earth - which provides food for men and animals: (It grows) till the earth is clad with its golden ornaments and is decked out (in beauty): the people to whom it belongs think they have all powers of disposal over it: There reaches it Our command by

night or by day, and We make it like a harvest clean-mown, as if it had not flourished only the day before! Thus do We explain the Signs in detail for those who reflect. (Surah Yunus: 24)

In this verse, it is shown that everything on this earth deemed nice and beautiful will lose its beauty one day. Moreover, they will all disappear from the surface of this earth. This is a very important point to ponder since Allah informs us that He gives such examples "for those who think". As an intelligent being, what is expected from man is to think and to take lessons from events and finally to set rational objectives for his life. "Thought" and "comprehension" are the unique traits of man; without these traits man lacks his most distinctive features and becomes lower than the animals. Animals also lead lives which are similar in many respects to human lives: they breathe, breed, and, one day, die. Animals never think why and how they are born, or that they will die one day. It is very natural that they do not engage in an effort to comprehend the real objective of this life; they are not expected to think about the purpose of their creation or about the Creator.

However, man is responsible to Allah for building consciousness of Allah through pondering on and being mindful of His orders. Furthermore, he is expected to comprehend that this world exists only for a limited period. Those who truly comprehend these facts will seek Allah's guidance and illumination by engaging in good deeds.

Otherwise, man meets suffering both in this world and the Hereafter. He becomes wealthy, but never attains happiness. Beauty and fame usually entail misfortune rather than a joyous life. A celebrity, for instance, who one day basks in the adulation of his fans later battles severe health problems, and one day dies alone in a small hotel room with no-one caring for him.

Qur'anic Examples of the Deception of the World

Allah repeatedly emphasises in the Qur'an that this is just a "world where all pleasures are doomed to perish". Allah tells the stories of those societies and men and women of the past who rejoiced in their wealth, fame or social status yet met disastrous ends. That is exactly what happened to the two men related in Surat al-Kahf:

Set forth to them the parable of two men: for one of them We provided two gardens of grape-vines and surrounded them with date-palms; in between the two We placed corn-fields.

Each of those gardens brought forth its produce, and failed not in the least therein: in the midst of them We caused a river to flow. (Abundant) was the produce this man had: he said to his companion, in the course of a mutual argument: "more wealth have I than you, and more honour and power in (my following of) men."

He went into his garden in a state (of mind) unjust to his soul: He said, "I deem not that this will ever perish, nor do I deem that the Hour (of Judgement) will (ever) come: Even if I am brought back to my Lord, I shall surely find (there) something better in exchange."

His companion said to him, in the course of the argument with him: "Do you deny Him Who created you out of dust, then out of a sperm-drop, then fashioned you into a man? But (I think) for my part that He is Allah, my Lord, and none shall I associate with my Lord. Why did you not, as you went into your garden, say: 'Allah's will (be done)! There is no power but with Allah!' If you see me less than you in wealth and sons, it may be that my Lord will give me something better than your garden, and that He will send on your garden thunderbolts (by way of reckoning) from heaven, making it (but) slippery sand! Or the water of the garden will run off underground so that you will never be able to find it."

So his fruits (and enjoyment) were encompassed (with ruin), and he remained twisting and turning his hands over what he had spent on his property, which had (now) tumbled to pieces to its very foundations, and he could only say, "Woe is me! Would I had never ascribed partners to my Lord and Cherisher!" Nor had he numbers to help him against Allah, nor was he able to deliver himself.

There, the (only) protection comes from Allah, the True One. He is the Best to reward, and the Best to give success. Set forth to them the similitude of the life of this world: It is like the rain which we send down from the skies; the earth's vegetation absorbs it, but soon it becomes dry stubble, which the winds scatter: it is (only) Allah who prevails over all things. Wealth and sons are allurements of the life of this world, but the things that endure, good deeds, are best in the sight of your Lord as rewards, and best as (the foundation for) hopes. (Surat al-Kahf: 32-46)

Boasting about one's possessions causes a person to be ridiculous. This is the unvarying law of Allah. Wealth and power are given as a gift by Allah and can, at any time, be taken away. The story of "the people of paradise" which is recounted in the Qur'an is another example of this:

Verily We have tried them as We tried the people of the garden, when they resolved to gather the fruits of the (garden) in the morning but made no reservation, ("if it be Allah's Will"). Then there came on the (garden) a visitation from your Lord, (which swept away) all around, while they were asleep.

So the (garden) became, by the morning, like a dark and desolate spot (whose fruit had been gathered).

As the morning broke, they called out, one to another, "Go you to your tilt (betimes) in the morning, if you would gather the fruits." So they departed, conversing in secret low tones, (saying) "Let not a single indigent person break in upon you into the (garden) this day." And they opened the morning, strong in an (unjust) resolve. But when they saw the (garden), they said: "We have surely lost our way: Indeed we are shut out (of the fruits of our labour)!" Said one of them, more just (than the rest): "Did I not say to you, 'Why not glorify (Allah)?'" They said: "Glory to our Lord! Verily we have been doing wrong!" Then they turned one against another, in reproach. Then some of them advanced against others, blaming each other. They said: "Alas for us! We have indeed transgressed! It may be that our Lord will give us in exchange a better (garden) than this: for we do turn to Him (in repentance)!"

Such is the punishment (in this life); but greater is the punishment in the Hereafter, if only they knew! (Surat al-Qalam: 17-33)

The attentive eye immediately recognises from these verses that Allah does not give examples of atheists in this story. The ones in question here are exactly those who believe in Allah but whose hearts have become insensitive towards His remembrance and who are ungrateful to their Creator. They take pride in possessing what Allah gives them as favours, and totally forget that these possessions are only resources to be used in His way. Typically, they affirm the existence and power of Allah; however, their hearts are full of pride, ambition and selfishness.

The story of Qarun, one of the people of Moses, is narrated in the Qur'an as an example of the archetypal wealthy worldly character. Both Qarun and those who yearn for his status and wealth are so-called believers who cast their religion away for possessions and thus lose the blessed eternal life, whose loss is eternal deprivation:

Qarun was doubtless of the people of Moses but he acted insolently towards them: such were the treasures We had bestowed on him that their very keys would have been a burden to a body of strong men, behold, his people said to him: "Exult not, for Allah love not those who exult (in riches). But seek, with the (wealth) which Allah has bestowed on you, the Home of the Hereafter, nor forget your portion in this world: but do good, as Allah has been good to you, and seek not (occasions for) mischief in the land: for Allah loves not those who do mischief." He said: "This has been given to me because of a certain knowledge which I have." Did he not know that Allah had destroyed, before him, (whole) generations, which were superior to him in strength and greater in the amount (of riches) they had collected? But the wicked are not called (immediately) to account for their sins. So he went forth among his people in the (pride of his worldly) glitter. Said those whose aim is the life of

this world: "Oh! That we had the like of what Qarun has! For he is truly a lord of mighty good fortune!" But those who had been granted (true) knowledge said: "Alas for you! The reward of Allah (in the Hereafter) is best for those who believe and work righteousness: but this none shall attain, save those who steadfastly persevere (in good)." Then We caused the earth to swallow up him and his house; and he had not (the least little) party to help him against Allah, nor could he defend himself. And those who had envied his position the day before began to say on the morrow: "Ah! It is indeed Allah who enlarges the provision or restricts it, to any of His slaves He pleases! Had it not been that Allah was gracious to us, He could have caused the earth to swallow us up! Ah! Those who reject Allah will assuredly never prosper." That home of the hereafter We shall give to those who intend not high-handedness or mischief on earth: and the end is (best) for the righteous. Anyone who does a good action will get something better. As for anyone who does a bad action, those who have done bad actions will only be repaid for what they did. (Surat al-Qasas: 76-84)

The main misdeed of Qarun was to see himself as a separate being apart from and independent of Allah. Indeed, as the verse suggests, he did not deny the existence of Allah, but simply assumed that he – due to his superior traits – deserved the power and wealth bestowed on him by Allah. However, all people in the world are servants of Allah and their possessions are not given to them simply because they deserve them. Everything given to man is the favour of Allah. If he is aware of this fact, man will not become ungrateful and spoilt towards his Creator due to the riches in his possessions. He will only feel grateful and show this gratitude by his good manners towards Allah. This is certainly the best and most honourable way of showing one's gratitude to Allah. On the other hand, Qarun and those who aspire to be like Qarun realise the wicked deeds they engage in only when a disaster falls upon them. After all the harm that befalls them, if they persist and still revolt against Allah, they are utterly ruined. Their end will be unavoidable: the Hell, an evil place in which to remain!

Know you (all), that the life of this world is but play and amusement, pomp and mutual boasting and multiplying (in rivalry) among yourselves, riches and children. Here is a similitude: How rain and the growth which it brings forth delight (the hearts of) the tillers; soon it withers; you will see it grow yellow; then it becomes dry and crumbles away. But in the Hereafter is a Penalty severe (for the devotees of wrong). And Forgiveness from Allah and (His) Good Pleasure (for the devotees of Allah). And what is the life of this world, but goods and chattels of deception? (Surat al-Hadid: 20)

THE WEAKNESSES OF MAN

Man is created by Allah in a most complete state and equipped with superior characteristics. His superiority over all creatures – as shown by his distinctive intellectual skills of thought and comprehension, and his readiness to learn and develop cultures – is unquestionable.

Have you ever thought why it is that despite all these superior features man has such a fragile body, which is always vulnerable to external and internal threat? Why is it exposed to the attacks of microbes or bacteria, which are so tiny they are invisible to the naked eye? Why does he have to spend a certain part of each day keeping himself clean? Why does he need bodily care? And why does he age in the course of time?

People assume that these needs are natural phenomena. Yet, being in need of care as a human serves a special purpose. Every detail of the needs of man is specially created. The verse "**man was created weak**" (Surat an-Nisa: 28) is the manifest statement of this fact.

Man's infinite needs are created on purpose: to make him understand that he is a servant of Allah and that this world is a temporary residence for him.

Man has no influence whatsoever on the date and place of his birth. Likewise, he never knows where or how he will die. Moreover, all his efforts to eliminate the factors negatively affecting his life are vain and hopeless.

Man has indeed a fragile nature requiring a lot of care to survive. He is intrinsically unprotected against, and feeble in the face of, abrupt and unforeseeable incidents that occur in the world. Equally, he is exposed to unpredictable health risks, no matter whether he is a resident of a high civilisation or of a remote, undeveloped mountain village. It is quite likely that at any moment man can develop an incurable or fatal disease. At any time, an accident may happen dealing unrecoverable harm to one's bodily strength or one's most enviable charms. Furthermore, this applies to all people: status, rank and race, etc., know of no exception to such an end. Both the life of a celebrity with millions of fans and that of a common shepherd may well be completely altered one day by an unexpected incident.

The human body is a weak organism of bones and flesh averaging 70-80 kilograms in weight. Only a frail skin protects it. No doubt, this sensitive skin can easily be hurt and bruised. It becomes cracked and dry when exposed to too much sunlight or wind. In order not to surrender to natural causes man always has to be on guard against the effects of the environment.

Although man is equipped with marvellous bodily systems, the "materials" – the flesh, muscles, bones, nervous tissue, cardiovascular system and fat – are prone to decay. If man were of a different material, rather than flesh and fat, a material that gave no access to external intruders such as microbes or bacteria, there would be no chance

of becoming sick. However, flesh is the frailest 'substance': it becomes rotten and even worm-eaten when left at room temperature for some time.

As a constant reminder of Allah, man often feels the fundamental needs of his body. Exposed to cold weather, for instance, he runs health risks; his immune system gradually "collapses". On such an occasion, his body may fail to maintain the constant body temperature (37°C) that is fundamental to good health.¹ His heart rate slows, the blood vessels contract, and arterial pressure increases. The body starts to shiver as a means of regaining heat. A lowered body temperature of 35°C accompanied by a depressed pulse and contracted blood-vessels in arms, legs and fingers signals a life-threatening condition.² A person with a body temperature of 35°C suffers severely from disorientation and constantly falls asleep. Mental functions slow. A slight decrease in body temperature can cause such consequences, but even more exposure to cold weather, bringing body temperature below 33°C , causes loss of consciousness. At 24°C , the respiratory system fails to function. The brain is damaged at 20°C and finally the heart stops at 19°C bringing on the unavoidable end: death.

This is only one of the examples upon which will be further expanded in the remaining pages of this book. The purpose in providing these examples is to emphasise that, due to the inexorable factors endangering his being, man will always fail to find profound satisfaction in his way of living. The aim is to remind the reader that man should avoid blind attachment to life and stop spending all his life running after dreams and, instead, always remember Allah and the real life, the Hereafter.

There is an eternal Paradise promised to man. As readers will have the opportunity to see from the pages that follow, paradise is a place of perfection. In paradise, man will be entirely insulated from all the physical weaknesses and imperfections that surround him on earth. Everything he desires will be within easy reach. Furthermore, fatigue, thirst, exhaustion, hunger, and injury do not exist in paradise.

Helping people reflect on their real nature and consequently have a deeper understanding of the infinite superiority of the Creator is another purpose of this book. In addition, comprehending that man is in need of the guidance of Allah is surely of great relevance to everyone. Allah states this in the following verse:

O mankind! You are the poor in your relation to Allah. And Allah! He is the Absolute, the Owner of Praise. (Surah al-Fatir: 15)

Bodily Needs

Man is exposed to many physical risks. Keeping one's body and environment clean and taking painstaking care of them are life-long burdens with which one has always to be occupied in order to minimise health risks. What is even more striking is that the amount of time spent on such tasks is considerable. We have often come across surveys that have been conducted to find out how much time is spent shaving, bathing, hair-

care, skin-care, manicuring etc. The results of such surveys are astounding, and reveal how much precious time such daily tasks consume.

In the course of our lives, we encounter many people. At home, in the office, on the streets or in the shopping-mall, we see many smartly dressed people in their best states. They are people with shaved faces, clean hair and bodies, ironed shirts, well-polished shoes. However, such careful grooming requires time and effort.

From the moment one wakes up in the morning until the time one goes to sleep, one has to involve oneself in endless routines to keep clean and fresh. Once we wake up, the first place we head for is the bathroom; during the night, the proliferation of bacteria causes a bad taste and unpleasant odour in the mouth, forcing us to brush our teeth immediately. However, in order to get ready for the new day, the essentials are not limited to brushing teeth. Neither does washing just the face and hands suffice. During the day, hair becomes greasy and the body becomes dirty. At night, in the midst of a dream, it might not be possible to stop sweating. As the only way to get rid of unpleasant body odours and sweat, one feels the urgent need of a shower. Otherwise, it would not be pleasant to go to work with greasy hair and a bad odour coming from the body.

The variety of materials used to make one's body clean enough to face others is surprisingly wide. This is, surely, enough evidence of the body's endless needs. Besides water and soap, we need numerous essentials to clean the body: shampoo, conditioner, toothpaste, tooth polish, dental tape, cotton buds, body powder, face cream, lotions; the list goes on and on. Apart from these essentials, there are hundreds of other products developed in laboratories to enhance body care.

As well as bodily care, everyone must also spend a considerable amount of time cleaning clothing, house, and surroundings. No doubt, one cannot keep oneself clean unless one is in a clean environment.

In brief, a certain part of life is spent solely to provide for the needs of the body. Moreover, we need many chemicals for this end. Allah created man with many weaknesses, yet He also provides the methods to temporarily conceal these weaknesses and hence remain in good condition without making other people conscious of these weaknesses. Besides, man is endowed with intelligence enough to find the best ways to cover his "weaknesses". If we neglect to apply these methods staying clean and fresh, we may in a very short time begin to appear repulsive.

Furthermore, one cannot remain clean for a long time. After a few hours, nothing remains from the refreshment a shower gives: we can only stay clean for a relatively short time. We need to take a shower at least once a day. Likewise, we need to brush our teeth regularly: bacteria quickly turn the mouth into its former state. A woman who spends hours in front of a mirror putting on make-up wakes up next morning with no trace of that beautiful make-up on her face. Moreover, if she does not remove it properly, her face may look even worse due to the remains of cosmetics. A clean-shaven man needs another shave the next morning.

It is important to understand that all these needs are created for a specific purpose. An example makes this point explicit: when body temperature rises, we sweat. The odour accompanying sweat is disturbing. This is an unavoidable process for anyone living in this world. However, this need not have been the case! For instance, plants never sweat. A rose never stinks despite the fact that it grows in soil, is fed with manure, and remains in an environment of dust and dirt. Under all conditions, it has a delicate fragrance. We need hardly mention that it needs no body-care! However, no matter which cosmetics are applied to the skin, few human beings can achieve such a permanent fragrance.

Besides all the needs of the body pertaining to hygiene, nutrition is also essential for health. There is a delicate balance of proteins, carbohydrates, sugars, vitamins and various minerals essential for the body. Once this balance is impaired, serious damage may arise in the functioning of bodily systems: the immune system loses its protective abilities, leaving the body weak and exposed to disease. Therefore, the same attention shown to body-care should also be paid to nutrition.

An even more essential requisite for life is, of course, water. A man can survive without food for a certain period, but a few days without water will have fatal consequences. All the chemical functions of the body take place with the aid of water; water is vital for life.

The foregoing are the weaknesses that one can observe in one's own body. Yet a question remains: are we all aware that these are weaknesses? Alternatively, do we think that these are 'natural' since human beings all over the world have such weaknesses? However, we should keep in mind that Allah could have created man perfect without any of these weaknesses. Each human being could have been as clean and as fragrant as a rose. Nevertheless, the lessons drawn from such a state lead eventually to wisdom, summoning us to clarity of mind and consciousness; man, seeing his weaknesses in the presence of Allah, should understand why he is created and try to lead an honourable life as a servant of Allah.

Fifteen Years Without "Consciousness"

Everyone has to spend some of his daily time sleeping. No matter how much work he has or how he struggles to avoid it, it is inescapable that he will fall asleep and remain in bed for at least a quarter of the day. Hence, man is conscious only eighteen hours a day; he spends the remaining time – a minimum of six hours a day on average – in complete unconsciousness. When assessed from this standpoint, we come across a striking picture: one quarter of an average 60 years of life is spent in total unconsciousness.

Do we then have an alternative to sleep? What would happen to someone who said, "I do not want to sleep?"

First, one's eyes become red and one's skin colour pales. If the duration of sleeplessness extends, loss of consciousness results.

Closing the eyes and the inability to focus attention are the initial phases of falling asleep. This is an inevitable process, and beautiful or ugly, wealthy or poor, everybody experiences the same process.

Similarly to death, just before sleep the body starts to become insensitive to the outer world and gives no response to any stimulus. Senses that were exceptionally keen a while ago start to fail. In the meantime, perceptions are altered. The body reduces all functions to a minimum, leading to disorientation in place and time and slower body movements. This state is, in a way, a different form of death, which is defined as the state in which the soul leaves the body. Indeed, while sleeping the body lies in bed where the spirit experiences totally different lives in completely different places. In one's dreams, one may well perceive oneself on a beach on a hot summer's day, unaware that one is sleeping in bed. Death, too, has the same outward appearance: it separates the soul from the body which the soul uses in this world and carries him away to another world in a new body. For this reason, Allah, in the Qur'an, the only remaining authentic revelation which guides humanity to the true path, repeatedly reminds us of the similarity of sleep to death.

It is He who takes your souls by night, and has knowledge of all that you have done by day: by day He raises you up again; that a term appointed be fulfilled; In the end unto Him will be your return; then will He show you the truth of all that you did. (Surat al-An'am: 60)

It is Allah that takes the souls (of men) at death; and those that die not (He takes) during their sleep: those on whom He has passed the decree of death, He keeps back, but the rest He sends (to their bodies) for a term appointed. Verily in this are Signs for those who reflect. (Surat az-Zumar: 42)

Totally deprived of all the functions of the senses, in other words, "in a dead faint", a person spends up to a fourth of his life in sleep. Yet, he little contemplates this fact, never realising that he leaves behind everything deemed important in this world. An important exam, huge sums of money lost on the stock exchange or a minor personal problem, in brief everything that appears to be of crucial importance during the day fades away as one falls asleep. This simply means having no relationship with the world at all.

All the examples that have been presented so far give a clear idea about the shortness of life and the huge amount of time spent on "compulsory" routine tasks. When the time spent on such "compulsory" tasks is subtracted, one realises the scarcity of moments left for the so-called joys of life. In retrospect, one feels astonished at the long time spent on nourishment, body-care, sleep, or working to attain better standards of living.

The calculations of the time spent on routine tasks necessary for survival are, undoubtedly, worth thinking about. As stated earlier, at least 15-20 years of a 60-year life are spent asleep. The initial 5-10 years of the remaining 40-45 years, however, are spent in childhood, another period that is also spent in an almost unconscious state. In other words, a sixty-year-old man will have spent perhaps half of his life without consciousness. Regarding the other half of life, many statistics are available. These figures, for instance, include the time spent preparing meals, eating, bathing or caught in traffic jams. This list can be further extended. In conclusion, what remains from a "long" life is only 3-5 years. What is the importance of such a short life in comparison to an eternal one?

It is right at this point that a huge gulf yawns between those who have faith and disbelievers. Disbelievers, believing the only life to be here on this earth, struggle to make the most of it. Yet these are useless endeavours: this world is both short and its life is beset with "weaknesses". Furthermore, since the disbeliever does not put his trust in Allah, he lives a troublesome life, one fraught with concerns and fears.

Those who have faith, on the other hand, spend their lives remembering Allah and in His presence at each instant, during all of the minor and troublesome occupations of bodily care, eating, drinking, standing, sitting, reclining to sleep, and seeking livelihoods, etc. They spend their lives only to attain the contentment of Allah and thus lead peaceful lives, isolated completely from all worldly sorrows and fears. In conclusion, they attain paradise, a place of eternal happiness. Similarly, the ultimate purpose of life is stated in the verse:

To the righteous (when) it is said, "What is it that your Lord has revealed?" they say, "All that is good." To those who do good, there is good in this world, and the home of the hereafter is even better and excellent indeed is the home of the righteous. (Surat an-Nahl: 30-31)

Disease and Accidents

Disease also reminds man how prone he is to weakness. The body, highly protected against all types of external threats, is seriously affected by mere viruses, disease-producing agents invisible to the naked eye. This process seems unreasonable, since Allah equipped the body with very complete systems, especially the immune system that could be described as a "victorious army" over its enemies. However, despite the body's strengths and defences, people often fall ill. They little ponder the fact that having been equipped with such excellent systems, Allah might never have allowed disease-producing agents to cause suffering. Viruses, microbes or bacteria might never have affected the body, or these tiny "enemies" might never have existed. However, still today, anyone may well become the target of serious disease arising from insignificant causes. For instance, a single virus entering the body through a slight cut on the skin

may in a short while spread to the whole body, taking control of vital organs. Despite advanced technology, a simple influenza virus may become a life-threatening factor for huge numbers of people. History has frequently been witness to influenza cases that changed even the demographic structures of countries. For instance, in 1918, twenty-five million people died of influenza. Similarly, in 1995, an epidemic claimed thirty thousand lives, the worst losses concentrated in Germany.

Today the danger persists: a virus may strike at any time and easily become life-threatening for anyone, or a rare disease may reappear after lying dormant for nearly twenty years. Accepting all these incidents as natural happenings and not reflecting on them would be a serious mistake. Allah gives mankind diseases for a special purpose. This way, those who are arrogant may well find an opportunity to grasp the truly limited extent of their power. Besides, this is a good way of understanding the true nature of this life.

Apart from diseases, accidents pose serious threats to man. Every day newspapers run headlines about traffic accidents. Accidents also constitute a considerable part of radio and television news. Yet, despite such familiarity with accidents, we never think we might face an accident at any moment. There are thousands of factors around us that may suddenly divert the flow of our lives. One may lose one's balance and fall in the middle of the street, for instance. A haemorrhage in the brain or a broken leg may well be traced back to such an ordinary accident, or while eating supper, one may choke to death on a fish-bone. The causes may sound simple, but every day thousands of people around the world face incidents such as these which are difficult to imagine.

These facts should make us understand the futility of devotion to this world and conclude that everything that has been given us is but a temporary favour to test us in this world. It is unfathomable how a human being, still unable to combat an invisible virus, dares to display arrogance towards his Almighty Creator.

No doubt, it is Allah who created man and He is the One who protects him against all dangers. In this respect, accidents and disease show us who we are. No matter how potent one assumes oneself to be, except by the will of Allah, one cannot prevent any disaster from befalling. Allah creates all disease and other situations to remind man of his weaknesses.

This world is a place to test man. Everyone is held responsible for trying to attain His good pleasure. At the end of this test, those who have a clear unitary knowledge of Allah without ascribing partners to Him and obey His prohibitions and orders will reside in paradise for all eternity. Those who do not change their arrogance and prefer this world and their desires will thus lose an eternal life of bliss and ease in exchange for eternal suffering and will never be free of troubles, weakness and sorrow either in this world or in the Hereafter.

The Consequences of Diseases and Accidents

As stated earlier, disease and accidents are the events by which Allah tests man. Facing such an incident, a faithful person immediately turns to Allah, praying and seeking refuge in Him. He is well aware that nothing and no-one except Allah can save him from grief. He is also aware that his patience, devotion and trust in Allah are being tested. In the Qur'an, the prophet Ibrahim is praised for his exemplary attitude. His sincere prayer is one that should be repeated by all believers. It is related in the Qur'an as follows:

"...Who gives me food and drink, and when I am ill, it is He who cures me; Who will cause me to die, and give me life (again)." (Surat ash-Shu'ara: 79-81)

The prophet Ayub, on the other hand, set a good example for all believers as he sought patience only from Allah when faced with a bitter illness:

Commemorate Our slave Ayyub. Behold he cried to his Lord: "The Evil One has afflicted me with distress and suffering!" (Surah Sad: 41)

Such distress strengthens the loyalty of believers towards their Creator and establishes them in maturity. That is why each suffering is a "fortune". Disbelievers, on the other hand, perceive all types of accident and disease as "misfortune". Not realising that everything is created for a specific purpose and that patience shown during troubles will be awarded in the Hereafter, disbelievers fall into great grief. Indeed, since in a system based upon the denial of the existence of Allah, people adopt a materialistic standpoint, disease and accidents bring other sorrows to those who have no faith. The moral values and point of view of materialist society dictates that after accident or disease what they generally experience is the sudden disappearance of close 'friends' even if they have not died. Such an attitude is assumed simply because they perceive being friends with, or taking care of a sufferer as trouble. No matter how much love and care he gave in the "good old days", once somebody becomes ill – bedridden for instance – or disabled, all affection felt for him vanishes. Another reason which makes people change is the loss of looks or of certain skills. That is also what is expected from materialist society, since in such a society, people assess others according to their physical traits. Consequently, when a physical defect appears, the value attached to that person also diminishes.

For instance, the spouse or close relatives of a physically handicapped person, immediately start complaining about the difficulties of looking after a disabled person. They often lament about how unfortunate they are. Most express that they are still very young and that being faced with such a disaster is not something they deserve. This is only self-justification for why he or she does not pay proper care and attention to his or

her disabled relative. Some, on the other hand, assist the patient or disabled just because they fear what others might think about them in the event that they leave them. The rumours, which are likely to spread, simply prevent them from such behaviour. In such times of trouble the promises of loyalty given during happier days are suddenly replaced by egotistical, selfish feelings.

Such incidents should not surprise us in a society where some forms of behaviour, such as loyalty, are only shown when there is benefit to be derived from them. No doubt, in a society where materialistic criteria are well established and, more importantly, where people have no fear of Allah, it is impossible to expect someone to remain loyal to somebody else for no price. After all, we cannot expect someone to be sincere and honest to others unless he believes he will receive punishment in return for his failure to act so or reward for doing so. Such behaviour is believed to be "idiotic" in materialist society. That is because there is no sense in showing loyalty to someone who will, when death befalls him possibly in a few decades, cease to exist for all eternity. Considering the situation in a system in which both parties are convinced they will live for a short time then die, such a mentality seems reasonable. Why, then, should they not prefer the comfortable and easy way of doing things?

Yet, the facts are otherwise. Those who trust Allah, who, in His presence, are aware of their weaknesses and fear Him, assess other people in the way Allah wants them to. The most precious feature of a person who is in the presence of Allah is his fear, respect and, hence, the noble behaviour he displays arising from these qualities. If the one who fears Allah displays moral perfection in this world, he will attain physical and mental perfection for all eternity. Knowing this fact, the physical defects of this world lose all significance. This is the promise of Allah to the believers. That is also the basic reason why believers show respect and affection to each other and consideration for each other's physical handicaps, and demonstrate lifelong devotion to one another.

This big gap in perception between believers and disbelievers and the different states of mind they experience are quite important. While grudges and anger are eliminated from the hearts of believers and peace and security prevail instead, feelings of disappointment, dissatisfaction and unhappiness create anguished states of mind for disbelievers. This is as if it was a punishment from the materialist society surrounding the disbelievers, but, it really is a misfortune from Allah for those who do not believe. Those who assume that they will not be judged for their misdeeds will be stunned on the day of judgement when their misdeeds – cruelty, disbelief, and disloyalty – will be judged:

Let not the disbelievers think that Our respite to them is good for them: We grant them respite that they may grow in their iniquity: But they will have a shameful punishment. (Surat Ali-'Imran: 178)

The Later Years of Life

The destructive effects of the passage of years are observable in one's own body. As the years go by, the body, the most precious possession a human being has, goes through an irreversible process of destruction. The changes a human being experiences throughout his life are recounted in the Qur'an as follows:

It is Allah Who created you in a state of (helpless) weakness, then gave (you) strength after weakness, then, after strength, gave (you) weakness and a hoary head: He creates as He wills, and it is He who has all knowledge and power. (Surat ar-Rum: 54)

The later years of life are the times most neglected in the future plans of an adult, except in the anxious process of saving for old-age pensions. Indeed, being too close to death, people usually develop a hesitant approach to this period. When someone tries to talk about old age, others feel concerned and attempt to change this "unpleasant" topic as soon as possible. The routine of daily life is also a good way of escaping from the thought of these potentially miserable years of life. So, it is postponed until the day one inevitably meets it. No doubt, the main reason for such avoidance is the assumption that one has endless time until death comes upon one. This common misconception is described in the Qur'an:

Nay, We gave the good things of this life to these men and their fathers until life grew long for them. (Surat al-Anbiya: 44)

This mistaken idea often leads to great grief. That is simply because, no matter how old one is, the only real possessions remaining from one's past are dimly-recalled memories. One barely remembers childhood. It is even hard to recall exactly what happened during the last decade. The greatest ambitions of a young man, important decisions, and the goals to which he is most committed, all lose their significance once they are experienced and done. That is why to tell a "long" life story is a vain endeavour.

Whether a teenager or an adult, this should prompt man to make an important decision about his life. For instance, if you are forty and expect to live until your mid-sixties – and of that you have no guarantee – those remaining twenty-five years will surely pass as quickly as the preceding forty years. The same holds true even if your life is prolonged a great deal, since the remaining thirty or forty years will, likewise, pass before you even notice. This is, surely, a perpetual reminder of the true nature of this world. One day every living soul on this earth will leave this world and there is no return.

Hence, man should set aside his prejudices and be more realistic about his life. Time passes very quickly and each day brings on further physical weakness and more impaired thinking rather than fresher dynamism and a younger figure. In brief, growing

old is a manifestation of man's inability to control his own body, life and destiny. Time's adverse effects on the body become visible during this period. Allah informs us about this in the following verse:

It is Allah Who creates you and takes your souls at death; and of you there are some who are sent back to a feeble age, so that they know nothing after having known (much): for Allah is All-Knowing, All-Powerful. (Surat an-Nahl: 70)

In medicine, advanced old age is also called "the second childhood". Hence, during this latter stage of life, elderly people just like children need care, since their bodily and mental functions go through certain alterations.

As one grows older, physical and spiritual characteristics pertaining to childhood become more apparent. Elderly people fail to do many tasks requiring physical strength. Changes in judgement, impaired thinking, difficulties in walking, maintaining balance and speech, impediments, memory impairment and gradual memory loss, and changes in mood or behaviour are only a few symptoms of diseases commonly seen in old age.

In short, after a certain period, people often regress to a state of childish dependency both physically and mentally.

Life both begins and ends in an infant-like state. This is evidently not a random process. It is possible that man could remain young until he dies. Yet Allah reminds man about the temporary nature of this world by making the quality of his life deteriorate at certain stages of life. This process serves as a clear reminder that life is slipping away. Allah explains this matter in the verse below:

O mankind! If you have doubt about the Resurrection, (consider) that We created you out of dust, then out of a drop, then out of a leech-like clot, then out of a morsel of flesh, partly formed and partly unformed, in order that We may manifest (Our power) to you; and We cause whom We will to rest in the wombs for an appointed term, then We bring you out as babes, then (foster you) that you may reach your age of full strength; and some of you are called to die, and some are sent back to the feeblest old age, so that they know nothing after having known (much), and (further), you see the earth barren and lifeless, but when We pour rain down on it, it is stirred (to life), it swells, and it puts forth every kind of beautiful growth (in pairs). (Surat al-Hajj: 5)

Age-related Physical Problems

No matter how much money you have or how good your health, everyone eventually faces disabilities and other age-related complications, some of which are described below:

Skin is truly an important factor determining how somebody looks. It is an essential component of beauty. When tissue of a few square millimetres is removed, one inevitably comes across a picture which squeamish people find disturbing. This is solely because, apart from offering protection from exterior threats to the body, skin also provides a smooth and aesthetic appearance to the body. This is, no doubt, quite an important function of skin. After all, if someone assumes herself good looking, that is solely because her skin, a piece of flesh weighing in total around four and a half pounds, covers her body. Yet to one's astonishment, this is the only organ that becomes visibly damaged when one gets old.

As one grows old, skin loses its elastic structure since structural proteins making up the "skeleton" of its bottom layers become sensitive and weak. That is also why wrinkles and lines, a nightmare for many people, appear on the face. The functioning of the oil glands in the top layer of the skin slows down, causing acute dryness. In time, the body is exposed to external influences since the permeability of skin increases. As a result of this process, elderly people suffer seriously from sleeping disorders, superficial wounds, and an itch called "the itch of old age". Likewise, damage occurs to the bottom layers of the skin. Renewal of skin tissue and substance-exchange mechanisms fail to function to a great extent, preparing and laying the ground for tumours to develop.

Strength of bones is also of great importance to the human body. Efforts to achieve an erect posture rarely meet with success for old people, while it is much easier for the young. Walking with a bent posture, one loses all one's loftiness and arrogance, giving the message that one no longer has the ability to exercise control even over one's own body. Therefore, this is also a loss of one's "airs and graces".

The symptoms of ageing are not limited to these alone. Elderly people are more likely to develop loss of sensation since nerve cells cease to renew themselves after a particular age. Elderly people suffer from spatial disorientation due to weakening eyes in response to the intensity of light. This is quite important since it means a limitation of eyesight: the vividness of colours, the positions of objects, and their dimensions become blurred. These are, no doubt, difficult situations for the elderly to adapt to.

Man might never have experienced the physical destruction of ageing: he might simply have grown stronger and healthier as he grew older. Though we are not familiar with such a model, living longer might have offered unprecedented opportunities for personally and socially fulfilling lives. Time might have improved the quality of life, making it much more enjoyable than ever. Yet, the system ordained as good for mankind is one based on a declining quality of life as one grows older.

This is one more evidence of the temporary nature of this world. Allah repeatedly reminds us of this fact in the Qur'an and commands believers to think about it:

The likeness of the life of the present is as the rain which We send down from the skies: by its mingling arises the produce of the earth - which provides

food for men and animals: (It grows) till the earth is clad with its golden ornaments and is decked out (in beauty): the people to whom it belongs think they have all powers of disposal over it: There reaches it Our command by night or by day, and We make it like a harvest clean-mown, as if it had not flourished only the day before! Thus do We explain the Signs in detail for those who reflect. (Surah Yunus: 24)

After a certain period of life during which man assumes himself to be physically and mentally strong and perceives the whole world from his own viewpoint, he suddenly goes through a period during which he loses many things he had previously enjoyed. This process is inevitable and irreversible. That is only because Allah created this world as a temporary place in which to live and made it imperfect in order that it serve as a reminder for the Hereafter.

Lessons to be Drawn from the Old Age of Celebrities

Growing old is unavoidable. Nobody, without exception, can escape it. Yet seeing celebrities becoming older has a deeper influence on us since their physical deterioration is openly observable. Witnessing the ageing of people renowned for their fame, wealth and beauty is surely a reminder of the shortness and insignificance of this life.

Every day it is possible to observe this fact from hundreds of examples around us. An intelligent, healthy and famous person, once a symbol of beauty or success, one day appears in newspapers, magazines and on television with a physical or mental disability. This is the end that almost everybody will meet. Yet celebrities hold a special place in our minds; the way they grow old and lose their charms appeals to the emotions more deeply. In the pages that follow, you will see photographs of some celebrities. Each one is the clearest evidence that no matter how beautiful, successful or young you are, the inevitable end for human beings is old age.

The Death of Man

Life slips away second by second. Are you aware that every day brings you closer to death or that death is as close to you as it is to other people?

As we are told in the verse **"Every soul shall taste death in the end; to Us shall you be brought back."** (Surat al-'Ankabut: 57) everyone who has ever appeared on this earth was destined to die. Without exception they all died, every one. Today, we hardly come across the traces of many of these people who passed away. Those currently living and those who will ever live will also face death on a predestined day. Despite this fact, people tend to see death as an unlikely incident.

Think of a baby who has just opened its eyes to the world and a man who is about to breathe his last. Both had no influence on their individual birth or death whatsoever. Only Allah possesses the power to inspire the breath of life or to take it away.

All human beings will live until a certain day and then die; Allah in the Qur'an gives an account of the attitude commonly shown towards death in the following verse:

Say: "The death from which you flee will truly overtake you: then you will be sent back to the Knower of things secret and open: and He will tell you (the truth of) the things that you did!" (Surat al-Jumu'ah: 8)

The majority of people avoid thinking about death. In the rapid flow of daily events, a person usually occupies himself with totally different subjects: what college to enrol in, which company to work for, what colour of clothing to wear next morning, what to cook for supper; these are the kinds of major issues that we usually consider. Life is perceived as a routine process of such minor matters. Attempts to talk about death are always interrupted by those who do not feel comfortable hearing about it. Assuming death will come only when one grows older, one does not want to concern himself with such an

unpleasant subject. Yet it should be kept in mind that living for even one further hour is never guaranteed. Everyday, man witnesses the deaths of people around him but thinks little about the day when others will witness his own death. He never supposes that such an end is awaiting him!

Nevertheless, when death comes to man, all the "realities" of life suddenly vanish. No reminder of the "good old days" endures in this world. Think of everything that you are able to do right now: you can blink your eyes, move your body, speak, laugh; all these are functions of your body. Now think about the state and shape your body will assume after your death.

From the moment you breathe for the last time, you will become nothing but a "heap of flesh". Your body, silent and motionless, will be carried to the morgue. There, it will be washed for the last time. Wrapped in a shroud, your corpse will be carried in a coffin to the graveyard. Once your remains are in the grave, soil will cover you. This is the end of your story. From now on, you are simply one of the names represented in the graveyard by a marble stone.

During the first months or years, your grave will be visited frequently. As time passes, fewer people will come. Decades later, there will be no-one.

Meanwhile, your immediate family members will experience a different aspect of your death. At home, your room and bed will be empty. After the funeral, little of what belongs to you will be kept at home: most of your clothes, shoes, etc, will be given to those who need them. Your file at the public registration office will be deleted or archived. During the first years, some will mourn for you. Yet, time will work against the memories you left behind. Four or five decades later, there will remain only a few who remember you. Before long, new generations will come and none of your generation will exist any longer on earth. Whether you are remembered or not will be worthless to you.

While all this is taking place in the world, the corpse under the soil will go through a rapid process of decay. Soon after you are placed in the grave, the bacteria and insects proliferating in the corpse due to the absence of oxygen will start to function. The gasses released from these organisms will inflate the body, starting from the abdomen, altering its shape and appearance. Bloody froth will pop out the mouth and nose due to the pressure of gasses on the diaphragm. As corruption proceeds, body hair, nails, soles, and palms will fall off. Accompanying this outer alteration in the body, internal organs such as lungs, heart and liver will also decay. In the meantime, the most horrible scene takes place in the abdomen, where the skin can no longer bear the pressure of gasses and suddenly bursts, spreading an unendurably disgusting smell. Starting from the skull, muscles will detach from their particular places. Skin and soft tissues will completely disintegrate. The brain will decay and start looking like clay. This process will go on until the whole body is reduced to a skeleton.

There is no chance of going back to the old life again. Gathering around the supper table with family members, socialising or to having an honourable job will never again be possible.

In short, the "heap of flesh and bones" to which we assign an identity faces a quite nasty end. On the other hand, you – or rather, your soul – will leave this body as soon as you breathe your last. The remainder of you – your body – will become part of the soil.

Yes, but what is the reason for all these things happening?

If Allah willed, the body would never have decayed in such a way. That it does so actually carries a very important inner message in itself.

The tremendous end awaiting man should make him acknowledge that he is not a body himself, but a soul "encased" within a body. In other words, man has to acknowledge that he has an existence beyond his body. Furthermore, man should understand the death of his body which he tries to possess as if he is to remain eternally in this temporal world. However this body, which he deems so important, will decay and become worm-eaten one day and finally be reduced to a skeleton. That day might be very soon.

Despite all these facts, man's mental process is inclined to disregard what he does not like or want. He is even inclined to deny the existence of things he avoids confronting. This tendency seems to be most apparent when death is the issue. Only a funeral or the sudden death of an immediate family member brings this reality to mind. Almost everybody sees death far from himself. The assumption is that those who die while sleeping or in an accident are different people and what they face will never befall us! Everybody thinks it is too early to die and that there are always years ahead to live.

Yet most probably, people who die on the way to school or hurrying to attend a business meeting shared the same thought. They probably never thought that the next day's newspapers would publish news of their deaths. It is entirely possible that, as you read these lines, you still do not expect to die soon after you have finished them or even entertain the possibility that it might happen. Probably you feel that it is too early to die because there are many things to accomplish. However, this is just an avoidance of death and these are only vain endeavours to escape it:

Say: "Running away will not profit you if you are running away from death or slaughter; and even if (you do escape), no more than a brief (respite) will you be allowed to enjoy!"(Surat al-Ahzab: 16)

Man who is created alone should be aware that he will also die alone. Yet during his life, he lives almost addicted to possessions. His sole purpose in life becomes to possess more. Yet, no-one can take his goods with him to the grave. The body is buried wrapped in a shroud made from the cheapest of fabrics. The body comes into this world alone and

departs from it in the same way. The only asset one can take with him when one dies is one's belief or disbelief.

THE LURE OF WORDLY GOODS

Throughout life, we have particular goals to achieve: wealth, possessions, and better status, and a spouse and children. These are among the common goals shared by almost everyone. All planning and effort are designed to meet these goals. In spite of the sole incontrovertible fact that everything is inclined to age and extinction, people cannot keep themselves from becoming deeply attached to things. One day a brand-new car becomes old-fashioned; due to natural causes, rich farmland becomes barren; a beautiful person loses all her looks when she ages. Above all, every human being on earth dies, leaving everything he owned behind. Yet despite all these irrefutable facts, man shows an unfathomable devotion to possessions.

Those who spend their lives devoted blindly to worldly goods, will realise that they consumed all their lives chasing illusions. They will realise their ridiculous situation after they die. Only then will the ultimate purpose of life, to be a sincere servant of Allah, be clear to them.

Allah in the Qur'an gives a considerable account of this "deep attachment" in the following verse:

Fair in the eyes of men is the love of things they covet: women and sons; heaped-up hoards of gold and silver; horses branded (for blood and excellence); and (wealth of) cattle and well-tilled land. Such are the possessions of this world's life; but in nearness to Allah is the best of the goals (to return to). (Surah Ali-'Imran: 14)

All the matters of this world – wealth, spouses, children and commerce – keep many a person busy in this life. However, if they could acknowledge the power and greatness of Allah, they would know that all the things granted to man are merely means of obtaining His good pleasure. This way, they would also comprehend that the main aim of man is to be His servant. Yet, those who do not have true faith and trust in Allah have blurred vision and a poor understanding of their existence due to their worldly ambitions. They expect great things from this flawed life.

It is surprising that man forgets all about the Hereafter, which is a perfect and infinitely superior residence for him, and is satisfied with this world. If someone does not have complete faith, even the existence of a slight "probability" of the Hereafter should make him, at least, assume a more cautious attitude.

Believers, on the other hand, are fully aware that this is, by no means, a "probability" but a reality. That is why their lives serve the purpose of eradicating the slightest possibility of being sent to hell; their efforts are entirely designed to attain paradise. They know clearly that the disappointment felt in the Hereafter after a life

spent on vain desires will be bitter. They are well aware that accumulated wealth, such as an overflowing bank account, luxury cars or mansions, will not be accepted as a ransom from eternal punishment. Furthermore, neither family nor one's dearest friends will be present to save one from eternal grief. On the contrary, every soul will try to save itself. Yet despite all this, most people assume that this life does not continue on to the hereafter, and greedily embrace this world. Allah states this in the verse below:

Mutual rivalry for piling up (the good things of this world) diverts you (from the more serious things), until you visit the graves. (Surat at-Takathur: 1-2)

Attraction towards worldly possessions is, no doubt, the secret of the test. Allah creates all things that He bestows upon man with great sophistication, yet they are also of short duration. This is only to make people think and compare the things given to them in this world with the Hereafter. This is the "secret" of which we are talking. Life in the world is indeed magnificent; it is quite colourful and attractive revealing the glory of Allah's creation. To lead a good life and take pleasure in it is, no doubt, something desirable and man, surely, prays to Allah to lead such a life. Yet this can never be the ultimate purpose, since such a goal in life is not more important than attaining the good pleasure of Allah and paradise. Therefore, man should never forget his main purpose, while enjoying the benefit of these favours. Allah warns man about this issue in the verse below:

The (material) things which you are given are but the conveniences of this life and the glitter thereof; but that which is with Allah is better and more enduring: will you not then be wise? (Surat al-Qasas: 60)

This great fondness for worldly things is one of the reasons why man forgets the Hereafter. There is another point to remember: man never finds true happiness in any of the worldly things he greedily embraces or in any provision that he toils to possess. That is because keen desires are hard to satisfy. No matter how much it may possess, the desires of the ego never end. Typically, it always seeks for more and for better. This is why the human being cannot find peace or satisfaction in the world.

Does Real Wealth Exist in this World?

A majority of people assume they can turn their life into a perfect one once they determine to do so. Furthermore, they simply assume that achieving a high quality of life is possible through having more money, better living standards, a happy family, and an admirable status in society. Yet, those people who devote all their time to securing such things are clearly admitting to an error. First, they only struggle to attain peace and happiness in this world and forget all about the Hereafter. Despite the fact that their main purpose is to be servants of Allah in this world and to be grateful for what He gives, they spend life fulfilling their own vain desires.

Allah informs man about the insignificance and deceptive allure of the world in the Qur'an:

Know you (all), that the life of this world is but play and amusement, pomp and mutual boasting and multiplying (in rivalry) among yourselves, riches and children. Here is a similitude: how rain and the growth which it brings forth delight (the hearts of) the tillers; soon it withers; you will see it grow yellow; then it becomes dry and crumbles away. But in the Hereafter is a penalty severe (for the devotees of wrong). And forgiveness from Allah and (His) good pleasure (for the devotees of Allah). And what is the life of this world, but goods and chattels of deception? (Surat al-Hadid: 20)

Not believing in the Hereafter or seeing it as a remote possibility is the many people's fundamental mistake. They believe that they will never lose their wealth. Pride makes them avoid submission to Allah and turn their faces against His promise. The ends of such people are related as follows:

Those who rest not their hope on their meeting with Us, but are pleased and satisfied with the life of the present, and those who heed not Our signs: Their abode is hell, because of the (evil) they earned. (Surah Yunus: 7-8)

History has witnessed many such people. Kings, emperors, and pharaohs thought they could secure immortality through their fabulous wealth; the thought that there is something more valuable than wealth and power may never even have occurred to them. This flawed mentality misled their peoples, who were greatly impressed by their wealth and power. However, all these disbelievers faced a terrible end. In the Qur'an, Allah informs us about them:

Do they think that because We have granted them abundance of wealth and sons, We would hasten them on in every good? Nay, they do not understand. (Surat al-Muminun: 55- 56)

Let not their wealth nor their (following in) sons dazzle you: in reality Allah's plan is to punish them with these things in this life, and that their souls may perish in their (very) denial of Allah. (Surat at-Tawbah: 55)

These people actually disregard a crucial point. All wealth and everything deemed important, belong to Allah. Allah, the actual Owner of wealth, allocates His endless possessions among those whom He wills. In return, man is expected to show his gratefulness to Allah and be a loyal servant to Him. It should be remembered that nobody can limit one's possessions once Allah bestows them. Likewise, once somebody is deprived of affluence, nobody except Allah has the power to sustain him. In this way,

Allah puts His people to test. However, those who forget their Creator and the day of judgement pay no heed to this:

Allah enlarges, or grants by (strict) measure, the sustenance (which He gives) to whomsoever He pleases. (The worldly) rejoice in the life of this world. But the life of this world is but little comfort in the Hereafter. (Surat ar-Ra'd: 26)

Are Wealth and Status in the World Important?

Most people believe that a perfectly peaceful life is attainable in this world. This mentality suggests that one can find true happiness and earn the respect of others by becoming wealthy. The same mentality believes that once this contentment is fulfilled, it will last until the end of the world. Yet, the truth is otherwise. Man can never achieve the life of his dreams by forgetting his Creator and the day of judgement. That is because by the time he realises one goal, he sets his mind on others. Not content with earning a lot, he goes into new businesses. He does not take any pleasure from his new flat once he sees his neighbour's more artfully decorated house, or else, because the fact that his house is decorated in last year's style, which is no longer in fashion, prompts him to redecorate it. Similarly, since fashions and tastes change dramatically, he dreams of a more sophisticated wardrobe because he is not satisfied with what he already has. The psychology of disbelievers is clearly explained in the following verse:

Leave Me alone, (to deal) with the (creature) whom I created (bare and) alone! To whom I granted resources in abundance, sons dwelling in his presence to whom I made (life) smooth and comfortable! Yet is he greedy that I should add (yet more). (Surat al-Muddaththir: 11-15)

A person of sound mind and clear understanding should acknowledge that those who possess mansions with more rooms than inhabitants, luxury cars or fabulous wardrobes are only able to use a limited part of those possessions. If you had the biggest mansion in the world, would it be possible to enjoy the comfort of each room at the same time? Alternatively, if you had a wardrobe of highly fashionable clothes, how many of your suits could you wear in a day? The owner of a mansion with dozens of rooms, as an entity limited in terms of time and space can only stay in a single room at any one time. If you are offered all the delicious dishes of a famous cuisine, your stomach would take no more than a few of them; if you attempt to bolt down more, the result will be torture rather than pleasure.

The list could be further extended, yet the most striking fact is that man is destined to a quite limited period of life in which he can enjoy the luxury his wealth brings. Man

rapidly proceeds towards his end, yet he hardly acknowledges this during his life and assumes that his wealth will bring him eternal happiness, as the verse suggests:

Thinking that his wealth would make him last forever! (Surat al-Humazah: 3)

Man is so blindly fascinated with the power of his wealth that when he faces the awful end on the day of judgement, he will still struggle to escape from punishment by giving away his wealth:

Though they will be put in sight of each other, - the wrongdoer's desire will be: Would that he could redeem himself from the penalty of that day by (sacrificing) his children, wife and his brother, kindred who sheltered him, all that is on earth so it could deliver him: by no means! For it would be the fire of hell! (Surat al-Ma'arij: 11-15)

Yet, some people are aware that wealth, prosperity and great fortune are under the control of Allah. Hence, they are well aware that rank and status are ridiculous. Only these people truly understand that these possessions will not save them in the hereafter. Therefore, they do not dare to chase after the valuables of this world. Showing arrogance is not a trait you can expect from such modest people. Never forgetting the existence of Almighty Allah makes them feel grateful for everything He gives them. In return for such conduct, Allah promises an honourable and comfortable life to them. The people who trust in Allah and make their servanthood to Allah the ultimate purpose of their lives are aware that they can only benefit from worldly goods for a limited period of time and that worldly goods are worthless next to the eternal abundance promised. Wealth never makes such people become deeply attached to this life. On the contrary, it makes them more grateful and closer to Allah. They deal justly with everyone and every issue, and try, with what Allah gives them, to attain His good pleasure. Rather than taking pleasure from wealth in this world, they aim to acquire the Qur'anic values expected from them, fully aware that real status and praise in the presence of Allah matter. The prophet Sulayman set an example to all people as an honourable believer who showed such traits in his life. Possessing a great wealth and sovereignty, Sulayman clearly stated why he pursued this wealth:

Truly do I love the love of good, with a view to the glory of my Lord. (Surah Sad: 32)

Failure to acknowledge why worldly goods are created in this world leads people to forget that they will only be able to use these possessions for a period of 60-70 years, if

they are destined to live that long, and then leave their mansions, cars and children behind. They do not think that they will be buried alone in their graves. All through their lives they long for the affluence they will never be able to enjoy.

Yet, those who consider wealth a saviour and neglect the existence of their Creator suffer bitter grief both in this world and the hereafter:

Those who reject faith, neither their possessions nor their (numerous) progeny will avail them aught against Allah: They are themselves but fuel for hell. (Surah Ali-'Imran: 10)

The Qur'an heralds the end of those who demonstrate insatiable greed for possessions:

**Who heaps up wealth and lay it by,
Thinking that his wealth would make him last forever!
By no means! He will definitely be thrown into That which breaks to pieces,
And what will explain to you That which breaks to pieces?
(It is) hell of (the wrath of) Allah kindled (to a blaze),
Which mounts (right) to the hearts.
It shall be made into a vault over them,
In columns outstretched. (Surat al-Humazah: 2-9)**

True wealth belongs to those believers who never show an inner interest in possessions in this world and truly believe that only Allah gives everything to man. These are actually the really wealthy people in this world; they do not limit their lives to a mere 50-60 years. Believers engage in the best trade by obtaining paradise in exchange for this life. They prefer permanent instead of temporary wealth. Allah informs us about this in the following verse:

Allah has purchased from the believers their persons and their goods; for theirs (in return) is the Garden (of Paradise): they fight in His cause, and slay and are slain: a promise binding on Him in truth, through the Tawrah, the Gospel, and the Qur'an: and who is more faithful to his covenant than Allah? Then rejoice in the bargain which you have concluded: that is the achievement supreme. (Surat at-Tawbah: 111)

Disregarding these facts, those who "cling to" this world will soon understand clearly who is on the path of right action.

Marriage

Marriage is considered an important turning point in one's life. Every young girl or boy looks forward to meeting the person of her or his dreams. A good mate is a major goal in life and young people are almost "indoctrinated" with the importance of finding one, which is certainly a natural wish. However, relations between man and woman are fundamentally based on unsound grounds in ignorant societies, namely societies in which people do not accept the Qur'anic way of life: "friendships" are solely romantic relationships in which both sexes seek emotional satisfaction. Yet, marriages are usually based on mutual material benefits. Many women try to find a "prosperous man" in expectation of a high standard of living. For such a purpose, a young girl may easily accept to be the life-long spouse of someone for whom she has no affection. On the other hand, what a man seeks in a woman is very often "good looks".

Yet the rationale behind the viewpoint of an ignorant society neglects a crucial fact: all these materialistic values are eventually doomed to perish; Allah can take back the fortune of a man in a moment. Similarly, it takes but a few seconds to lose good looks; as city dwellers, for instance, our daily commuting to and from work can at any time be thwarted by an accident that may leave hideous and permanent scars on the face. Time, meanwhile, deals irrecoverable damage to our health, strength and beauty. Under such unpredictable conditions, what consequences are there in a system based on purely materialistic values? For instance, think of a man who only marries a woman because he is impressed by her good looks. What would he think if her face is badly injured in an accident? Would he leave her when wrinkles start to appear on her face? The answers no doubt reveal the unreasonable basis of materialistic thinking.

A marriage becomes precious when it is intended purely to obtain the good pleasure of Allah. Otherwise, it becomes a burden both in this world and the next. If not in this world, man will ultimately understand in the hereafter that this is an improper way for the human soul. Yet, this will be too late; on the day of judgement, he would hold his wife, to whom he felt so close in this world, a ransom for his own salvation. The terror of that day will render all relations in this world meaningless. Allah gives a detailed account of the relationships between immediate family members on the day of judgement in the following verse:

Though they will be put in sight of each other, the wrongdoer's desire will be: would that he could redeem himself from the penalty of that Day by (sacrificing) his children, wife and his brother, kindred who sheltered him... (Surat al-Ma'arij: 11-13)

It is evident from the verses that people will no longer attach any importance to women, friends, brothers or sisters on the day of judgement. In their desperate efforts to be saved, everybody will be willing to pay their immediate family or relatives as a ransom for their own personal salvation. Furthermore, these people will curse each other

since they never warned each other against such a terrible end. In the Qur'an, the case of Abu Lahab who deserved eternal punishment in hell and his wife is recounted:

The power of Abu Lahab will perish, and he will perish. His wealth and gains will not exempt him. He will be plunged in flaming fire, and his wife, the wood-carrier, will have upon her neck a halter of palm-fibre. (Surat al-Masad: 1-5)

The type of marriage acceptable in the presence of Allah is, however, based on totally different criteria. Contrary to the marriages common in an ignorant society, where people are heedless about earning the good pleasure of Allah, the criteria is not money, fame or beauty but a marriage intended to gain His good pleasure. For believers, the only criterion is taqwa, in other words, 'the avoidance of all that is prohibited, the fulfilment of all that is commanded, and the fear of Allah. Consequently, a believer can only marry someone who displays a deep loyalty to Allah. People find peace and happiness in this marriage. The relevant verse follows:

And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquillity with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts): verily in that are Signs for those who reflect. (Surat ar-Rum: 21)

Taqwa being the sole bond, believers will surely meet a pleasant life in the Hereafter. As they remind each other righteousness and guide one another to the paradise all through their lives, they will also remain close friends for all eternity. Their relations are described as follows:

The believers, men and women, are protectors one of another: they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, practice regular charity, and obey Allah and His messenger. On them will Allah pour His mercy: for Allah is exalted in power, Wise. (Surat at-Tawbah: 71)

Children

A major ambition of mankind is to leave behind sons who will carry the family name into the future. However, if not intended seeking the good pleasure of Allah, this ambition well may be a factor taking man from the path of Allah. A person is tested in his children; in this sense, what is expected from him is to treat them in a way that will gain the good pleasure of Allah.

Your wealth and your children are only a trial, whereas Allah! With Him is an immense reward. (Surat at-Taghabun: 15)

In the verse, the use of the word 'trial' is of great significance. For many people, having children is one of the most important goals in life. Yet in the Qur'anic sense, a believer only wants children in order to gain the good pleasure of Allah. Otherwise, just for the sake of satisfying one's own desire for a child, having a baby would only mean ascribing partners to Allah. The example of those who forget their real purpose and make their children the "ultimate goal in life" is given in the Qur'an:

He it is Who did create you from a single soul, and therefrom did make his mate that he might take rest in her. And when he covered her she bore a light burden, and she passed (unnoticed) with it, but when it became heavy they cried to Allah, their Lord, saying: "If you give to us a goodly child, we vow we shall be of the thankful." When He gave to them a goodly child, they ascribed to Him partners in respect of that which He had given them. High is He exalted above all that they associate (with Him). Do they indeed ascribe to Him as partners things that can create nothing, but are themselves created? (Surat al-A'raf: 189-191)

Believers ask for children from Allah only for His good pleasure. When asking for children, the prophets cited in the Qur'an only intended to attain the good pleasure of Allah. An example is the wife of 'Imran:

When the wife of 'Imran said: "My Lord! Surely I vow to You what is in my womb, to be devoted (to Your service); accept therefore from me, surely You are the Hearing, the Knowing." (Surat Ali-'Imran 35)

The prayer of the prophet Ibrahim, also sets an example to all believers:

Our Lord! Make of us Muslims, bowing to Your (Will), and of our progeny a people Muslim, bowing to Your (will); and show us our place for the celebration of (due) rites; and turn unto us (in Mercy); for You are the Oft-Returning, Most Merciful. (Surat al-Baqarah: 128)

In the expression of the verse, having children, if intended to seek Allah's favour, is a way of worshipping Allah. However, when the real intention is something other than attaining the blessing of Allah, then a person may suffer grave consequences both in this world and the next. Believers acknowledge their children as individuals entrusted to them by Allah. Therefore, they do not take a personal pride in their children's

appearance, success or intelligence, knowing that Allah granted those traits to that child. Such pride is simply an act of going astray.

Such an approach has detrimental consequences in the hereafter. On the day of judgement, one would be more than willing to pay one's sons, spouse and other immediate family members as ransom for eternal salvation. One's desire to avoid the awful punishment makes one immediately forsake beloved ones. Yet on the day of judgement there will be no hope of escaping eternal punishment by such an act.

For the people of an ignorant society, children become the source of many problems not only in the hereafter but also in this world. From birth onwards, rearing a child entails burdensome responsibilities for parents. It is an especially difficult experience for the pregnant mother. First, the day she receives the news of a baby, she has to change her life-style entirely. She has to reorder her priorities. In this respect the needs of the baby in her womb always come first; her eating habits, the way she sleeps, in brief, her whole personal life changes entirely. Towards the end of the period of pregnancy, doing daily work and most simple bodily movements become impossible for the mother. Yet, the major difficulties start after birth. The mother spends all her time taking care of the baby. The baby usually leaves its mother very little time for her personal needs and tasks. Therefore, the mother looks forward to the time when her baby grows old enough to take care of its own needs. In the meantime, the mother does not recognise how quickly the years pass. If done for the good pleasure of Allah, such a long time can be considered as a way of worship. Yet for the members of an ignorant society, these years are nothing more than pointless trouble.

Parents in an ignorant society usually feel disappointment when they raise their family. Raised as a member of an ignorant society, the child generally develops a self-centred personality. Under the misguidance of selfish drives and motives, he shows interest in the needs of his parents only if it serves him to do so. His parents, now old and experiencing age-related problems, only understand this fact late in life. However in the early years of parenthood, they imagine that when their children grow up they would be major supports in times of unexpected trouble, but contrary to this expectation, they may even find themselves in rest-homes.

Allah in the Qur'an presents man with a framework, according to which believers must conduct themselves responsibly towards their parents. Allah requires respect and mercy towards parents, especially those in old age:

Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him, and that you be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in your lifetime, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them in terms of honour. And, out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility, and say: "My Lord! Bestow on them your mercy even as they cherished me in childhood." (Surat al-Isra: 23-24)

As we understand from the verses, rearing a child in the light of Qur'anic values is something honourable for believers to do. Yet, if unbelieving people who force the children to adopt the mentality of an ignorant society rear them, then this is a vain effort both in this world and the next. Furthermore, believers still attain the good pleasure of Allah even if the child does not adopt the Qur'anic teaching he is given. Parents are only held responsible to give the Qur'anic teaching to their children and then put their trust in Allah. Besides Allah, people have no other protector or helper.

Those who seek worldly benefits from their children will receive no help from them either in this world or in the next.

When the Deafening Blast comes, the Day a man will flee from his brother and his mother and his father, and his wife and his children: on that Day every man among them will have concerns enough of his own. (Surah 'Abasa: 33-37)

As stated earlier, man is only created to serve his Creator. Everything surrounding him, all his life only exists to test him. After death, a person will only be judged according to his deeds. In return for his deeds, he will be rewarded with paradise or punished in hell. In brief, wealth, beauty or sons are not worthwhile, but taqwa, the "Fear of Allah" is worthwhile.

It is neither your wealth nor your sons that will bring you nearer to Us in degree: but only those who believe and work right actions, these are the ones for whom there is a multiplied reward for their deeds, while secure they (reside) in the dwellings on high! (Surah Saba: 37)

Those who reject faith, neither their possessions nor their (numerous) progeny will avail them aught against Allah: they will be companions of hell, dwelling therein (forever). (Surah Ali-'Imran: 116)

Of no profit whatever to them, against Allah, will be their riches or their sons: they will be companions of hell, to dwell therein (for aye)! (Surat al-Mujadilah: 17)

NATURAL HAZARDS AND DISASTERS

The world is anything but serene and still. We are all vulnerable to natural threats, both internal and external. Meteor showers, asteroids are only a few of the factors likely to pose threats to the world from space. As for the seemingly solid earth, the planet's interior has an inner core of molten elements. It surely would not be an exaggeration to call this part of the earth, which remains invisible to our eyes, "a flaming core". There also exists an atmosphere surrounding the earth, which is a "shield" against external threats. Yet, no part of the earth is immune against the effects of atmospheric forces like thunderstorms, storms, or hurricanes.

Natural hazards may strike at any time. They can cause considerable loss of life and property. Generally referred to as "natural" disasters, earthquakes, lightning, flash floods, global wildfires, acid rain, and tidal waves have different intensities and effects. What is common to all these disasters is that in just moments they can reduce a city, with all its inhabitants, to ruin. What is most important, no human being has the power to combat or prevent any of these hazards.

Heavy destruction is the legacy of catastrophes all over the planet. Yet, a disaster always affects only a particular region of the earth, thanks to nature's delicate balance which is a creation of Allah. A significant protection exists on earth for all living things as well as for human beings. The possibility of a devastating natural disaster always lurks in spite of this protection. Allah creates these disasters to show us how insecure our habitation can sometimes be. These outbursts of nature are reminders to all mankind that we have no control whatsoever over the planet. Likewise, each disaster serves the purpose of reminding us of our inherent weakness. These are surely warnings to those that can contemplate the significance of such events and draw lessons from the experience of others.

What other lessons should man learn from natural disasters?

The world is specially created for man. The reason why man is created is evident as the verse suggests:

"He it is who created the heavens and the earth in six Days, and His Throne was over the waters, that He might try you, which of you is best in conduct." (Surah Hud: 7)

The "setting" for this "test" is quite elaborate, however, and each event is a component of this sophisticated setting. Furthermore, none of these natural phenomena occur randomly; all have a scientific explanation. For instance, the earth's gravitational force explains why we do not drift off into space; rain falls when water vapour reaches a certain level of saturation. The same kind of causation is also valid for death, accidents

or disease. Numerous causes can be cited for why a man dies, becomes sick, or has an accident. Yet, what really matters is not the number of these reasons but the "reliability" of the system these causes and their consequences rest upon. One particular aspect of this system is important; each incident proceeds in a way such that the human mind can entirely understand it. Allah warns man by means of natural disasters. An earthquake, for instance, kills thousands of women, children and young people and leaves many more injured. Those who are heedless of the warnings of Allah are prone to explain such incidents as "natural" phenomena and little understand that Allah creates these for specific purposes. Let us think for a moment: what would happen if only those who are guilty before Allah died in an earthquake? In such a case, the appropriate basis for the "test" of humankind would not be established. That is why Allah creates each phenomenon in a "natural" setting. Only those who are aware of the existence of Allah and have a deep comprehension of His creation understand the divine rationale behind this "natural" appearance.

In the verse, **"Every soul shall taste death: and We test you by evil and by good by way of trial. To Us must you return,"** (Surat al-Anbiya: 35), Allah states that He tests man through good as well as bad events.

That many people are affected by a disaster is the riddle of this test. One should always keep in mind that Allah is the All-Knowing Judge and "the Decision between them at judgement will be in perfect justice." (Surat az-Zumar: 75).

All events happening to a person in this life are a part of the test. Those who are truly believers comprehend the essence of this riddle. Whenever a misfortune befalls them, they turn to Allah alone and repent. They are servants of Allah and are aware of the promise of Allah:

Be sure We shall test you with something of fear and hunger, some loss in goods and lives and the fruits (of your toil), but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere, who say, when afflicted with calamity: "To Allah we belong, and to Him is our return". They are those on whom (descend) blessings from Allah, and mercy, and they are the ones that receive guidance. (Surat al-Baqarah: 155- 157)

As is stated in the verse, all people, believers and disbelievers, are tested in many ways: sometimes by natural disaster, at other times by something happening in our daily lives, a disease or an accident that befalls us. Such misfortunes strike individuals as well as societies and cause material loss along with spiritual suffering. A wealthy man may become bankrupt, a girl with good looks may receive a severe injury on the face, or a

city may be reduced to rubble by an earthquake. These incidents are all clear demonstrations of how, at any moment, events can alter our lives.

People should be able to draw lessons from these events. No doubt, Allah does not create anything without a purpose; each disaster is a reminder for human beings whose purpose is to save humans from the perversity they are in. In the Qur'an, Allah says that without His leave, nothing can occur on earth:

No kind of calamity can occur, except by the leave of Allah: and if anyone believes in Allah, (Allah) guides his heart (aright): for Allah knows all things. (Surat at-Taghabun: 11)

Nor can a soul die except by Allah's leave, the term being fixed as by writing. If any desires a reward in this life, We shall give it to him; and if any desires a reward in the hereafter, We shall give it to him. And swiftly shall We reward those that (serve Us with) gratitude. (Surah Ali-'Imran: 145)

Another lesson one draws from disasters is that man, assuming himself to be mighty on earth, realises that he is simply weak and actually does not have the strength to cope with disasters, which happen in a moment by the will of Allah. Man can provide no help either to himself or to anyone else. Surely Allah is Omnipotent. This is stated in the following verse:

If Allah touch you with affliction, none can remove it but He; if He touch you with happiness, He has power over all things. (Surat al-An'am: 17)

In this chapter, a comprehensive account of types of disasters affecting the earth will be given. The purpose is to remind people that this world is not a place for which to feel blind affection. These incidents indicate how desperately we need Allah's guidance and help. This desperation is a clear statement that people are impotent before Allah. As is said in the verse; "and nor have you, besides Allah, any protector or helper." (Surat al-'Ankabut: 22)

Earthquakes

Earthquakes are the most devastating natural forces on earth. The worst loss of life occurs during earthquakes. Research reveals that every two minutes somewhere the surface of the earth cracks. According to statistics, the earth shakes hundreds of thousands of times a year. Twenty of them are powerful earthquakes which convulse the land. Yet since they often do not hit densely populated areas, they kill few people, if any, and cause little economic loss. Only five of these earthquakes reduce buildings to heaps of rubble.

This information shows that people do not frequently encounter earthquakes. No doubt, this is Allah's special protection against disasters for humankind.

In our day, only a city or a province becomes subject to damaging earthquakes. Yet, by the will of Allah, an earthquake affecting the whole planet could happen at any time. This type of shaking of the ground could end life on earth. The structure of the earth is quite vulnerable to quakes; a sudden movement or rupture of large masses of rock within the earth's crust or upper mantle would make catastrophe inescapable.

An earthquake has no relation with the type of soil that amplifies the effects of seismic waves travelling through it. An earthquake may still occur even when the natural conditions for an earthquake do not exist. By the will of Allah, an earthquake may happen at any time. Yet, Allah specially creates insecurity and instability in some parts of the land. This is to remind people that, at any time, an unexpected incident may place their lives in jeopardy. In the Qur'an, Allah warns people against a possible calamity:

Do those who plot evil actions feel secure that Allah will not cause the earth to swallow them up or that a punishment will not come upon them from where they least expect? Or that He will not seize them on their travels, something they are powerless to prevent? Or that He will not seize them little by little? For your Lord is All-Compassionate, Most Merciful. (Surat an-Nahl: 45-47)

These earthquakes shaking the earth for only seconds can last for hours, even days. While recovering from a devastating disaster, people can suffer another. This is surely easy for Allah. However, by His mercy, Allah protects man and with such disasters reminds him, now and then, that he has no control whatsoever over his life.

At this point, it could be beneficial to remember a major earthquake, which took place in the 20th century.

Technology Defeated: Kobe

Today's advanced level of science and technology inspires man with the feeling that he has control over nature. Yet, those who are overwhelmed by such a notion may soon feel disappointment. Technology is a tool provided by Allah for the service of man and is entirely under His control. Various events show that even the most advanced technology is impotent to rule nature.

For instance, despite the "earthquake-resistant technology" developed by Japanese scientists, Kobe fell victim to widespread subsidence caused by twenty seconds of intense shock waves during the 1995 quake. The world's most earthquake-resistant structures built to withstand an intense jolt simply collapsed during a momentary 6.9 magnitude quake. During the previous three decades, the Japanese government had invested one billion dollars in academic research to develop warning systems for earthquakes. Yet, these efforts yielded no conclusive results at all. As the millennium draws to a close, scientists are still unable to devise systems to issue warnings that could reduce the destructive effects of dangerous seismic events. Kobe was a recent example, among many others, demonstrating how vulnerable to unexpected patterns of seismic hits a modern industrialised city is.

The public was reassured that modern technology developed to predict major earthquakes would save them from complete destruction. Yet, after the disaster which reduced Kobe to heaps of rubble, it became apparent that no technology had been available to alert people to the danger. It also became apparent that the so-called "quake-resistant structures" had no resistance at all to the earthquake whose epicentre was 15 miles south-west of downtown Kobe.

The region affected by the earthquake included the populous cities of Kobe and Osaka. That is why appalling damage occurred, leaving 5,200 people dead and another 300,000 injured. The total damage was put at 200 billion dollars.

There are certainly lessons to be drawn from such a disaster. City-dwellers, used to leading comfortable lives, were suddenly confronted with many hardships after the disaster. In a state of shock, they were unable to figure out what to do with their lives, - let alone make plans for the future.

Typhoons, Hurricanes, Tornadoes...

Typhoons, hurricanes, and tornadoes are natural disasters that people frequently experience. These disasters and their aftermaths claim thousands of lives every year. These are very strong winds, which can cause great damage to cities, killing and injuring residents, hurling thousands of trees, huts, telephone poles, cars, and even buildings miles away.

Great typhoons in particular can cause giant sea waves to raise suddenly from the seabed. In this phenomenon, powerful storms send waves speeding at hundreds of miles

per hour across the ocean against seacoasts. In such cases, water rises onto the land and heavy rains cause serious floods in delta regions.

The transformation of winds that are generally experienced as mild breezes into powerful storms capable of moving buildings no doubt forces us to look for the great power making such events happen. The same rationale discussed in the section on earthquakes is also true for typhoons, hurricanes and tornadoes: if Allah willed it so, man would very frequently be confronted by such natural disasters. While recovering from disaster, human beings could suffer another. In the Qur'an, Allah reminds man that winds are under His control:

Do you feel secure against Him Who is in heaven causing the earth to swallow you up when suddenly it rocks from side to side? Or do you feel secure against Him Who is in heaven releasing against you a sudden squall of stones, so that you will know how true My warning was? Those before them also denied but then how great was My denial! (Surat al-Mulk: 16-18)

However, Allah protects man against hazards. He only occasionally sends against them violent storms. This is surely to give man a warning. The intention is to remind people that their ultimate purpose in life is to be servants of Allah, that they are but impotent against Allah's might and that they will be judged on the day of judgement.

Volcanoes

As well as the vibration or shaking of the ground caused by sudden movement or rupture of large masses of rock within the earth's crust or upper mantle, volcanic eruptions are another spectacular form of natural disaster. There are about 1,500 active volcanoes around the world today; 550⁴ of them exist on land while the remainder are under the oceans. These volcanoes can erupt at any time in extremely destructive ways that no-one can anticipate in advance. When they erupt, they can kill the residents of nearby cities in addition to destroying crops and covering farmland with ash.

Some catastrophic eruptions that took place in this century as well as earlier in history made indelible impressions on the human mind. These eruptions wiped many cities off the map and killed numerous communities.

There are certainly lessons to be drawn from the volcanic eruptions witnessed in history. Mount Vesuvius in Italy, for instance, buried **Pompeii**, a city whose residents led a life of total debauchery, under a storm of hot lava. It is striking that 20,000 inhabitants of this prosperous city were asphyxiated mostly by the pyroclastic flows that swept through it on the 24th August 79 CE.

In our own day, however, the dormancy of volcanoes can often end abruptly and they can explode at unexpected times shooting steam and ash thousands of feet into the air. In the meantime, pyroclastic flows sweep through areas causing irrecoverable damage to whatever they encounter. Another adverse effect of eruptions is the harmful

clouds of gases and ash carried by winds into populated areas. These terrifying winds, sometimes about 90 miles per hour, set everything on fire and engulf cities like sun-extinguishing canopies.

One of history's worst disasters occurred in 1883 when Krakatau, in the East Indies, erupted explosively, generating a sound-wave heard 3,000 miles away and creating tsunamis up to 125 feet high. The waves razed 165 coastal villages and killed 36,000 people.

Volcanoes are memorable not only for their tragically high death tolls but also because they erupt in extremely destructive ways that cannot be predicted. The eruption of Nevado Del Ruiz is an example. This was an eruption of minor intensity. In comparison, its intensity was only 3% of the eruption of Mount St Helens. After being dormant for 150 years, Nevado Del Ruiz erupted in 1985 melting the snow and ice on its summit. So devastating was the lahar, or river of mud, that flowed down the volcano's slopes and into the Lagunille River valley, that some 20,000 residents in Armero, Colombia perished, entombed in hot mud as they slept. This event was the worst volcanic disaster since Mount Pelee annihilated St Pierre in 1902. Mount Pelee claimed 30,000 lives when it sent a nuee ardente, or pyroclastic flow, into the town of St Pierre.

Allah demonstrates how suddenly man can meet his death by means of such disasters and thereby calls on him to ponder the purpose of his existence on earth. These incidents send a "warning". What is expected in return from man, who can conceive of his Almighty Creator, is not to indulge distractedly in the affairs of a short life of 50-60 years and neglect the eternal life, the hereafter. We should keep in mind that death will come upon all men one day and that everybody will be judged in the presence of Allah:

One day the earth will be changed to a different earth, and so will be the heavens, and (men) will be marshalled forth, before Allah, the One, the Irresistable. (Surah Ibrahim: 48)

Tsunamis

Seismic sea waves or tidal waves are caused by a sudden uplift or subsidence of the sea floor or by volcanic eruptions. Some tsunamis can be as destructive as atom bombs.

Floods

Allah surely creates all these disasters as "warnings" to mankind. He is exalted in power and He has power over all things. Allah testifies to this in the verse: **"He has power to send calamities on you, from above and below."** (Surat al-An'am: 65) That there are so many serious physical threats around the world no doubt underlines one important reality. With disasters, in only a matter of seconds Allah may take back

whatever He has granted man. Catastrophes may strike anywhere at any time. This is a clear demonstration that no place exists on earth that can guarantee man's security. Allah says this in the following verse:

Do the people of the towns feel secure against the coming of Our wrath by night while they are asleep? Or else, do they feel secure against its coming in broad daylight while they play about (carefree)? Do they then feel secure against the plan of Allah But no-one can, (unwisely), feel secure from the plan of Allah, except those (doomed) to ruin! (Surat al-A'raf: 97-99)

Water, granted to man as a favour, may in times turn out a disaster by the will of Allah. It is incomprehensible that man witnesses one or two floods every year and still disregards the possibility of experiencing such a calamity himself.

A Lesson from History: The Titanic

History abounds with cases of people relying on technological breakthroughs and totally disregarding the might of Allah. That is exactly why many disasters have gone down in history as painful lessons for everyone. Each one of these events is important in the sense that it reminds man that neither wealth nor power, science nor technology has any power to resist the will of Allah.

Numerous examples of such incidents can be given. The best known is the famous Titanic, a huge ocean liner 55 meters in height and 275 meters in length, which sank nearly ninety years ago. The Titanic, intended to be an "assault on nature", was a grand project that employed a team of engineers and as many as five thousand people. Almost everybody was absolutely convinced that this ship would never sink. The ocean liner was a masterpiece of technology with many engineering advances that pushed back the limits of its day. Yet those who relied on the technical prowess of the ship did not take into consideration one important fact stated in the verse **"The command of Allah is a decree that is made absolute"** (Surat al-Ahzab 38) and that everyone will sooner or later meet his fate. Eventually, a minor failure led to the sinking of the ship and advanced technology could not save the Titanic from her bitter end.

From what the survivors of Titanic related, the majority of her passengers gathered on the deck to pray when they realised the ship was about to sink. In many sections of the Qur'an, this tendency of human behaviour is repeated. In times of serious trouble and danger, man sincerely prays and seeks the help of his Creator. However, when delivered from danger, they immediately turn away in ungratefulness:

Your Lord is He that made the ship go smoothly for you through the sea, in order that you may seek of his bounty. For He is unto you most Merciful. When distress seizes you at sea, those that you call upon - beside Him - leave

you in the lurch! But when He brings you back safe to land, you turn away (from Him). Most ungrateful is man! Do you then feel secure that He will not cause you to be swallowed up beneath the earth when you are on land, or that He will not send against you a violent tornado (with showers of stones) so that you shall find no-one to carry out your affairs for you? Or do you feel secure that He will not send you back a second time to sea and send against you a heavy gale to drown you because of your ingratitude, so that you find no helper therein against Us? (Surat al-Isra: 66- 69)

One might never have experienced such a disaster, yet one should always remember that, at any time, one may find life stripped to its fundamentals. Accordingly, man should always occupy himself with the remembrance of Allah since **"the power is wholly Allah's."** (Surat al-Baqarah: 165) On the other hand, once a catastrophe strikes, one might not have the opportunity to change his ungrateful attitude towards Allah and seek to repent to Him. Death may be very sudden:

Do they see nothing in the government of the heavens and the earth and all that Allah has created? (Do they not see) that it may well be that their terms are nigh drawing to an end? In what message after this will they then believe? (Surat al-A'raf: 185)

By the Mercy of Allah

Each one of them We seized for his crime: against some of them We sent a violent tornado (with showers of stones); some were caught by a (mighty) blast; some We caused the earth to swallow up; and some We drowned (in the waters): It was not Allah who injured (or oppressed) them; They injured (and oppressed) their own souls. (Surat al-'Ankabut: 40)

What has been discussed so far is intended to remind those who forget their purpose in creation of an important fact: everything on earth owes its existence to Allah, the Creator who has created the entire material universe. In other words, everything's existence is consequent upon the exercise of the will of Allah. Therefore, nothing has a being separate and apart from Allah. The Qur'an tells us that nothing is beyond Allah's control: **"Allah has full power and control over His affair; but most of mankind know it not."** (Surah Yusuf: 21)

Nevertheless, as Allah makes clear in the second part of the verse, the majority of people are not aware of this. They assume, during the course of their lives, that no misfortune whatsoever will befall them, never thinking that they too are vulnerable to any of those devastating disasters. We feel that "others" experience such terrifying

incidents and that "we" will always live in safety. News about disasters, accidents or epidemics surely makes us feel sympathy for the sufferers. We indeed share their sorrow; however, as disasters recede into memory, we become less concerned and such an attitude proves to be a passing interest for us. Once we immerse ourselves in the flow of daily life or face personal problems, we quickly develop a sense of apathy and remain indifferent to those who have been through disaster.

Nevertheless, the notion that every day of one's life will be the same is a flawed one. This is evident from the warnings of Allah. Certainly, those people who were exposed to various disasters did not know that a natural hazard would throw their life into complete disarray. They certainly started that day as an ordinary one, thinking that it would be the same as the preceding ones. However, it turned out to be totally different. Most probably, it never occurred to them that, on that particular day there would be a drastic change in their lives, which would transform life into a dangerous struggle. On such occasions, lives are reduced to their simplest truths. Surely, this is how Allah reminds man that security in this world is a sham.

A majority of people pay no heed to this, however. They forget that life is short and temporary and disregard that they will be judged in the presence of Allah. In this state of heedlessness, they spend their lives in pursuit of vain desires instead of living for the good pleasure of Allah.

Viewed from this standpoint, troubles are a mercy of Allah. Allah demonstrates the true nature of this world and encourages man to be prepared for the next life. That is why what is said to be a misfortune is in fact an opportunity offered by Allah. These misfortunes are given to people so that they may seek to repent and amend their conduct. The lessons that should be drawn from disasters are related in one of the verses:

See they not that they are tried every year once or twice? Yet they turn not in repentance, and they take no heed. (Surat at-Tawbah: 126)

PAST CIVILASATIONS

But how many (countless) generations before them have We destroyed? Can you find a single one of them (now) or hear (so much as) a whisper of them? (Surah Maryam: 98)

Man is on earth to be tested. Throughout history, the pure messages and the revelations of Allah communicated to people by His messengers provided guidance for mankind. These messengers and books always summoned man to the right path, the path of Allah. Today, the last book of Allah, His only unaltered revelation to mankind is available: the Qur'an.

In the Qur'an, Allah informs us that He showed the right path to all people throughout world history and warned them through His messengers of the day of judgement and hell. However, a majority of these people denounced the prophets sent to them and showed animosity towards them. Because of their arrogance, they brought Allah's wrath down upon themselves and were quite suddenly wiped off the face of the earth. The relevant verse follows:

As also 'Ad and Thamud, and the Companions of the Rass, and many a generation between them. To each one, We set forth parables and examples; and each one We broke to utter annihilation (for their wrong actions). And the (disbelievers) must indeed have passed by the town on which was rained a shower of evil: did they not then see it (with their own eyes)? But they fear not the Resurrection. (Surat al-Furqan: 38-40)

The news of previous peoples, which constitutes a great part of the Qur'an, is certainly one of the issues of the revelation to be contemplated. The lessons that are to be drawn from their experience is stated as follows in the Qur'an:

See they not how many of those before them We did destroy? Generations We had established on the earth, in strength such as We have not given to you, for whom We poured out rain from the skies in abundance, and gave (fertile) streams flowing beneath their (feet): yet for their wrong actions We destroyed them, and raised in their wake fresh generations (to succeed them). (Surat al-An'am: 6)

Another verse addressed to men of understanding who can take warning and take heed is the following:

But how many generations before them did We destroy (for their wrong actions), stronger in power than they? Then did they wander through the land: was there any place of escape (for them)? Verily in this is a message for any that has a heart and understanding or who gives ear and earnestly witnesses (the truth). (Surah Qaf: 36-37)

Allah in the Qur'an tells us that these cases of destruction should be a warning for succeeding generations. Nearly all the destructions of ancient peoples related in the Qur'an are identifiable, thanks to current archive studies and archaeological finds, and thus can be studied. Yet it would be a great mistake to develop only a historical or scientific approach while examining traces of these cases in the Qur'an. As stated in the following verse, each of these incidents is a warning from which to draw lessons:

So, We made it an example to their own time and to their posterity, and a lesson to those who fear Allah. (Surat al-Baqarah: 66)

Yet, we should consider one significant fact: those communities who resisted obeying the commands of Allah did not suffer under Allah's wrath suddenly. Allah sent them messengers to warn them so that they would regret their behaviour and submit to Him. That all troubles befalling men is a reminder for the grievous punishment in the hereafter is stated in the Qur'an:

And verily We make them taste the lower punishment before the greater, that happily they may return. (Surat as-Sajdah: 21)

Destruction often followed when these warnings evoked no response in the communities and when their perversity increased. All these communities were punished by the wrath of Allah. They disappeared from the pages of history and were replaced by new generations. These communities actually received benefit from the favours of Allah, led their lives in prosperity, indulged in the enjoyment of all sorts of pleasures and, while doing all these things, never occupied themselves with the remembrance of Allah. They never reflected on the fact that everything in this world is doomed to extinction. They savoured the moment and never thought about death and beyond. To them, anything and everything to do with worldly life seemed eternal. Yet, the real eternal life lies beyond death. They had no gain whatsoever from this perception of life; however, history provides sufficient evidence of their bitter destruction. Despite the passage of thousands of years, their memories remain as a warning, reminding current generations of the ends of those who stray from their Creator's path.

Thamud

Thamud are one of those communities that perished due to insolence towards divine revelation and overlooking the warnings of Allah. As stated in the Qur'an, Thamud were known for their prosperity and power and they were a nation who excelled in art.

And remember how He made you inheritors after 'Ad and gave you habitations in the land: you build for yourselves palaces and castles in (open) plains, and carve out homes in the mountains; so bring to remembrance the benefits (you have received) from Allah, and refrain from evil and mischief on the earth. (Surat al-A'raf: 74)

In another verse, the social environment of Thamud is illustrated as follows:

Will you be left secure, in (the enjoyment of) all that you have here? Gardens and springs, and cornfields and date-palms with spathes near breaking (with the weight of fruit)? And you carve houses out of (rocky) mountains with great skill. (Surat ash-Shu'ara: 146-149)

Exulting in affluence, Thamud led an extravagant life. In the Qur'an, Allah says that the prophet Salih was sent to Thamud to warn them. The prophet Salih was a person who was well-known among Thamud. His people, who did not expect him to proclaim the religion of truth, were surprised by his calling them to abandon the perversity they were in. A small part of the community complied with Salih's summons, but most did not accept what he said. In particular, the leaders of the community denied Salih and were antagonistic towards him. They tried to injure those who believed in Salih and to oppress them. They were enraged against Salih because he called them to worship Allah. This rage was not specific to Thamud: they were repeating the mistake made by the people of Nuh and 'Ad who preceded them in history. This is why the Qur'an refers to these three peoples as follows:

Has not the story reached you, (O people!), of those who (went) before you? Of the people of Nuh, and 'Ad and Thamud? And of those who (came) after them? None knows them but Allah. To them came messengers with clear (signs); but they put their hands up to their mouths, and said: "We deny (the mission) on which you have been sent, and we are really in suspicious (disquieting) doubt as to that to which you invite us." (Surah Ibrahim: 9)

Thamud were determined to remain arrogant and never change their attitude towards the prophet Salih and even were making plans to kill him. Salih warned them further saying: "**Will you be left secure, in (the enjoyment of) all that you have here?**" (Surat ash-Shu'ara: 146-149) Indeed, the Thamud increased their perversity being unaware of the penalty of Allah and addressed prophet Salih with pride and exultation:

"O Salih! Bring about your threats, if you are a messenger (of Allah)!" (Surat al-A'raf: 77).

The prophet Salih told them, by Allah's revelation, that they would be perished in three days.

Three days later, the prophet Salih's warning came true and Thamud perished.

The (mighty) blast overtook the wrongdoers, and they lay prostrate in their homes before the morning, as if they had never dwelt or flourished there.

Ah! Behold! For Thamud rejected their Lord and Cherisher! Ah! Behold! Removed (from sight) were Thamud! (Surah Hud: 67-68)

Thamud paid dearly, by being destroyed, for not obeying their messenger. The buildings they had constructed and the works of art they had produced could not protect them from the penalty. Thamud were destroyed with a grievous penalty just like all the other peoples who have denied faith before and after them. In brief, their ends matched their attitude. Those who revolted were utterly ruined, and those who obeyed received eternal deliverance.

The People of Saba

The story of the people of Saba (Sheba in the Bible) is recounted in the Qur'an as follows:

There was, for Saba, aforetime, a sign in their homeland - two Gardens to the right and to the left. "Eat of the Sustenance (provided) by your Lord, and be grateful to Him: a territory fair and happy, and a Lord Oft-Forgiving!" But they turned away (from Allah), and We sent against them the Flood (released) from the dams, and We converted their two garden (rows) into "gardens" producing bitter fruit, and tamarisks, and some few (stunted) Lote-trees. That was the requital We gave them because they ungratefully rejected faith: and never do We give (such) requital except to such as are ungrateful rejecters. (Surah Saba: 15-17)

As related in the verses above, the people of Saba lived in a region noted for its arrestingly beautiful and fruitful vineyards and gardens. In such a country, where living standards and circumstances were so high, what they should have done was be grateful to Allah. Yet, as stated in the verse, they "turned away from Allah". Because they laid claim to all their prosperity, they lost it all. As we are informed by the verse, the Arim flood laid waste the whole country.

The Glorious Sumerians

Sumer was a collection of city-states around the lower Tigris and Euphrates in what is now southern Iraq. In our day, the terrain that someone travelling to southern Iraq would most frequently encounter is nothing but vast desert. Most of the land, with the exception of cities, and regions that have since been afforested, is covered with sand. These deserts, once the homeland of the Sumerians, have been there for thousands of years. Their glorious country, which today we are likely to meet only in textbooks, was as real as any contemporary civilisation. These people were as alive as we are today and

they created architectural masterpieces. In a sense, the magnificent cities built by the Sumerians are part of the cultural heritage of our own time.

Among what survives of the cultural remains of the Sumerians, we have information about an elaborate funeral held for Puabi, one of their queens. Vivid accounts of this splendid ceremony are to be found in a number of sources and they tell us that the dead body of the queen was embellished in an extraordinary way. Her corpse was dressed in cloth fashioned from beads of silver, gold and precious stones, and with tassels of pearls. On its head was a wig decorated with a crown encrusted with golden leaves. A vast amount of gold was also placed in the tomb.

In brief, Queen Puabi, an important name in Sumerian history, was buried with a splendid treasure. According to accounts, these matchless riches were carried to her tomb by a procession of guards and servants. Queen Puabi may have been buried together with treasures beyond counting, but that did not save her body from being reduced to a skeleton.

Like all other people in her kingdom, for whom she may have felt contempt because they were poor, her body decayed under the ground becoming a putrefying mass of bacteria. This is surely an impressive example showing that the wealth and properties of this world by no means ensure salvation from a disastrous end.

The Minoans

Land and sea may lie relatively still for centuries. Then, an upheaval suddenly unleashes a cataclysm. Perhaps no event illustrates such a horror so clearly as the calamity of ancient Thera. What happened there may have been the most explosive volcanic eruption in history. Towering over the Aegean Sea some 3,500 years ago, a mile-high volcano formed a ten-mile-wide island. There loomed over a magnificent civilisation centred some seventy miles to the south on the island of Crete. At its peak, perhaps 30,000 people dwelled in Akrotiri, Thera's main city, in which were erected fresco-decorated palaces and from which were dispatched ships laden with goods for trade. While scholars remain uncertain of the exact date – estimates range from 1470 to 1628 BCE – they know the sequence of events. Light earth tremors were followed by a violent quake, aftershocks, and an explosion whose reverberations were audible as far as Scandinavia, the Persian Gulf, and the Rock of Gibraltar. Huge tidal waves arched up and smashed Amnisos, the harbour of Knossos. Today, only the remains of those glorious palaces are left.

The Minoan civilisation, one of the most important civilisations of the period, most probably never expected such a drastic end. Those people who boasted of their wealth and properties lost everything they had. Allah, in the Qur'an, underlines that the drastic ends of such ancient civilisations should be reflected on by contemporary societies:

Does it not teach them a lesson, how many generations We destroyed before them, in whose dwellings they (now) go to and fro? Verily in that are Signs: Do they not then listen? (Surat as-Sajdah: 26)

The Disaster of Pompeii

For historians the remains of Pompeii are striking testimony to the debauchery that once prevailed there. Even the streets of Pompeii, a symbol of the degeneration of the Roman Empire, evoke the enjoyment and pleasure indulged in by this city: the once busy streets lined with taverns, night-clubs, and brothels, still provide glimpses that the disaster left of the daily life.

Here, on soil now enriched with volcanic ash, were once prosperous farms, lush vineyards and luxurious summerhouses. Situated between the slopes of Vesuvius and the sea, Pompeii was the favourite summer resort of wealthy Romans who had escaped the sweltering capital. Yet, Pompeii witnessed one of the most fearsome volcanic eruptions in history, obliterating the town from the face of the earth. Today, the remains of the inhabitants of this city – asphyxiated by the poisonous vapours of Vesuvius as they were going about their daily lives as usual – vividly portray details pertaining to the Roman way of life. The disaster struck Pompeii, together with the neighbouring city Herculaneum, on a summer day, just at a time when the region was crowded with wealthy Romans spending the season in their glorious villas.

The date was the 24th August 79CE. Investigations at the site reveal that the eruption progressed in discrete stages. Before the eruption, the region was shaken several times. Distant, high-pitched rumblings, deep and terrible, coming from the volcano, accompanied these quakes. At first, Vesuvius ejected a column of steam and ash. "Then this roiling cloud rose high into the atmosphere carrying pieces of old rock torn from the volcano's conduit and millions of tons of fresh, glassy pumice. Prevailing winds carried the ash cloud toward Pompeii, where 'small stones' began to fall. As the sun-extinguishing canopy extended over the city, pumice and ash rained down on Pompeii, accumulating at the rate of six inches an hour."

Herculaneum was closer to Vesuvius; most of its residents fled the city terrified by the fast-moving pyroclastic surge that roared towards them. Those who did not leave the city immediately, did not live long to regret their delay. The pyroclastic surge on reaching Herculaneum killed these travellers while a slower-moving pyroclastic flow engulfed the town, burying it. Excavations at Pompeii, on the other hand, reveal that a majority of its inhabitants were reluctant to leave the city. They thought they were not in danger because Pompeii was not very close to the crater. For this reason, most wealthy Pompeians did not abandon their homes and instead took refuge in their houses and shops, hoping the tempest would soon blow over. They all perished before they had time to realise that it was too late. In just one day, Pompeii and Herculaneum along with six nearby villages were wiped off the map. The Qur'an declares that events such as these are a reminder to all:

These are some of the stories of communities that We relate to you: of them, some are standing, and some have been mown down (by the sickle of time). (Surah Hud: 100)

Unravelling the secrets of Pompeii was not possible until centuries later. Rather than mere clues however, the excavations of the ancient city yielded up vivid representations of its people's daily lives. The shapes of many of the agonised victims were preserved intact. The related verse follows:

Such is the chastisement of your Lord when He chastises communities in the midst of their wrong: grievous, indeed, and severe is His chastisement. (Surah Hud: 102)

Today, vast ruins are humbling evidence of complex civilisations that once flourished hundreds, even thousand of years ago. Many of the builders of the great metropolises from different epochs of history are now nameless. Their wealth, technology or works of art did not save them from a bitter end. It was not them but succeeding generations who took advantage of their rich heritage. With few clues to

guide us, the origins and fates of these ancient civilisations are mysteries to this day. Yet two things are evident: they assumed they would never die and they indulged in worldly pleasures. They left behind great monuments believing that thereby they would achieve immortality. No less than these ancient civilisations, many groups of people today also have such a mindset. In expectation of immortalising their names, a majority of the members of modern societies devote themselves entirely to accumulating more wealth or to creating works to leave behind. Moreover, it is more than likely that they revel in more extravagance than did earlier generations and remain heedless of Allah's revelations. There are many lessons to be drawn from the social attitudes and experiences of ancient communities. None of those early communities survived. The works of art and monuments they left behind may have helped them be remembered by succeeding generations but they did not save them from divine punishment or prevent their corpses from decaying. Their remains stand there only as a reminder and warning of Allah's wrath on those who are rebellious and ungrateful for the riches bestowed by Him.

Undoubtedly the lessons to be drawn from such historical events should eventually lead to wisdom. Only then can one comprehend that what befell early societies was not purposeless. One may further realise that only Almighty Allah has the power to create any disaster at any moment. The world is a place where man is being tested. Those who submit to Allah will attain salvation. Those who are satisfied with this world, on the other hand, will be deprived of a blessed eternity. No doubt, their ends will match their deeds and they will be judged in accordance with their deeds. Surely, Allah is the Best of Judges.

MAN'S TRUE ABODE: HEREAFTER

Many people assume that it is possible to lead a perfect life in this world. According to this view, a happy and satisfactory life is attainable through material prosperity, which along with a fulfilling home life and recognition of one's social status are generally regarded as the fundamentals of a perfect life.

Yet according to the Qur'anic point of view, a "perfect life" – that is, one without any problems – is never possible in this world. That is simply because life in the world is deliberately designed to be imperfect.

The origin of the Arabic word for 'world' – dunya – has a significant meaning. Etymologically, it is derived from the root daniy, which means "simple", "inferior", "low" and "worthless". Hence, the word 'world' in Arabic inherently comprises these qualities.

The insignificance of this life is emphasised many times earlier in this book. Indeed, all factors believed to make life wonderful – wealth, personal and business success, marriage, children, and so on – are nothing but vain deceptions. The related verse follows:

Know you (all), that the life of this world is but play and amusement, pomp and mutual boasting and multiplying (in rivalry) among yourselves, riches and children. Here is a similitude: How rain and the growth which it brings forth, delight (the hearts of) the tillers; soon it withers; you will see it grow yellow; then it becomes dry and crumbles away. But in the Hereafter is a penalty severe (for the devotees of wrong). And forgiveness from Allah and (His) good pleasure (for the devotees of Allah). And what is the life of this world, but goods and chattels of deception? (Surat al-Hadid: 20)

In another verse, Allah gives an account of the inclination felt by man for the world rather than the hereafter:

Nay (behold), you prefer the life of this world, but the hereafter is better and more enduring. (Surat al-A'la: 16-17)

Problems arise only because, rather than the hereafter, people value this life too highly. They are pleased and content with what they have here in this world. Such an attitude means nothing more than turning one's face away from the promise of Allah and consequently from the reality of His mighty existence. Allah proclaims that a grievous end awaits them:

Those who expect not the meeting with Us but desire the life of the world and feel secure therein, and those who are neglectful of Our revelations... (Surah Yunus: 7)

Of course, the imperfection of this life does not gainsay the fact that there are also good and beautiful things on earth. But here on earth, what is regarded as beautiful, delightful, pleasing and attractive stands cheek-by-jowl with the imperfect, flawed and ugly. In this world, good and evil are commingled. This is but a reminder of paradise and hell. Indeed, if observed with a sound and conscientious mind, these facts would make a person realise the truth of the hereafter. With Allah, that life which is deemed good and beneficial for man is actually that of the hereafter.

Allah commands His faithful servants to make serious efforts to attain paradise in the verse below:

Be quick in the race for forgiveness from your Lord, and for Paradise whose width is that (of the whole) of the heavens and of the earth, prepared for the righteous. (Surat Ali-'Imran: 133)

Those who Hasten for Paradise

In the Qur'an, believers are given the glad tidings of an eternal reward and happiness. Yet, what is commonly disregarded is the fact that this happiness and eternal pleasure start when we are still in this life. That is because, in this world too, believers are not deprived of the favours and benevolence of Allah.

In the Qur'an, Allah states that true believers who engage in good deeds in this world will find an excellent dwelling in the Hereafter:

Whoever does right actions, man or woman, and has faith, verily, to him will We give a new life, a life that is good and pure and We will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their actions. (Surah an-Nahl: 97)

As a reward and source of bliss, in this world Allah bestows many favours as well as unprecedented opportunities for personally and socially fulfilling lives to His true servants. This is the immutable law of Allah. Since wealth, splendour and beauty are the fundamental characteristics of paradise, Allah opens His fortunes to His sincere believers also in this world. This is certainly the beginning of a comfortable and honourable life that will never end.

Beautiful places and ornaments in this world are but imperfect echoes of the real ones in paradise. Their existence makes true believers think of paradise and feel a deeper longing for it. On the other hand, all through his life, it is entirely possible that a believer may suffer serious trouble and grief; yet true believers put their trust in Allah

and patiently bear up under any sorrows befalling them. Furthermore, being aware that this is a way to attain the good pleasure of Allah, such an attitude affords a special relief to their hearts.

A believer is someone who is constantly aware of the existence of his Creator. He complies with His commands and is careful to lead the kind of life described in the Qur'an. He has realistic expectations and hopes for his life after death. Since a believer puts his trust in his Creator, Allah relieves his heart of all misery and suffering.

What is more important, a believer, at every moment, feels the guidance and support of his Creator. This is actually a peaceful state of mind and heart that is a consequence of knowing that Allah is with him every time he prays, engages in good deeds, or does something - important or insignificant - solely to attain His good pleasure.

This is certainly a feeling of security inspiring the heart of a believer who comprehends that **"for him are angels ranged before him and behind him who guard him by Allah's command"** (Surat ar-Ra'd: 11), and that he will be victorious in his struggle in the name of Allah, and that he will receive the good news of an eternal reward: paradise. Hence, true believers never fear or grieve, in accordance with the inspiration of Allah to angels **"I am with you: give firmness to the Believers."** (Surat al-Anfal: 12)

Believers are those who say **"Our Lord is Allah and, further, stand straight and steadfast."** (Surah Fussilat: 30). They are also **"those upon whom the angels descend" and to whom the angels say "fear not nor grieve, but hear good tidings of the paradise which you are promised."** (Surah Fussilat: 30). **Believers are also aware that their Creator "places no burden on any soul but that which it can bear."** (Surat al-A'raf: 42). **They are well aware that "Allah is the One who has created all in proportion and measure."** (Surat al-Qamar: 49). Hence, they are the ones who say **"Nothing will happen to us except what Allah has decreed for us: He is our protector."** (Surat at-Tawbah: 51) and put their trust in Allah. **"No harm touched them" since they say "Allah is sufficient for us and most excellent is the Protector."** (Surat Ali-'Imran: 173-174). Yet, since the world is a place of testing for all human beings, believers will necessarily be confronted by some difficulties. Hunger, thirst, loss of property, disease, accidents and so on may also strike them at any time. Poverty as well as many other kinds of trouble or affliction may also befall them. The kind of test a believer may go through is described as follows in the Qur'an:

Or do you think that you shall enter Paradise without such (trials) as came to those who passed away before you? They encountered suffering and adversity, and were so shaken in spirit that even the Messenger and those of faith who were with him cried: **"When (will come) the help of Allah?" Ah! Verily, the help of Allah is (always) near!** (Surat al-Baqarah: 214)

Of course adversities never altered the respect and fear the Prophet, and his Companions had for Allah. No alteration in their attitude ever occurred when they faced trouble. Allah, also, gives the glad tidings of His support to believers in the verse: **"Ah! Verily, the help of Allah is (always) near." In consequence, "but Allah will deliver the right acting to their place of salvation: no evil shall touch them, nor shall they grieve."** (Surat az-Zumar: 61)

Believers are aware that difficult times are specially created and that their responsibility is to respond to them with patience and constancy. Furthermore these are great opportunities to show one's perseverance and commitment to Allah and are a means to attain personal maturity in His sight. Thus, a believer becomes happier, excited and more committed on such occasions.

However, the attitude of disbelievers is totally different. Difficult times make them fall into despair. Apart from physical pain, a disbeliever also suffers from great mental distress.

The fear, hopelessness, pessimism, grief, worry, anxiety and agitation that are the characteristic traits of disbelievers in this world are but pale versions of the real pain from which they will suffer in the Hereafter. Allah **"makes their breast close and constricted, as if they had to climb up to the skies and thus Allah (heaps) the penalty on those who refuse to believe."** (Surah al-An'am: 125)

On the other hand, those true believers that seek forgiveness and repent to Allah are the recipients of the benevolence and favours of Allah in this world as related in the following verse:

(And to preach thus), "Seek you the forgiveness of your Lord, and turn to Him in repentance; that He may grant you enjoyment, good (and true), for a term appointed, and bestow His abounding grace on all who abound in merit! But if you turn away, then I fear for you the penalty of a great day." (Surah Hud: 3)

In another verse, the life of believers is described as follows:

To the righteous (when) it is said, "What is it that your Lord has revealed?" They say "All that is good." To those who do good, there is good in this world, and the Home of the Hereafter is even better and excellent indeed is the Home of the righteous. (Surat an-Nahl: 30)

The Hereafter is surely superior to and better than this world. Compared to the Hereafter, this world is but a mean and entirely worthless place. Hence, if a person wants to set a goal for himself, that goal should be paradise in the Hereafter. It should also be remembered that those who seek paradise receive the benevolence of their Creator in

this world as well. But those who seek this world in rebellion against Allah often attain nothing of worth from it and then their abode in the next life is hell.

Paradise

Allah promises paradise to those who come to His presence as believers. Surely, Allah does not fail to keep His promise. People whose faith is assured, know that their Creator will keep His promise and that they will be accepted in paradise provided that they live as true believers in this world:

Paradise of Eternity, those which (Allah) Most Gracious has promised to His slaves in the Unseen: for His promise must (necessarily) come to pass. (Surah Maryam: 61)

The moment of entering paradise is the most important time for the faithful who believe and do good deeds. All through their lives, they strove for it, prayed for it and performed right actions to obtain it. In the presence of Allah, it is surely the best place to stay and the real place to attain: paradise, the place specially prepared for believers. Allah describes this unique moment in the following verse:

Gardens of perpetual bliss: they shall enter there, as well as the righteous among their fathers, their spouses, and their offspring. And angels shall enter unto them from every gate (with the salutation): "Peace unto you for that you persevered in patience! Now how excellent is the final home!" (Surat ar-Rad: 23-24)

The Beauty of Paradise

The parable of Paradise which the righteous are promised! Beneath it flow rivers: perpetual is the enjoyment thereof and the shade therein. Such is the end of the righteous; and the end of disbelievers is hell. (Surat ar-Ra'd: 35)

An excellent vista of lakes, rivers, and lush greenery is the sort of paradise imagined by the ordinary person. However this image of paradise needs to be clarified because it does not accurately reflect the Qur'anic point of view. It is certainly true that paradise has significant natural beauty; which is one of its perfect blessings. It is yet another beautiful aspect that splendid mansions are built in shady gardens, by flowing rivers. However such accounts will definitely prove to be inadequate to the magnificence of paradise.

The beauty and glory of paradise are beyond one's imagination. The Qur'anic words "**containing all kinds (of delights)**" (Surat ar-Rahman: 48) surely illustrate a vivid

picture of the real nature of paradise. What is meant by "delights" are things specially created by Allah the All-Knowing. These delights may well be surprising rewards or things in which to take such pleasure as human beings have never imagined. The promise of Allah **"they shall have, before their Lord, all that they wish for. That will indeed be the magnificent bounty (of Allah)"** (Surat ash-Shura: 22) makes it explicit that, as a favour of Allah, the imagination of believers will shape a Paradise according to their own tastes and wishes.

The Eternal Residence of Believers

Allah has promised to believers, men and women, gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein, and beautiful mansions in gardens of everlasting bliss. But the greatest bliss is the good pleasure of Allah: that is the supreme felicity. (Surat at-Tawbah: 72)

In this world, believers live **"in houses, which Allah has permitted to be raised to honour; for the celebration, in them, of His name."** (Surat an-Nur: 36) By Allah's command, these residences are kept clean and especially cared for.

Similar to them are the residences in paradise; they are places where Allah is glorified and His name is constantly remembered.

As well as grand mansions in beautiful spots, believers' residences in the world can be works of ultra-modern design and architecture, built in beautiful cities.

The residences in paradise described in the Qur'an, are usually located in natural beauties:

But it is for those who fear their Lord that lofty mansions, one above another, have been built: beneath them flow rivers (of delight). (Such is) the Promise of Allah. Never does Allah fail in (His) promise. (Surat az-Zumar: 20)

The mansions, mentioned in the verse, below which rivers flow, may have wide windows or halls surrounded with glass walls making it possible to watch this beautiful scene. These are beautifully decorated houses with thrones specially designed for the comfort of the believers. They will rest on these thrones set in lines and enjoy an abundance of luscious fruits and various kinds of drinks. The design and decoration of the mansions are of the best quality of textiles and materials. Comfortable couches lined with silk brocade and thrones are specially emphasised in many verses:

They will be on thrones encrusted with gold and precious stones, reclining on them, facing each other. (Surat al-Waqi'ah: 15-16)

**They will recline with ease on thrones of dignity arranged in ranks...
(Surat at-Tur: 20)**

As the verses also suggest, thrones are the symbols of dignity, splendour and wealth. Allah wants His servants to reside in such glorious places in paradise. In such magnificent surroundings, believers constantly keep remembering Allah and repeat His word:

They will enter Gardens of Eden where they will be adorned with gold bracelets and pearls, and where their clothing will be of silk. They will say, 'Praise be to Allah, Who has removed from us (all) sorrow: for our Lord is indeed Oft-Forgiving, Ready to appreciate (service), Who has, out of His bounty, settled us in a Home that will last: no toil nor sense of weariness shall touch us therein.' (Surat al-Fatir: 33-35)

The basic material of paradise is "works of great delicacy" and "remarkable beauties". These are all the reflections of the ultimate intelligence and art of Allah. For instance, thrones are encrusted with gold and precious stones. The thrones are not ordinary but exalted ones. Clothes are of silk and precious textile. Moreover, the silver and golden jewellery will be complementary to these precious garments. In the Qur'an, Allah gives many details of paradise, yet from those expressions it is clear that every believer will enjoy a Garden designed according to his own imagination. No doubt, Allah will bestow many other astonishing gifts on His beloved servants.

A Garden Beyond Imagination

To them will be passed round, dishes and goblets of gold: there will be there all that the souls could desire, all that their eyes could delight in: and you shall abide therein timelessly, for ever. (Surat az-Zukhruf: 71)

From the descriptions and illustrations existing in the Qur'an, we can get a general understanding of what paradise is like. In the verse "**Whenever they shall be given a portion of the fruit thereof, they shall say: 'This is what was given to us before,'**" (Surat al-Baqarah: 25) Allah states that the favours in paradise will be fundamentally similar to those in this world. In accordance with the description of the verse "**And admit them to the Paradise which He has announced for them,**" (Surah Muhammad: 6), we can arrive at the conclusion that Allah will let believers reside in a Paradise with which they were familiar before.

Nevertheless, any information that we may gather about paradise in this world must necessarily be inadequate; it can only give some hints with which to paint a general picture. "**Here is a parable of the Paradise which the righteous are**

promised: in it are rivers of water incorruptible; rivers of milk of which the taste never changes; rivers of wine, a joy to those who drink; and rivers of honey pure and clear." (Surah Muhammad: 15). This verse makes it clear that paradise is a place beyond our imagination. In the human soul, this verse evokes the feeling that it is a place of unexpected sights.

On the other hand, Allah describes paradise as "an entertainment" or a "feast":

But as to those who are careful of (their duty to) their Lord, they shall have gardens beneath which rivers flow, abiding in them; an entertainment from their Lord, and that which is with Allah is best for the righteous. (Surat Ali-'Imran: 198)

In this verse, Allah introduces paradise as a place of entertainment and joy. The "end" of this life, the joy of passing the "test" and attaining the best of places to reside for all eternity, are surely causes for believers to rejoice. This celebration will be a splendid one: one that bears no similarity whatsoever to any kind of feast or joy in this world.

In the eternal life, the fact that believers will enjoy various kinds of unceasing entertainment brings to mind another significant characteristic of believers in paradise: never feeling weariness. In the Qur'an, this condition is expressed as follows in words spoken by believers: **"...Who has, out of His Bounty, settled us in a Home that will last: neither toil nor sense of weariness shall touch us therein."** (Surat al-Fatir: 35).

No doubt, believers will also not suffer from mental fatigue there. In contrast to paradise where **"there no sense of fatigue shall touch them"** (Surat al-Hijr 48), man in this world feels fatigue since his body has not been created strong. When one feels tired, it becomes difficult to concentrate and to make sound decisions. Due to weariness, one's perceptions alter. Yet, such a state of mind never exists in paradise. All senses remain keen perceiving the creation of Allah in the best manner. Believers are completely unaware of any feelings of fatigue and, hence, they taste the gifts of Allah without interruption. The pleasure and joy felt are boundless and eternal.

In an environment where fatigue and boredom do not exist, Allah rewards believers by creating **"whatever they wish". Indeed, Allah gives the good news that He will create more than believers can imagine or wish: "There will be for them therein all that they wish - and more besides - in Our Presence."** (Surah Qaf: 35)

It should be kept in mind that one of the most important favours of paradise is that **"Allah will preserve believers from the Penalty of the Blazing Fire"** (Surat ad-Dukhan: 56) and **"not the slightest sound will they hear of Hell."** (Surat al-Anbiya: 102)

Whenever they wish, on the other hand, believers have the opportunity to see and talk to the people of hell. They feel grateful for this favour also:

Saying: "Surely we feared before on account of our families but Allah has been gracious to us and He has saved us from the punishment of the hot wind. Surely, we called upon Him before. Surely He is the Benign, the Merciful." (Surat at-Tur: 26-28)

Paradise is described in the Qur'an as follows: **"And when you look, it is there you will see a Bliss and a Realm Magnificent."** (Surat al-Insan: 20) Here, eyes savour and enjoy a different prospect, a different magnificence. Every corner and spot is decorated with precious ornaments. Such magnificence is only for those believers upon whom Allah bestows His mercy and to whom He grants His Garden. And We shall remove from their hearts any lurking sense of injury: **(they will be) brothers joyfully facing each other on thrones of dignity.** (Surat al-Hijr: 47) **Abiding therein; they shall not desire removal from them.** (Surat al-Kahf: 108)

The Most Important Favour of Allah: His Good Pleasure

Allah has promised to believers, men and women, gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein, and beautiful mansions in gardens of everlasting bliss. But the greatest bliss is the good pleasure of Allah: that is the supreme felicity. (Surat at-Tawbah: 72)

In the preceding pages, we mentioned the glorious favours that Allah bestows upon man in paradise. It is evident that paradise is a place containing all the joys man can experience through his five senses. However, the superior quality of paradise is the good pleasure of Allah. For believers, attaining the good pleasure of Allah becomes a major source of peace and joy in the hereafter. Furthermore, seeing the favours of Allah and being grateful to Allah for His benevolence makes them happy. In the Qur'an, the believers in paradise are described as follows:

...Allah is well pleased with them and they with Allah. That is the great salvation, (the fulfilment of all desires). (Surat al-Ma'idah: 119)

What makes the favours of paradise so precious is the good pleasure of Allah. The same types of favours may also exist in this world, yet if the good pleasure of Allah is not involved, believers do not enjoy these favours. This is a very important issue on which one needs to ponder. What actually makes a favour precious is something beyond the

savour and pleasure it gives. What really matters, is the fact that Allah has bestowed that favour.

A believer who has the benefit of such a favour and is grateful to his Creator derives his main pleasure from knowing that it is the benevolence of Allah. The satisfaction can be found only from the fact that Allah protects him, loves him and that his Creator shows His Mercy to him. Therefore, one's heart only takes pleasure from paradise. He is created to be a servant of Allah and therefore he takes only pleasure from His benevolence.

In brief, paradise is a gift of Allah to His true servants and that is why it is important to them. Since **"they are (but) slaves raised to honour,"** (Surat al-Anbiya: 26) they attain eternal happiness and joy. The words of the believers in paradise are **"Blessed be the name of your Lord, full of Majesty, Bounty and Honour."** (Surat ar-Rahman: 78)

Hell

The place, where disbelievers will remain for all eternity is specially created to give pain to the human body and soul. That is solely because the disbelievers are guilty of great wrong.

Being ungrateful and rebellious to the Creator, the One who gives man a soul, is the greatest wrong action that can be committed in the whole universe. Hell is where Allah's justice will be meted out for this wrong. Man is created to be a servant of Allah. If he denies the main purpose of his creation, then he surely receives what he deserves. Allah states the following in one of the verses:

...those who are too arrogant to serve Me will surely find themselves in Hell - in humiliation! (Surat al-Ghafir: 60)

Since the majority of people will be sent to hell at the end and punishment in it is timeless and eternal, then the main aim, the basic goal of humanity should be to avoid hell. The biggest threat to man is hell and nothing can be more important than saving one's soul from it.

Despite this, almost all people on earth live in a state of unconsciousness. They occupy themselves with other troubles in their daily lives. They work for months, years, even decades for insignificant issues, yet never think of the biggest threat, the gravest danger to their eternal existence. Hell is right next to them; yet, they are too blind to see it:

Closer and closer to mankind comes their Reckoning: yet they heed not and they turn away. Never comes (aught) to them of a renewed Message from their Lord, but they listen to it as in jest, their hearts toying as with trifles. (Surat al-Anbiya: 1-3)

Such people engage in vain effort. They spend all their lives chasing after chimerical goals. Most of the time, their goals are being promoted in the company, marrying, having a "happy family life", earning a lot of money or being an advocate of an ideology. These are deeds that one may hope to benefit from both in this world and in the next as long as they are performed for Allah's good pleasure. What is wrong, however, is to take them as one's sole purpose in life. People with this mindset are unaware of the big threat ahead of them.

In fact, hell is more real than this world. The world will cease to exist after some time, but hell will remain for all eternity. Allah, the Creator of the universe and the world and all the delicate balances in nature, has likewise created the hereafter, paradise and hell. A grievous punishment is promised to all disbelievers and hypocrites:

Enough for them is Hell: In it they will burn, and evil is that destination. (Surat al-Mujadilah: 8)

Hell, the worst place that can ever be imagined, is a source of the sheerest torture. This torture and pain is not similar to any kind of pain in this world. It is much more intense than any pain or misery one can ever face in this world. It is surely the work of Allah, the Exalted in Wisdom.

This torture will be timeless and eternal for unbelievers. The majority of people in this ignorant society assume that they will "serve their sentence" in hell for a certain period and that then they will be forgiven. They assume that they can indulge in worldly pleasures as much as possible. According to the same belief, they will attain paradise after receiving punishment in hell for a while. However, Allah informs us in the Qur'an that hell is surely a place of everlasting torment. The following verse makes this fact explicit: **"They will dwell therein for ages."** (Surat an-Naba: 23)

Being ungrateful and rebellious to the Creator who **"gave hearing and sight and intelligence and affections"** (Surat an-Nahl 78) certainly deserves unceasing suffering, except as Allah wills. The excuses one puts forth will not save one from hell. The verdict given for those who display indifference - or worse, animosity - to the religion of his Creator is certain and invariable. In the world, they were arrogant and avoided submitting to Almighty Allah. They were also bitter enemies of true believers. On the day of judgement, they will hear the following:

So enter the gates of Hell, to dwell therein. Thus evil indeed is the abode of the arrogant. (Surat an-Nahl: 29)

The most fearsome characteristic of hell is its eternal nature. Once in hell, there will be no return. The only reality is hell together with many other kinds of torture.

Encountering such an eternal torture, a person falls into desperate hopelessness. He has no further expectations. This state is described as follows in the Qur'an:

As to those who are rebellious and wicked, their abode will be the Fire. Every time they wish to get away therefrom, they will be forced thereinto, and it will be said to them: "Taste you the Penalty of the Fire, which you were wont to reject as false." (Surat as-Sajdah: 20)

The Torments of Hell

And (as for) those who disbelieve in Our signs, they are the people of the left hand. On them is fire closed over. (Surat al-Balad: 19-20)

On the day of judgement, there will be billions of people, yet this huge crowd will not give the disbelievers an opportunity to escape from the judgement. After the judgement of the disbelievers takes place in the presence of Allah, they will be labelled "the people of the left hand". This is the time when they will be sent to hell. From then on, they will bitterly comprehend that hell will be their permanent residence. Those sent to hell come with a witness and a driver:

And the trumpet is blown; that is the day of the threatening. And every soul has come, with it a driver and a witness. Certainly you were heedless of it, but now We have removed from you your veil, so your sight today is sharp. And his companions shall say: **"This is what is ready with me."** Do cast into Hell every ungrateful, rebellious one, forbiddener of good, exceeeder of limits, doubter, who sets up another god with Allah, so do cast him into severe chastisement. (Surah Qaf: 20-26)

Disbelievers are driven to this terrible place "in divisions". Yet, on the way to hell, the fear of it is inspired in the hearts of disbelievers. The horrible noise and roar of fire is heard from a distance:

When they are cast therein, they will hear the terrible drawing in of its breath even as it blazes forth almost bursting with fury. (Surat al-Mulk: 7-8)

From the verses, it is obvious that when they are recreated, all disbelievers will understand what will befall them. They remain alone; no friends, relatives, or supporters will be there to help. Disbelievers will not have the strength to be arrogant and they will lose all their self-confidence. They will look with averted eyes. One of the verses describes this moment as follows:

And you will see them brought forward to the (penalty), in a humble frame of mind because of (their) disgrace, (and) looking with a stealthy glance. And the believers will say: "Those are indeed in loss, who have given to perdition their own selves and those belonging to them on the day of judgement. Behold! Truly the wrongdoers are in a lasting penalty!" (Surat ash-Shura: 45)

Hell is created to inflict pain. Despite an abundance of disbelievers, it still asks for more:

One day We will ask Hell, "Are you filled to the full?" It will say, "Are there any more (to come)?" (Surah Qaf: 30)

Allah describes the Hell in the Qur'an as follows:

Soon will I cast him into Saqar! And what will explain to you what Saqar is? Naught does it permit to endure, and naught does it leave alone, darkening and changing the colour of man! (Surat al-Muddaththir: 26-29)

An Endless Life Behind Locked Doors

As soon as disbelievers arrive in hell, the doors are locked behind them. Here, they see the most fearsome sights. They immediately understand that they will be "presented" to hell, the place where they will remain for eternity. The closed doors indicate that there will be no salvation. Allah describes the state of disbelievers as follows:

And (as for) those who disbelieve in Our signs, they are the people of the left hand. On them is fire closed over. (Surat al-Balad: 19-20)

The torment in the Qur'an is described as "**a severe punishment**" (Surah Ali-'Imran: 176), "**a heavy doom**" (Surah Ali-'Imran: 4), and "**a painful chastisement**" (Surah Ali-'Imran: 21). The descriptions of it are inadequate to give a full understanding of the punishment in hell. Being unable to resist even minor burns in the world, man cannot grasp being exposed to fire for all eternity. What is more, the pain that a fire gives in the world is incomparable to the severe torture of hell. No pain can be similar to that of hell:

None punishes as He will punish on that day! None binds as He then will bind. (Surat al-Fajr: 25-26)

There is life in hell. Yet it is a life in which every moment is full of torture and anguish. Every type of physical, mental and psychological torment, various types of torture and disgrace rage in that life. To compare it to any distress in the world is impossible.

People in hell perceive pain through all five senses. Their eyes see disgusting and terrible images; their ears hear frightening screams, roars and cries; their noses fill with terrible and acrid smells; their tongues taste the most unbearable, vile tastes. They feel hell deep in their cells; this is a maddeningly severe pain that is difficult to imagine in this world. Their skin, their internal organs and their whole body are wracked and they writhe in pain.

The people of hell are very resistant to pain and they can never die. Hence, they can never save themselves from torture. In the Qur'an, this pain is described as follows: **"What boldness (they show) for hell!"** (Surat al-Baqarah: 175) Their skins are mended as they burn; the same torture continues for all eternity; the intensity of torture never decreases. Allah says in the Qur'an: **"Burn you therein. The same is it to you whether you bear it with patience, or not."** (Surat at-Tur: 16)

No less than physical pain, mental pain is also severe in hell. People in hell regret deeply, fall into hopelessness, feel desperate and spend ages in despair. Every corner, every place in hell is designed to give mental suffering. The suffering is eternal; if it were to end after millions or billions years, even such a long-term possibility could arouse fervent hopes and remain a strong reason for happiness and joy. Yet, the eternity of torture will inspire a kind of hopelessness that cannot be compared to any similar feeling in this world.

According to the description of the Qur'an, hell is a place where extreme pain is experienced: disgusting smells; it is narrow, noisy, smoky and gloomy, injecting feelings of insecurity into human soul; fires burning deep in the heart; nasty food and drink; garments of fire and liquid pitch.

These are the basic characteristics of hell. There is a life going on in this terrible environment, however. The people of hell have sharp senses. They hear, talk and argue, and they try to escape from suffering. They burn in fire, become thirsty and hungry, and feel regret. They are tormented by feelings of guilt. What is more important, they want the pain to be relieved.

The people of hell live a life infinitely lower than the animals in this dirty and disgusting environment. The only nourishment they have is the fruits of the bitter thorn and the tree of zaqqum. Their drink, on the other hand, is blood and pus. Meanwhile, fire engulfs them everywhere. The anguish in hell is depicted as follows:

Those who reject our Signs, We shall soon cast into hell. As often as their skins are roasted through, We shall change them for fresh skins that they may taste the penalty. For Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise. (Surat an-Nisa: 56)

With skin rent, flesh burned, and blood splattering all over, they are chained and whipped. Hands tied to their necks, they are cast into the core of hell. Angels of punishment, in the meantime, place those who are guilty in beds of fire, their covers also of fire. The coffins they are placed in are covered with fire.

Disbelievers constantly scream to be saved from such torments. And they often receive in reply only more humiliation and torture. They are left all alone in their anguish. Those who were known for their arrogance in the world now beg humbly for mercy.

These scenes will all come true. They are real. They are more real than our daily lives.

Those **"who among men serve Allah, as it were, on the verge"** (Surat al-Hajj: 11); those who say **"the Fire shall not touch us but for a few numbered days"** (Surah Ali-'Imran: 24); those who make notions such as money, status, and careers the main goals of their lives and accordingly neglect the good pleasure of Allah; those who alter the commands of Allah in accordance with their own wishes and desires; those who interpret the Qur'an according to their own interests; those who go astray from the right path – in brief – all disbelievers and hypocrites will abide in hell, except those whom Allah in His mercy forgives and rescues. This is the conclusive word of Allah and will certainly happen:

If We had so willed, We could certainly have brought every soul its true guidance: but the word from Me will come true, "I will fill Hell with jinn and men all together." (Surat as-Sajdah: 13)

There is another fact about hell; these people are all specially created for hell, as the following verse suggests:

Many are the jinn and men we have made for Hell: They have hearts wherewith they understand not, eyes wherewith they see not, and ears wherewith they hear not. They are like cattle - nay more misguided: for they are heedless (of warning). (Surat al-A'raf: 179)

Despite all the suffering they go through, there will not even be a single soul providing aid to the people of hell. No soul will be able to save them from it. Being abandoned will give them a bitter feeling of loneliness. **"Therefore, he has not here today a true friend."** (Surat al-Haqqah: 35) Around them, there will be only "the Angels of Punishment" who receive orders from Allah. These are extremely stern, merciless, and terrifying guards, bearing the sole responsibility of inflicting severe torture on the people of hell. The feeling of mercy is completely eradicated from the souls of these angels.

Apart from their torments, they also have terrifying appearances, voices and gestures. The purpose of their existence is to take revenge upon those who rebel against Allah, and they exercise their responsibility with due care and attention. It is unlikely that they will provide "preferential treatment" to anybody.

This is, actually the real danger awaiting every soul on earth. Man, being rebellious and ungrateful to his Creator, and therefore committing the greatest wrong action, no doubt deserves such a recompense. Allah, therefore, warns man against it:

O you who believe! Save yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is men and stones, over which are (appointed) angels stern (and) severe, who flinch not (from executing) the commands they receive from Allah, but do (precisely) what they are commanded. (Surat at-Tahrim: 6)

Let him beware! If he desist not, We will drag him by the forelock - a lying, sinful forelock! Then, let him call (for help) to his council (of comrades). We will call on the angels of punishment (to deal with him)! (Surat al-'Alaq: 15-18)

Pleas of Desperation and Hopelessness

The people of hell are in a hopeless state. The torture they undergo is extremely cruel and never-ending. Their only hope is to cry and beg for salvation. They see the People of paradise and beg for water and food. They try to repent and ask forgiveness of Allah. Yet, these are all in vain.

They beg the keepers of hell. They even want them be an intermediate between them and Allah and ask for mercy. Their pain is so unbearable that they want to be saved from it for even a single day:

Those in the Fire will say to the keepers of hell: "Pray to your Lord to lighten us the penalty for a day (at least)!" They will say: "Did there not come to you your messengers with clear signs?" They will say, "Yes". They will reply, "Then pray (as you like)! But the prayer of those without faith is nothing but (futile wandering) in (mazes of) error!" (Surat al-Ghafir: 49-50)

Disbelievers further try to seek forgiveness, but they are strictly turned down:

They will say:"Our Lord! Our misfortune overwhelmed us, and we became a people astray! Our Lord! Bring us out of this: if ever we return (to evil), then shall we be wrongdoers indeed!" He will say: "A part of My slaves there was, who used to pray 'our Lord! We believe; then forgive us, and have mercy upon us: for You are the Best of those who show mercy!' But you treated them with ridicule, so much so that (ridicule of) them made you forget My Message while you were laughing at them! I have rewarded them this Day for their patience and constancy: they are indeed the ones that have achieved bliss." (Surat al-Muminun: 106-111)

This is actually the last address of Allah to the people of hell. (Allah knows best) His words "Be you driven into it (with ignominy)! And speak not to Me!" are conclusive. One would not even like to think about this situation.

While the people of hell burn in it, those who attain "happiness and salvation", in other words the believers, remain in paradise enjoying the benefit of endless favours. The suffering of the people of hell becomes more intense when they see and observe the life of believers in paradise. Indeed, while being subject to unbearable torture, they can "watch" the magnificent favours of paradise.

Believers, of whom disbelievers made fun in the world, now lead a full and happy life, living in glorious locations, magnificent houses with beautiful women, and tasting delicious food and drinks. The sight of the believers in peace and abundance further reinforces the humiliation of being in hell. These scenes add more pain and suffering to their grief.

The regret becomes deeper and deeper. Not having followed the commands of Allah in the world makes them feel profound remorse. They turn to the believers in paradise and try to speak to them. They beg for help and sympathy from them. Yet, these are vain efforts. The people of paradise also see them. Their glorious appearance and life make them feel more grateful to Allah. The exchange between the peoples of hell and paradise is as follows:

(They will be) in gardens (of Delight): they will question each other, and (ask) of the wrongdoers: "What led you into Hell Fire?"They will say: "We were

not of those who prayed; Nor were we of those who fed the indigent; But we used to talk vanities with vain talkers; And we used to deny the day of judgement, until there came to us (the Hour) that is certain."Then will no intercession of (any) intercessors profit them. (Surat al-Muddaththir: 40-48)

An Important Reminder to Avoid Torment

In this chapter, we talked about two groups of people; those who have faith in Allah and those who reject His existence. We have also provided a general picture of hell, and one of paradise, based entirely on Qur'anic descriptions. Our purpose here is to remind and warn disbelievers that the Hereafter will be a horrible place for them and theirs will be an awful doom.

After all that has been said, it is necessary to emphasise that man is, no doubt, free to make his choice. He can lead his life as he desires. No man has the right to force others to believe. However, as people who have faith in the existence of Allah and in His ultimate justice, we bear the responsibility of warning people against such a fearsome day. These people are surely unaware of the situation they are in and the kind of end awaiting them. Therefore, we feel a responsibility to warn them. Allah informs us about the state of these people:

Which then is best? He that laid his foundation on fear of Allah and His good pleasure? Or he that laid his foundation on an undermined sand-cliff ready to crumble to pieces? And it crumbles to pieces with him, into the fire of Hell. And Allah guides not people that do wrong. (Surat at-Tawbah: 109)

Those who reject the commands of Allah in this world and, consciously or unconsciously, deny the existence of their Creator will have no salvation in the hereafter. Therefore, before losing any time, each one has to realise his situation in the presence of Allah and surrender to Him. Otherwise, he will regret it and face a fearsome end:

Again and again will those who disbelieve wish that they had bowed (to Allah's will) in Islam. Leave them alone to enjoy (the good things of this life) and to please themselves: let (false) hope amuse them: soon will knowledge (undeceive them). (Surat al-Hijr: 2-3)

The way to avoid eternal punishment, win eternal bliss and attain the good pleasure of Allah is apparent:

Before it is too late, have true faith in Allah,
Spend your life doing good deeds to attain His good pleasure...

THE SECRET BEYOND MATTER

Those who contemplate their surroundings conscientiously and wisely realize that everything in the universe - both living and non-living - must have been created. So the question becomes, "Who is the Creator of all these things?"

It is evident that the creation that reveals itself in every aspect of the universe cannot be an outgrowth of the universe itself. For example, no insect could have created itself, nor could the solar system have created or organized itself. Neither could plants, humans, bacteria, red-blood cells, nor butterflies have created themselves. As this book explains throughout, any possibility that all these could have originated "by chance" is unimaginable.

Therefore, we arrive at the following conclusion: Everything that we see has been created, but nothing we see can itself be a "creator." The Creator is different from - and superior to - all that we see, a Superior Power Who is invisible to our eyes, but Whose existence and attributes are revealed in everything that He creates.

This is where those who deny Allah's existence are led astray. They are conditioned not to believe in Allah's existence unless they see Him with their own eyes, forced to conceal the actuality of creation manifested all throughout the universe, and to claim that the universe and all the living things it contains have not been created. In order to do so, they resort to falsehoods. As explained earlier, evolutionary theory is one key example of their lies and vain endeavours to this end.

The basic mistake of those who deny Allah is shared by many others who don't actually deny His existence, but have wrong perceptions of Him. These people, constituting the majority of society, do not deny creation, but have superstitious beliefs about Allah, most believing that Allah is only "up in the sky." They tacitly and falsely imagine that Allah is off behind some very distant planet and only occasionally interferes with worldly affairs. Or perhaps He doesn't intervene at all: He created the universe, and then left it to itself, leaving us humans to determine our fates for ourselves.

Still others have heard the fact that Allah is "everywhere," as revealed in the Qur'an, but cannot understand exactly what this means. Superstitiously, they think that Allah surrounds all matter like radio waves or like an invisible, intangible gas. (Allah is certainly beyond that.)

However, this and other notions that cannot clarify "where" Allah is (and perhaps deny Him accordingly) are all based on a common mistake: They hold a groundless prejudice that moves them to wrong opinions about Allah.

What is this prejudice? It concerns the existence and nature of matter. Most people have been conditioned to assume that the material universe we see is itself the true reality. Modern science, however, demolishes this position and discloses a very

important and imposing truth. In the following pages, we will explain this great reality to which the Qur'an points.

The World of Electrical Signals

All the information we have about the world is conveyed to us by our five senses. Thus, the world we know consists of what our eyes see, our hands feel, our nose smells, our tongue tastes, and our ears hear. We never believe that the external world can be other than what our senses present to us, since we've depended on those senses since the day we were born.

Yet modern research in many different fields of science points to a very different understanding, creating serious doubt about the "outside" world that we perceive with our senses.

For this new understanding, the starting point is that everything we perceive as external is only a response formed by electrical signals in our brain. The red of an apple, the hardness of wood - moreover, one's mother, father, family, and everything that one owns, one's house, job, and even the pages of this book - all are comprised of electrical signals only.

On this subject, the late German biochemist Frederic Vester explained the viewpoint that science has reached:

Statements of some scientists, positing that **man is an image**, that everything experienced is temporary and deceptive, and that **this universe is only a shadow**, all seem to be proven by current science.

To clarify, let's consider the five senses which provide us with all our information about the external world.

How Do We See, Hear, and Taste?

The act of seeing occurs in a progressive fashion. Light (photons) traveling from the object passes through the lens in front of the eye, where the image is refracted and falls, upside down, onto the retina at the back of the eye. Here, visual stimuli are turned into electrical signals, in turn transmitted by neurons to a tiny spot in the rear of the brain known as the vision centre. After a series of processes, these electrical signals in this brain center are perceived as an image. The act of seeing actually takes place at the posterior of the brain, in this tiny spot which is **pitch dark, completely insulated from light**.

Even though this process is largely understood, when we claim, "We see," in fact we are perceiving the effects of impulses reaching our eye, transformed into electrical signals, and induced in our brain. And so, **when we say, "We see," actually we are observing electrical signals in our mind**.

All the images we view in our lives are formed in our centre of vision, which takes up only a few cubic centimetres in the brain's volume. The book you are now reading, as

well as the boundless landscape you see when you gaze at the horizon, both occur in this tiny space. And keep in mind that, as noted before, the brain is insulated from light. Inside the skull is absolutely dark; and the brain itself has no contact with light.

An example can illustrate this interesting paradox. Suppose we place a burning candle in front of you. You can sit across from it and watch this candle at length. During this time, however, your brain never has any direct contact with the candle's original light. Even while you perceive the candle's light, the inside of your brain is lightless. We all watch a bright, colourful world inside our pitch-dark brain.

R. L. Gregory explains the miraculous aspect of seeing, which we take so very much for granted:

We are so familiar with seeing, that it takes a leap of imagination to realize that there are problems to be solved. But consider it. We are given tiny distorted upside-down images in the eyes, and we see separate solid objects in surrounding space. From the patterns of stimulation on the retinas we perceive the world of objects, and this is nothing short of a miracle.

The same applies to all our other senses. Sound, touch, taste and smell are all transmitted as electrical signals to the brain, where they are perceived in the relevant centres.

The sense of hearing proceeds in the same manner. The auricle in the outer ear picks up available sounds and directs them to the middle ear; the middle ear transmits the sound vibrations to the inner ear by intensifying them; the inner ear translates these vibrations into electrical signals and sends them to the brain. Just as with the eye, the act of hearing takes place in the brain's hearing centre. The brain is insulated from sound just as it is from light. Therefore, no matter how noisy it may be outside, it is completely silent inside the brain.

Nevertheless, the brain perceives sounds most precisely, so that a healthy person's ear hears everything without any atmospheric noise or interference. Your brain is insulated from sound, yet you listen to the symphonies of an orchestra, hear all the noises in a crowded auditorium, and perceive all sounds within a wide frequency, from the rustling of leaves to the roar of a jet plane. However, were a sensitive device to measure the sound level in your brain, it would show complete silence prevailing there.

Our perception of odour forms in a similar way. Volatile molecules, emitted by vanilla extract or a rose, reach receptors in the delicate hairs in the olfactory epithelium and become involved in an interaction that is transmitted to the brain as electrical signals and perceived as smell. Everything that you smell, be it pleasant or repugnant, is only your brain's perception of the interactions of volatile molecules transformed into electrical signals. The scent of a perfume, a flower, any delicious food, the sea, or other odours you like or dislike, you perceive entirely in your brain. The molecules themselves never reach there. Just as with sound and vision, what reaches your sensory centres is simply an assortment of electrical signals. In other words, all the sensations that, since

you were born, you've assumed to belong to external objects are just electrical signals interpreted through your sense organs.

Similarly, at the front of your tongue, there are four different types of chemical receptors that create the tastes of salty, sweet, sour, and bitter. After a series of chemical processes, your taste receptors transform these perceptions into electrical signals and transmit them to the brain, which perceives these signals as flavours. The taste you get when you eat chocolate or a fruit that you like is your brain's interpretation of electrical signals. You can never reach the object outside; you can never see, smell or taste the chocolate itself. For instance, if the nerves between your tongue and your brain are cut, no further signals will reach your brain, and you will lose your sense of taste completely.

Here, we come across another fact: You can never be sure that how a food tastes to you is the same as how it tastes to anyone else; or that your perception of a voice is the same as what another's when he hears that same voice. Along the same lines, science writer Lincoln Barnett wrote that "no one can ever know whether his sensation of red or of Middle C is the same as another man's."

Our sense of touch is no different. When we handle an object, all the information that helps us recognise it is transmitted to the brain by sensitive nerves on the skin. The feeling of touch is formed in our brain. Contrary to conventional wisdom, we perceive sensations of touch not at our fingertips or on our skin, but in our brain's tactile centre. As a result of the brain's assessment of electrical stimulations coming to it from the skin, we feel different sensations pertaining to objects, such as hardness or softness, heat or cold. From these stimulations, we derive all details that help us recognise an object. Concerning this important fact, consider the thoughts of B. Russell and L. J. J. Wittgenstein, two famous philosophers:

For instance, whether a lemon truly exists or not and how it came to exist cannot be questioned and investigated. A lemon consists merely of a taste sensed by the tongue, an odor sensed by the nose, a color and shape sensed by the eye; and only these features of it can be subject to examination and assessment. Science can never know the physical world.

It is impossible for us to reach the physical world outside our brain. All objects we're in contact with are actually collection of perceptions such as sight, hearing, and touch. Throughout our lives, by processing the data in the sensory centres, **our brain confronts not the "originals" of the matter existing outside us, but rather copies formed inside our brain.** At this point, we are misled to assume that these copies are instances of real matter outside us.

"The External World" Inside Our Brain

As a result of these physical facts, we come to the following indisputable conclusion: Everything we see, touch, hear, and perceive as "matter," "the world" or "the

universe" is in fact electrical signals interpreted in our brain. We can never reach the original of the matter outside our brain. We merely taste, hear and see an image of the external world formed in our brain. In fact, someone eating an apple confronts not the actual fruit, but its perceptions in the brain. What that person considers to be an apple actually consists of his brain's perception of the electrical information concerning the fruit's shape, taste, smell, and texture. If the optic nerve to the brain were suddenly severed, the image of the fruit would instantly disappear. Any disconnection in the olfactory nerve travelling from receptors in the nose to the brain would interrupt the sense of smell completely. Simply put, that apple is nothing but the interpretation of electrical signals by the brain.

Also consider the sense of distance. The empty space between you and this page is only a sense of emptiness formed in your brain. Objects that appear distant in your view also exist in the brain. For instance, someone watching the stars at night assumes that they are millions of light-years away, yet the stars are within himself, in his vision centre. While you read these lines, actually you are not inside the room you assume you're in; on the contrary, the room is inside you. Perceiving your body makes you think that you're inside it. However, your body, too, is a set of images formed inside your brain.

The same applies to all other perceptions. When you believe you're hearing the sound of the television in the next room, for instance, actually you are experiencing those sounds inside your brain. The noises you think are coming from meters away and the conversation of the person right beside you - both are perceived in the auditory centre in your brain, only a few cubic centimetres in size. Apart from this centre of perception, no concepts such as right, left, front or behind exist. That is, sound does not come to you from the right, from the left, or from above; there is no direction from which sound "really" comes.

Similarly, none of the smells you perceive reach you from any distance away. You suppose that the scents perceived in your centre of smell are those of outside objects. However, just as the image of a rose exists in your visual centre, so its scent is located in your olfactory centre. You can never have direct contact with the original sight or smell of that rose that exists outside.

To us, the "external world" is merely a collection of the electrical signals reaching our brains simultaneously. Our brains process these signals, and we live without recognizing our mistaken assumption that these are the actual, original versions of matter existing in the "external world." We are misled, because by means of our senses, we can never reach the matter itself.

Again, our brain interprets and attributes meanings to the signals that we assume to be "external." Consider the sense of hearing, for example. In fact, our brain interprets and transforms sound waves reaching our ear into symphonies. Music, too, is a perception formed by - and within - our brain. In the same manner, when we see colours, different wavelengths of light are all that reaches our eyes, and our brain transforms

these wavelengths into colours. There are no colours in the "external world." Neither is the apple red, nor is the sky blue, nor the trees green. They are as they are only because we perceive them to be so.

Even the slightest defect in the eye's retina can cause colour blindness. Some people perceive blue as green, others red as blue, and still others see all colours as different tones of grey. At this point, it no longer matters whether the outside object is coloured or not.

The prominent Irish thinker George Berkeley also addressed this point:

First,... it was thought that colour, figure, motion, and the rest of the sensible qualities or accidents, did really exist without the mind;... But, it having been shewn that none even of these can possibly exist otherwise than in a Spirit or Mind which perceives them it follows that we have no longer any reason to suppose the being of Matter...

In conclusion, we see colours not because objects are coloured or because they have a material existence outside ourselves, but because all the qualities we ascribe to objects are inside us, not in the "external world."

In that case, how can we claim to have complete knowledge of "the external world?"

Mankind's Limited Knowledge

One implication of the facts described so far is that actually, man's knowledge of the external world is exceedingly limited.

That knowledge is limited to our five senses, and there is no proof that the world we perceive by means of those senses is identical to the "real" world.

It may, therefore, be very different from what we perceive. There may be a great many dimensions and other beings of which we remain unaware. Even if we reach the furthestmost extremities of the universe, our knowledge will always remain limited.

Almighty Allah, the Creator of all, has complete and flawless knowledge of all beings who, having been created by Allah, can possess only the knowledge that He allows them. This reality is explained in the Qur'an as follows:

Allah, there is no deity but Him, the Living, the Self-Sustaining. He is not subject to drowsiness or sleep. Everything in the heavens and the earth belongs to Him. Who can intercede with Him except by His permission? He knows what is before them and what is behind them but they cannot grasp any of His knowledge save what He wills. His Footstool encompasses the heavens and the Earth and their preservation does not tire Him. He is the Most High, the Magnificent. (Surat al-Baqara: 255)

The Artificially Constituted "External World"

The only world we know is the one that is designed, recorded, and made vivid there - in short, the one created and existing within our minds. Perceptions we observe in our brain may sometimes be coming from an artificial source.

We can illustrate this with an example:

First, imagine that by artificial means, your brain can survive apart from your body. And suppose a computer able to produce all kinds of electrical signals. Let us artificially produce electrical signals of the data relating to a given environment - including its sights, sounds and aromas. Finally, let's have electrical cables connect this computer to your brain's sensory centres and transmit the recorded signals. Perceiving these signals, your brain (in other words, "you") will see and experience the environment they represent.

This computer can also send to your brain electrical signals related to your own image. For example, if we send the electrical correlates of all senses such as hearing, sight and touch that you experience while sitting at a desk, you will assume that you're a businessman in his office. This imaginary world will endure as long as the computer keeps sending stimuli. Never will it become possible for you to understand that you consist of nothing but your brain. This is because all that's needed to form a world within your brain is the availability of stimulations to the relevant centres. It is perfectly possible for these stimulations (and hence, perceptions) to originate from some artificial source.

Along these lines, the distinguished philosopher Bertrand Russell wrote:

As to the sense of touch when we press the table with our fingers, that is an electric disturbance on the electrons and protons of our fingertips, produced, according to modern physics, by the proximity of the electrons and protons in the table. If the same disturbance in our finger-tips arose in any other way, we should have the sensations, in spite of there being no table.

It's very easy indeed to be deceived into deeming perceptions without any material correlates as real. Often we experience this illusion in dreams, wherein we experience events and see people, objects and settings that seem completely genuine. But they're all merely perceptions. There's no basic difference between these dreams and the "real world"; both sets of perceptions are experienced in the brain.

Who Is the Perceiver?

The "external world" that we think we inhabit is no doubt created inside our brain. Here, however, arises a question of primary importance: If all the physical objects we know of are intrinsically perceptions, what about our brain itself? Since our brain is a part of the material world just like our arms, our legs, or any other object, it too should be a perception.

An example will help illustrate this point. Assume that we perceive a dream in our brain. In our dream, we have an imaginary body, imaginary arms and eyes, and an

imaginary brain. If, during our dream, we were asked "Where do you see?" we'd answer, "I see in my brain." Yet, actually there is no real brain to talk about, only an imaginary body, along with an imaginary head and an imaginary brain. The seer of the dream's various images is not the imaginary dreaming brain, but a being who is far beyond it.

Since there is no physical distinction between the setting of a dream and the setting we call real life, when in "real life" we are asked the same question of "Where do you see?" it would be equally meaningless to answer, "In my brain." Under either condition, the entity that sees and perceives is not the brain, which is after all only a hunk of nerve tissue.

So far, we have kept referring to how we watch a copy of the external world in our brains. An important result is that we can never know the external world as it actually is.

A second, no less important fact is that the "self" in our brains who observes this world cannot be the brain itself, which is like an integrated computer system: It processes data reaching it, translates it into images, and projects them on a screen. Yet a computer cannot watch itself; nor is it aware of its own existence.

When the brain is dissected to search for this awareness, nothing is found in it but lipid and protein molecules, which exist in other organs of the body as well. This means that within the tissue we call "our brain," there is nothing to observe and interpret the images, constitute consciousness, or to create the being we call "ourselves."

In relation to the perception of images in the brain, perceptual scientist R.L. Gregory refers to a mistake people make:

There is a temptation, which must be avoided, to say that the eyes produce pictures in the brain. A picture in the brain suggests the need of some kind of internal eye to see it - but this would need a further eye to see its picture... and so on in an endless regress of eyes and pictures. This is absurd.

This problem puts materialists, who hold that nothing is real except matter, in a quandary: Who is behind the eye that sees? What perceives what it sees, and then reacts?

Renowned cognitive neuroscientist Karl Pribram focused on this important question, relevant to the worlds of both science and philosophy, about who the perceiver is:

Philosophers since the Greeks have speculated about the "ghost" in the machine, the "little man inside the little man" and so on. Where is the I - the entity that uses the brain? Who does the actual knowing? Or, as Saint Francis of Assisi once put it, "What we are looking for is what is looking."

This book in your hand, the room you are in - in brief, all the images before you - are perceived inside your brain. Is it the blind, deaf, unconscious component atoms that view these images? Why did some atoms acquire this quality, whereas most did not? Do our acts of thinking, comprehending, remembering, being delighted, being unhappy, and everything else consist of chemical reactions among these atoms' molecules?

There is no sense in looking for will in atoms. Clearly, the being who sees, hears, and feels is a supra-material being, "alive," who is neither matter nor an image. This being interacts with the perceptions before it by using the image of our body.

This being is the soul.

The intelligent being reading these lines is not an assortment of atoms and molecules and the chemical reactions between them, but a soul.

The Real Absolute Being

We are brought face to face with a very significant question: If the world we confront is comprised of our soul's perceptions, then what is the source of these perceptions?

For an answer, consider that we perceive matter only in our imaginations, but can never directly experience of its counterparts outside. Since matter is actually a perception to us, it is something "constructed." That is, it must have been caused by another power - which means that in fact, it must have been created. Moreover, this creation must be continuous. If not, then these perceptions would quickly disappear and be lost. Similarly, a television picture is displayed only as long as the signal continues to be broadcast.

So, who makes our soul that continuously watches the stars, the earth, the plants, the people, our body and everything else that we see?

Very evidently, there exists a supreme Creator Who has created the entire material universe, and Who ceaselessly continues His creation. Since this Creator displays such a magnificent creation, surely He has eternal power and might.

This Creator describes Himself, the universe and the reason of our existence for us through the book He has sent down.

This Creator is Allah, and His book is the Qur'an.

The fact is, the heavens and the Earth - that is, the universe - are not stable. Their presence is made possible only by Allah's creation, and that they will disappear when He ends this creation. This is revealed in a verse as follows:

Allah keeps a firm hold on the heavens and Earth, preventing them from vanishing away. And if they vanished no one could then keep hold of them. Certainly He is Most Forbearing, Ever-Forgiving. (Surah Fatir: 41)

This verse is describing how the material universe is maintained under the might of Allah. Allah created the universe, the Earth, mountains, and all living and non-living things, and maintains all these under His power at every moment. Allah manifests His name al-Khaliq in this material universe. Allah is al-Khaliq, in other words, the Creator of all things, the Creator from nothing. This shows that there is a material universe, outside our brains, consisting of entities created by Allah. However, as a miracle and manifestation of the

superior nature of His creation and His omniscience, Allah shows us this material universe in the form of an "illusion," "shadow," or "image." As a consequence of the perfection in His creation, human beings can never reach the world outside their brains. Only Allah knows this real material universe.

Another interpretation of the above verse is that Allah constantly maintains the images of the material universe that people see. (Allah knows best.) If Allah did not wish to show the image of the world to our minds, the entire universe would cease to exist for us, and we could never reach it.

That we can never directly contact the material universe also answers the question of "Where is Allah?" that preoccupies a great many people.

As mentioned at the start, many cannot comprehend Allah's power and so, imagine Him as present somewhere in the heavens and not really intervening in worldly affairs. (Allah is certainly beyond that.) This logic is based on the assumptions that the universe is an assembly of matter and Allah is "outside" this material world.

However, just as we can never reach the material universe, neither can we have full knowledge of its true essence. All we know is the existence of the Creator Who brought all these things into being - in other words, Allah. To express that truth, great Islamic scholars like Imam Rabbani have said that the only absolute being is Allah; and that all the rest, except Him, are shadow entities.

That is because the world we see is entirely in our minds, and to directly experience its counterpart in the external world is totally impossible.

That being so, it would be wrong to imagine that Allah is "outside" of a material universe that we can never attain.

Allah is surely "everywhere" and encompasses all. This reality is explained in the Qur'an as follows:

... His Footstool encompasses the heavens and the earth and their preservation does not tire Him. He is the Most High, the Magnificent. (Surat al-Baqara: 255)

What! Are they in doubt about the meeting with their Lord? What! Does He not encompass all things? (Surah Fussilat: 54)

The fact that Allah is not bound with space and that He encompasses everything roundabout is stated in another verse as follows:

Both East and West belong to Allah, so wherever you turn, the Face of Allah is there. Allah is All-Encompassing, All-Knowing. (Surat al-Baqara: 115)

Material beings cannot see Allah; but Allah sees the matter He created in all its forms. In the Qur'an, this fact is stated thus: **"No vision can grasp Him, but His**

grasp is over all vision." (Surat al-An'am: 103) That is, we cannot perceive Allah's existence with our eyes, but Allah has thoroughly encompassed our inside and outside, our vision and thoughts. We cannot utter any word except with His knowledge, nor can we even draw breath.

In the course of our lives, while we watch perceptions we assume to be the "external world," the closest being to us is Allah Himself. The secret of the following verse in the Qur'an is concealed in this reality: **"It was We Who created man, and We know what dark suggestions his soul makes to him: for We are nearer to him than [his] jugular vein."** (Surah Qaf: 16) When a person thinks that his body is made up of "matter," he cannot comprehend this important fact. If he takes his brain to be himself, then what he accepts as the "outside world" will begin at about 20 to 30 centimetres away. But when he conceives that everything he thinks of as matter is only perceptions in his mind, any notions such as outside or inside, far or near lose all their meaning. Allah has encompassed him and He is infinitely close to him.

Allah informs men that He is **"infinitely close"** to them with the verse **"If My servants ask you about Me, I am near..."** (Surat al-Baqara: 186). Another verse relates the same fact: **"Surely your Lord encompasses the people."** (Surat al-Isra: 60)

Man is misled if he thinks that the being closest to him is himself. Allah, in truth, is even closer to us than ourselves. He has called our attention to this point in the verse "Why is it not then that when it (soul) comes up to the throat, and you at that time look on, **We are nearer to him than you, but you see not.**" (Surat al-Waqi'a: 83-85) People, however, remain unaware of this phenomenal fact because they cannot see it with their eyes, as revealed in the verse.

On the other hand, it is impossible for man - who is nothing but a shadow being, as Imam Rabbani put it, - to have any power independent of Allah. The verse **"But Allah has created you and your handwork!"** (Surat as-Saffat: 96) shows that everything we experience takes place under Allah's control. In the Qur'an, this reality is stated in the verse **"When you threw, it was not your act, but Allah's."** (Surat al-Anfal: 17) whereby it is emphasised that no act is independent of Allah. Since we humans are shadow beings, we ourselves cannot be the ones who perform any act. However, Allah gives us shadow beings the feeling that we act by ourselves. In reality, it is Allah Who performs all acts.

A person may not want to concede this reality and may keep thinking of himself as independent of Allah; but this changes nothing.

Everything You Possess Is Intrinsically Illusory

It is clear, scientific, and logical that we are not in direct contact with the "external world," only with a copy of it that Allah perpetually presents to our soul. Nevertheless, people are unwilling to think of this.

If you consider this issue sincerely and boldly, you'll soon realize that your house, the furniture in it, your car, your office, jewels, your bank account, wardrobe, spouse, children, your colleagues - in fact, all else that you possess - resides in your mind. Everything around you that you see, hear, or smell - in short, perceive with your five senses - is a part of this "replica world," including the voice of your favourite singer, the hardness of the chair you sit on, a perfume whose smell you like, the sun that warms you, a flower's beautiful colours, a bird flying past your window, a speedboat moving swiftly on the water, your fertile garden, the computer you use at your job, your hi-fi with the most advanced technology in the world...

This is the reality, because the world is created only to test man. All through our limited lives, we are tested with perceptions whose original sources we can never reach, which are intentionally presented as appealing and attractive. This fact is mentioned in the Qur'an:

Fair in the eyes of men is the love of things they covet: Women and sons; Heaped-up hoards of gold and silver; horses branded [for blood and excellence]; and [wealth of] cattle and well-tilled land. Such are the possessions of this world's life; but in nearness to Allah is the best of the goals [to return to]. (Surah Al 'Imran: 14)

Most people cast away religion for the lure of property, heaped-up wealth, hoards of gold and silver, jewels, bank accounts, credit cards, designer clothes, late-model cars - in short, all the forms of prosperity they either possess or strive to. They concentrate on this world only, forgetting the Hereafter. They are deceived by the fair and alluring face of the world, and fail to keep up prayer, give charity to the poor, and perform worship that will make them prosper in the Hereafter. They make excuses, saying, "I have things to do," "I have ideals," "I have responsibilities," "I haven't enough time," "I have tasks to complete," "I will do them in the future." They devote their entire lives to trying to prosper in this world only. In the verse, **"They know but the outer [things] in the life of this world: but of the End of things they are heedless."** (Surat ar-Rum: 7), this misconception is described.

The reality dealt with in this chapter is very important, for it renders meaningless all lusts and boundaries. Verifying this fact makes it clear that everything people toil to possess, their wealth amassed with greed, their children they boast of, their spouses they consider to be closest to them, their dearest friends, their bodies, their superior rank which they hold, the schools they have attended, the holidays they celebrate - all are nothing but mere shadows. Therefore, all the efforts they expended and the time they spent proves unavailing.

Some people unwittingly make fools of themselves when they boast of their wealth and properties, or of their yachts, helicopters, factories, holdings, manors and lands as if they can ever have direct contact with their original possessions. Those well-to-do who

cruise ostentatiously up and down in their yachts, show off with their cars, keep hinting at their wealth, suppose that they rank higher than everyone else. In what kind of state would they find themselves, once they realize that they are boasting of nothing but images in their own minds?

In many of their dreams, they in fact find themselves possessed of grand houses, fast cars, precious jewels, rolls of banknotes, and loads of gold and silver. In their dreams, too, they enjoy a high rank, own factories with thousands of workers, possess the power to rule over thousands, and wear clothes that command everyone's admiration. But just as boasting about one's possessions in a dream often subjects one to ridicule, he is sure to be equally ridiculed in this world for boasting of images he relates to. After all, what he sees in his dreams and what he relates to in this world are both merely images in his mind.

Similarly, when people realize the reality, the way they react to the worldly events they experience should make them feel ashamed. Those who fight fiercely with each other, swindle, take bribes, commit forgery, lie, covetously withhold their money; who do wrong to others, who curse and beat them, who are full of passion for office and high rank, who envy and try to show off, who exalt themselves above all others - all will feel disgrace when they realize that they have committed all of these deeds in an illusion.

Since Allah creates the entire universe and reveals it to every human being individually, the Ultimate Owner of all possessions in the world is Allah alone. This fact is revealed in the Qur'an:

But to Allah belong all things in the heavens and on Earth: And He it is that Encompasses all things. (Surat an-Nisa': 126)

It is hugely foolish to cast away religion for the sake of passions whose original objects one can never reach, and thus lose eternal life.

At this point, it's important to grasp that the truth we are considering does not mean that all the possessions, wealth, children, spouses, rank and position one possesses and longs for will vanish in the future, and so are meaningless. Rather, it predicates that in fact, people have no direct contact with any of their possessions. They are merely perceptions they watch from within their brains, composed of images that Allah shows to test them. As you see, there's a big difference between those two propositions.

Although someone might not want to acknowledge this fact right away and would prefer to deceive himself by assuming that all his possessions really exist, he must finally to die. When he is resurrected in the Hereafter, everything will become clear, and **"sight will be sharp."** (Surah Qaf: 22) On that day, he is apt to see everything much more clearly. If he has spent his life chasing after imaginary aims, however, he will wish he had never lived, and say **"Ah! Would that [Death] had made an end of me! Of no profit to me has been**

my wealth! My power has perished from me!" (Surat al-Haqqa: 27-29) On the other hand, a wise man should try to understand the great reality of the universe here on this world, while he still has time. Otherwise, he will spend all his life running after dreams and face a grievous penalty in the end. In the Qur'an, the final state of those people who run after illusions (or mirages) on this world and forget Allah, our Creator, is stated as follows:

But the unbelievers, their deeds are like a mirage in sandy deserts, which the man parched with thirst mistakes for water; until when he comes up to it, he finds it to be nothing: But he finds Allah [ever] with him, and Allah will pay him his account: and Allah is swift in taking account. (Surat an-Nur: 39)

Logical Deficiencies of the Materialists

From the start, this chapter has clearly stated that matter is not absolute, as materialists claim, but rather a shadow that Allah creates out of nothing and whose original we can never reach. In an extremely dogmatic manner, materialists resist this evident reality which destroys their philosophy, and bring forward baseless counterclaims to refute it.

George Politzer, for example, an ardent Marxist and one of the twentieth century's biggest advocates of the materialist philosophy, gave the "bus example" as the greatest evidence proving that he could reach the original of matter. According to Politzer, even idealist philosophers run away when they see a bus about to run them over, and this proves that they do confront the actuality of matter.

Samuel Johnson, another famous materialist, was told that one can never reach essential matter, and tried to "prove" that he could make contact with the essence of stones by giving one of them a kick.

A similar example is given by Friedrich Engels, the mentor of Politzer and along with Marx, the founder of dialectic materialism. He wrote that "if the cakes we eat were mere perceptions, they would not stop our hunger."

There are similar examples in the books of famous materialists such as Marx, Engels, Lenin, and others along with impetuous sentences such as, "You understand the existence of matter when you are slapped in the face."

The disordered comprehension that engenders such examples arises from materialists' interpreting the explanation "We cannot reach the original of matter" as involving the sense of sight only. They think that perception is limited to sight, and that touching can get us directly to the essence of matter. A bus knocking a man down makes people say, "Look, it hit him! Therefore, he confronted the original." They don't understand that all the perceptions experienced during a crash - hard metal, the force of collision, pain - are in fact formed in the brain.

The Example of Dreams

The fact is, whichever of the five senses we take as a starting point, we can't ever actually reach the original of the external world that exists outside. A significant evidence of this is the way we imagine the existence of things that in fact do not exist in our dreams. In dreams, we can experience very realistic events. We can fall down the stairs and break a leg, have a serious car accident, get stuck under a bus, or eat a heavy meal and feel satiated. Events similar to those experienced in daily life are experienced in dreams too, with the same persuasiveness and rousing the same emotions.

A person who dreams of being knocked down by a bus can open his eyes in a hospital - again in his dream - and realise that he is disabled. But all this would remain a dream. Also, he can dream of dying in a car crash, that angels of death retrieve his soul, and his life in the Hereafter begins.

The images, sounds, feeling of hardness, pain, light, colours - all the feelings pertaining to the event he experiences in his dream - are perceived very sharply. They seem as natural as the ones in real life. The cake he eats in his dream satiates him, although it is a mere perception, because feeling satisfied is a perception too. At that moment, however, this person is lying in his bed. There are really no stairs, no traffic, no buses, no cake, because the dreamer experiences perceptions and feelings that don't exist in the external world. The fact that our dreams give us events with no physical, external correlates clearly reveals that the "world out there" is one whose true essence we can never know. We can learn the true nature of that world only from the revelation of Almighty Allah, Who created it.

Those who believe in the materialist philosophy, the Marxists in particular, are enraged when informed of this reality. They quote examples from the superficial, ignorant reasoning of Marx, Engels, or Lenin and else make emotional declarations.

However, they should realize that they can make these declarations in a dream as well. They can dream of reading Das Kapital, participating in meetings, and even feel the pain of getting involved in a fistfight. When asked - in their dream - they will think that what they see is absolute reality, just as they assume that everything they see while awake is absolutely real. But they should know that everything they experience - be it in a dream or in their daily lives - consists of only perceptions whose "real" source they can never reach.

The Example of a Shared Nervous System

Let us consider Politzer's car crash example: If the injured victim's nerves travelling from his five senses to his brain, were connected in parallel to another person's - Politzer's, for instance - then at the instant the bus hit that person, Politzer, sitting at his home at that same time, would feel the impact too. Politzer would experience all the sensations experienced by the person undergoing the accident, just as the same song will issue from two different loudspeakers connected to the same tape recorder. Politzer will hear the braking of the bus, feel its impact on his body, see the sights of a broken

arm and spreading blood, suffer the aching fractures, experience entering the operation room, the hardness of the plaster cast, and the feebleness of his healing arm.

Just like Politzer, every other person connected to that man's nerves would experience the accident from beginning to end. If the man in the accident fell into a coma, so would everyone. Moreover, if all the perceptions pertaining to the car accident were recorded in some device, and repeatedly transmitted to someone, the bus would knock this person down again and again.

But which one of these two buses hitting those people is real? To this question, materialist philosophers have no consistent answer. The correct answer is that all of them experience the car accident, in all its details, in their own minds.

The same principle applies to our other examples. If the sensory nerves of Engels, who felt the fullness in his stomach after eating a cake, were connected to a second person's brain, that person would also feel full after Engels finished the cake. If the nerves of materialist Johnson, who felt pain in his foot after delivering a sound kick to a stone, were connected to a second individual, that person too would feel himself kick the same stone and feel the same pain.

So, which cake or stone is the real one? Again, materialist philosophy falls short of giving a consistent answer. The correct, consistent answer is that Engels and the second person have both eaten the cake and are satiated in their minds; both Johnson and the second person have fully experienced kicking the stone - again, in their minds.

In our previous example, let's make an exchange: Connecting the nerves of the man hit by the bus to Politzer's brain, and the nerves of Politzer, sitting in his house, to brain of that accident victim. In this case, Politzer will think that a bus has hit him, but the man actually hit by the bus will never feel the impact and think that he is sitting in Politzer's house. The very same logic can be applied to the examples involving the cake and the stone.

All this reveals how dogmatic materialism actually is. Its philosophy is founded on the assumption that nothing exists except matter. The fact is, however, that no one can ever experience any direct contact with matter and thus be justified in claiming that everything consists of it. The universe we contact is the universe that we perceive in our minds. The famous British philosopher David Hume expressed his thoughts on this point:

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception.

We can never step outside these perceptions and encounter matter as it "really" is, so it is wholly nonsensical to construct any philosophy regarding matter as an absolute entity we can experience directly. As a theory, materialism is totally unfounded, right from the outset.

The Formation of Perceptions in the Brain is

Not Philosophy, But Scientific Fact

Materialists claim that what we have stated here is a philosophical view. But the plain scientific fact is, we cannot interact with the "external" material world, but only with a world in our brain. This is not a matter of philosophy. All medical schools teach in detail how images and feelings form in the brain. Facts proven by twentieth-century science, and by physics in particular, clearly show that we can never reach the originals of physical matter; and that in a sense, everyone is watching the "monitor" in his brain.

Everyone who believes in science, be he an atheist, Buddhist, or of any other belief, must accept this fact. Even the materialist who denies the existence of Allah cannot deny scientific reality.

That Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, George Politzer and others were never able to comprehend such a simple, evident fact is still startling, even though their level of scientific understanding was primitive and insufficient. Our highly advanced science and technology make it even easier to comprehend this explicit fact. Materialists, on the other hand, are paralyzed with their fears of even partially comprehending this fact and thereby, realizing how completely it demolishes their philosophy.

The Materialists' Great Fear

For a while, Turkish materialist circles mounted no substantial backlash against the subject examined in this book - that matter is perceived in the brain. This gave us the impression that we hadn't made our point clearly enough, that it needed further explanation. Yet before long, it became apparent that materialists did feel quite uneasy about the popularity of this topic and moreover, felt a great fear about it all.

After a while, materialists started loudly publicizing their fear and panic in their publications, conferences and panels. Their agitated, hopeless discourse implied that they were suffering a severe intellectual crisis. The collapse of the theory of evolution - the basis of their so-called scientific philosophy - had already come as a great shock. Now they experienced an even greater one, as they realized that they were losing their belief in the absolute supremacy of matter, which for them was a greater mainstay than even Darwinism. They declared that for them, this issue is a tremendous threat that totally demolishes their cultural fabric.

One who expressed the materialist circles' anxiety and panic in a most outspoken way was Renan Pekunlu, an academician and writer in the periodical *Bilim ve Utopya* (Science and Utopia) which has assumed the task of defending materialism. Both in his articles in *Bilim ve Utopya* and in the panels he attended, Pekunlu presented our book *The Evolution Deceit* as the number-one threat. What disturbed Pekunlu even more than the chapters invalidating Darwinism was the section you are currently reading. Pekunlu admonished his handful of readers not to let themselves be carried away by the indoctrination of idealism and to keep their faith in materialism. He used Vladimir I. Lenin, leader of Russia's bloody communist revolution, as a reference. Advising everyone to read Lenin's century-old book

Materialism and Empirio-Criticism, Pekunlu only repeated Lenin's counsel to "not think over this issue, or you will lose track of materialism and be carried away by religion." In an article for the aforementioned periodical, Pekunlu quoted the following lines from Lenin:

Once you deny the objective reality [that is] given us in sensation, you have already lost every weapon against fideism [reliance on faith alone], for you have slipped into agnosticism or subjectivism - and that is all that fideism requires. A single claw ensnared, and the bird is lost. And our Machists [an adherent of Machism, a modern positivist philosophy], have all become ensnared in idealism, that is, in a diluted, subtle fideism; They became ensnared from the moment they took "sensation" not as an image of the external world, but as a special "element." It is nobody's sensation, nobody's mind, nobody's spirit, nobody's will.

These words explicitly demonstrate the fact that Lenin found alarming and wanted to expunge, both from his own mind and the minds of his "comrades." It disturbs contemporary materialists too, in a similar way. But Pekunlu and other materialists suffer a yet greater distress because they know that this certain fact is now being advanced in a way that's far more explicit convincing than a hundred years ago. For the first time, this subject is being explained in a truly irrefutable way.

Still, nevertheless, a great number of materialist scientists take a superficial stand against the fact that no one can reach matter in and of itself. The subject covered in this chapter is one of the most important and most exciting that a person can ever run across. It's fairly unlikely that these scientists would have faced such a crucial subject before, but the reactions and the stance they employ in their speeches and articles still hint at how shallow and superficial their comprehension really is.

Some materialists' reactions show that their blind adherence to materialism has somehow impaired their logic, making them far removed from comprehending the subject. For instance, Alaeddin Senel - like Rennan Pekunlu, an academician and a writer for *Bilim ve Utopya* - said, "Forget the collapse of Darwinism, the real threatening subject is this one," and made demands implying "prove what you tell," sensing that his own philosophy has no basis. More interestingly, this writer has written lines revealing that he can by no means grasp this very fact which he considers such a menace.

For instance, in one article where Senel discussed this subject exclusively, he accepts that the brain perceives the external world as an image. But then he goes on to claim that images are divided into two categories: those having physical correlates and those with none; and that we can indeed reach the physical correlates of images pertaining to the external world. In support of this assertion, he writes, "I do not know whether or not the images in my brain have correlates in the external world, but the same thing applies when I speak on the phone. When I speak on the telephone, I cannot see the person I am speaking to, but I can have this conversation confirmed later, when I see him face to face."

By this, he actually means that if we doubt our perceptions, we can look at their origin and check its reality. This is an evident misconception, however, since it's impossible for us to reach matter itself. We can never get outside of our minds to reach what is "outside." Does the voice on the phone have an objective correlate or not? We can confirm that by meeting the person we spoke with. However, this confirmation too is experienced in the mind!

In fact, these writers also experience the same events in their dreams. For instance, Senel may dream that he speaks on the phone, then have this conversation confirmed by the person he spoke to. Or Pekunlu may, in his dream, feel he's facing a serious threat and advise others to read century-old books by Lenin. But no matter what they do, these materialists can never deny that the events they've experienced and the people they talked to were nothing but perceptions to them.

Who, then, can confirm the correlates of the images in the brain? The shadow beings whom people watch in their visual centres? It is impossible for materialists to find any "outside" source that can confirm information outside of the brain.

If someone concedes that all perceptions are formed in the brain, but still assumes that one can step "out" of this world of perceptions and have them confirmed by the "real" external world, this reveals this person's limited perceptive capacity and distorted reasoning.

However, the facts related here can easily be grasped by anyone of normal understanding and reasoning. In relation to everything we have said, every unbiased person will understand that it isn't possible for one's senses to reach the external world. Yet blind adherence to materialism apparently distorts people's reasoning capability. Contemporary materialists display severe logical flaws just like their mentors who tried to "prove" that they could reach the original of matter by kicking stones or eating cake.

This is no astonishing situation. The inability to understand - that is, interpret the world and events with decent reasoning - is a trait common to unbelievers. In the Qur'an, Allah particularly states that they are **"a people without understanding."** (Surat al-Ma'ida: 58)

Materialists Have Fallen into the Biggest Trap in History

The panicky atmosphere sweeping materialist circles in Turkey, of which we've mentioned only a few examples here, shows that materialists face utter defeat. Modern science has proven that we cannot reach the original of matter, and put this forward in a clear, straightforward, forceful way. Materialists see that the material world, on which they base their entire philosophy, lies beyond a perceptual boundary they can never cross. In the face of this fact, they can do nothing. Throughout human history, materialist thought has always existed. Being assured of themselves and their philosophy, materialists revolted against Allah Who created them. They maintained that matter is eternal, that none of it could possibly have had a Creator. While denying Allah out of

their arrogance, they took refuge in matter alone, with which they held themselves to be in direct contact. So confident were they of this philosophy that they believed that no arguments could ever disprove it.

That is why this book's facts regarding the real nature of matter so surprised these people. What we've related here destroyed the very basis of their philosophy and left no grounds for further discussion. Matter, on which they based all their thoughts, lives, arrogance, and denial, suddenly vanished. No human being has ever seen matter as it "really" is, so no philosophy can be based upon it.

One of the attributes of Allah is His plotting against the unbelievers. This is stated in the verse; **"They plot and plan, and Allah too plans; but the best of planners is Allah."** (Surat al-Anfal: 30)

Allah entrapped materialists by making them assume that matter is an absolute existence and in so doing, humiliated them in a way never seen before. Materialists deemed their possessions, status, rank, the society they belong to, the whole world to be absolute. Moreover, by relying on these, they grew arrogant against Allah. By being boastful, they revolted against Him and added to their unbelief. While so doing, they relied on a total conviction in the absoluteness of matter. Yet so lacking are they in understanding that they fail to realize that Allah compasses them round about. Allah announces the state to which the unbelievers are led as a result of their thick-headedness:

Or do they intend a plot [against you]? But those who defy Allah are themselves involved in a Plot! (Surat at-Tur: 42)

Theirs is most probably the biggest intellectual defeat in history. While growing arrogant of their own accord, materialists have been tricked and suffered a serious defeat in their war against Allah by bringing up something monstrous against Him. The verse **"Thus have We placed leaders in every town, its wicked men, to plot [and burrow] therein: but they only plot against their own souls, and they perceive it not"** (Surat al-An'am: 123) announces how unconscious these people who revolt against our Creator are, and how they will end up. In another verse the same fact is related as:

Fain would they deceive Allah and those who believe, but they only deceive themselves, and realise [it] not! (Surat al-Baqara: 9)

While trying to plot, unbelievers do not realize the very important fact that everything they experience is really experienced in their brains, and all the plots they devise are simply formed in their brains, just like every other act they perform. Their folly has let them forget that they are all alone with Allah and, hence, are trapped in their own devious plans.

Just like those unbelievers of bygone days, those living today face a reality that will shatter the basis of their devious plans. With the verse **"...feeble indeed is the cunning of Satan"** (Surat an-Nisa': 76), Allah has stated that these plots were doomed to end with failure the day they were hatched, and gave the good tidings to believers with the verse **"...not the least harm will their cunning do to you."** (Surah Al 'Imran: 120)

In another verse Allah states: **"But the unbelievers, their deeds are like a mirage in sandy deserts, which the man parched with thirst mistakes for water; until when he comes up to it, he finds it to be nothing."** (Surat an-Nur: 39) Materialism, too, offers a mirage for the rebellious; when they have recourse to materialism, they find its philosophy to be nothing but deceptive. Allah has deceived them with such a mirage, and beguiled them into perceiving matter as an absolute. All those eminent professors, astronomers, biologists, physicists and all others, regardless of their rank and post, are simply deceived and humiliated because they took matter as their god. Assuming matter, whose essence they can never reach, to be absolute, they based their philosophy and ideology on it, grew involved in serious discussions, adopting a so-called "intellectual" discourse. They deemed themselves wise enough to argue about the truth of the universe and, more seriously to interpret Allah with their limited intelligence. Allah explains their situation in the following verse:

And [the unbelievers] plotted and planned, and Allah too planned, and the best of planners is Allah. (Surat Ali 'Imran: 54)

One may possibly escape from some plots in the world; but Allah's plan against the unbelievers is so firm that there is no avoiding it. No matter what they do or to whom they appeal, never can they find any helper other than Allah. As Allah informs in the Qur'an, **"they shall not find for them other than Allah a patron or a help."** (Surat an-Nisa': 173)

Materialists never expected to fall into such a trap. Having all the means of the twenty-first century at their disposal, they believed they could grow obstinate in their denial and drag others into disbelief. This ever-lasting mentality of unbelievers and their end are described as follows in the Qur'an:

They plotted and planned, but We too planned, even while they perceived it not. Then see what was the end of their plot! - this, that We destroyed them and their people, all [of them]. (Surat an-Naml: 50-51)

This, in another sense, is what the fact stated in the verses comes to mean: Materialists are now told that everything they own is actually in their brains, and therefore, everything they possess has been rendered valueless. As they witness their possessions, factories, gold, money, children, spouses, friends, rank and status, and even

their own bodies - all of which they deem absolute - slipping away from them hands, in a sense, they are destroyed. They come face to face with the fact that Allah, not matter, is the only absolute.

Realizing this truth is doubtless the worst possible thing for the materialists. That matter in which they place such faith, is separated from them by an impenetrable frontier is, in their own words, tantamount to "death before dying" in this world.

This leaves them all alone with Allah. With the verse, **"Leave Me alone, [to deal] with the [creature] whom I created [bare and] alone!"** Allah has called our attention to the fact that each human being is, in truth, all alone in His presence. (Surat al-Muddaththir: 11) This remarkable fact is repeated in many other verses:

"And behold! You come to Us bare and alone as We created you for the first time: you have left behind you all [the favours] which We bestowed on you..." (Surat al-An'am: 94)

And each one of them will come unto Him on the Day of Resurrection, alone. (Surah Maryam: 95)

This, in another sense, is what the fact stated in the verses comes to mean: Those who take matter as their god have come from Allah and returned to Him. They have submitted themselves to Allah, whether they want to or not. Now they wait for the Day of Judgement, when each one of them will be called to account, however unwilling they may be to understand it.

The Importance of the Subject

It is of the utmost importance to understand correctly the secret beyond matter explained in this chapter. **Mountains, plains, flowers, people, seas - briefly everything we see and everything that Allah informs us in the Qur'an that exists and that He created out of nothing is created and does indeed exist.** However, people cannot see, feel or hear the real nature of these beings through their sense organs. What they see and feel are only their copies that appear in their brains. This is a scientific fact taught at all schools of medicine. The same applies to the book you are reading now; you can not see nor touch the real nature of it. The light coming from the original book is converted by some cells in your eyes into electrical signals, which are then conveyed to the visual centre in the back of your brain. This is where the view of this book is created. In other words, you are not reading a book which is before your eyes through your eyes; in fact, this book is created in the visual centre in the back of your brain. The book you are reading right now is a "copy of the book" within your brain. The original book is seen by Allah.

It should be remembered, however, that the fact that the matter is an illusion formed in our brains does not "reject" the matter, but provides us information about the real nature of the matter: that no person can have connection with its original. Moreover, the matter outside is seen not just by us, but by other beings too. The angels Allah delegated to be watchers witness this world as well:

And the two recording angels are recording, sitting on the right and on the left. He does not utter a single word, without a watcher by him, pen in hand! (Surah Qaf: 17-18)

Most importantly, Allah sees everything. He created this world with all its details and sees it in all its states. As He informs us in the Qur'an:

... Heed Allah and know that Allah sees what you do. (Surat al-Baqara: 233)

Say: "Allah is a sufficient witness between me and you. He is certainly aware of and sees His servants." (Surat al-Isra': 96)

It must not be forgotten that Allah keeps the records of everything in the book called Lawh Mahfuz (Preserved Tablet). Even if we don't see all things, they are in the Lawh Mahfuz. Allah reveals that He keeps everything's record in the "Mother of the Book" called Lawh Mahfuz with the following verses:

It is in the Source Book with Us, high-exalted, full of wisdom. (Surat az-Zukhruf: 4)

... We possess an all-preserving Book. (Surah Qaf: 4)

Certainly there is no hidden thing in either heaven or Earth which is not in a Clear Book. (Surat an-Naml: 75)

Conclusion

The subject we have explained so far is one of the greatest truths you will ever read in your lifetime. Proving that everything we see and refer to as "the material world" is actually in our minds, that we can never have direct experience of the material originals existing outside, is important in comprehending the existence of Allah and His creations and to understanding that He is the only absolute Being.

The person who understands this will realize that the world is not the sort of place that most people surmise. Not an absolute place with an exterior existence, as supposed by those who wander aimlessly about the streets, get into fights in pubs, show off in luxurious cafes, brag about their property, or who dedicate their lives to hollow aims. The world is an image we see in our brain, whose original we can never reach. All of the people cited above watch these perceptions in their minds, yet are unaware of this.

This very important concept undermines the materialist philosophy that denies the existence of Allah. This is why materialists like Marx, Engels, and Lenin panicked, became enraged, and warned their followers "not to think over" this concept when told about it. Such people are so mentally deficient that they cannot even comprehend the fact that perceptions are formed inside the brain. Assuming that what they watch in their brains is the "external world," they cannot comprehend obvious evidence to the contrary.

This unawareness is the outcome of the lack of wisdom Allah gives to disbelievers. As it is said in the Qur'an, the unbelievers **"have hearts wherewith they understand not, eyes wherewith they see not, and ears wherewith they hear not. They are like cattle-nay more misguided: for they are heedless [of warning]."** (Surat al-A'raf: 179) You can explore beyond this by using the power of your personal reflection. Concentrate your attention, and ponder on how you see the objects around you and feel their touch. Think heedfully, and you can feel that the being that thinks and reads this book at this moment is only a soul, who watches the perceptions called "matter" on an inner screen. Anyone who grasps this has moved away from the domain of the material world that deceives a major part of humanity and has entered the domain of authentic existence.

This reality has been understood by a number of theists or philosophers throughout history. Even though the Wahdatul Wujood view has deviated from the truth by misunderstanding this reality and rejecting the existence of all creation, great scholar Imam Rabbani set the right measure on this subject. According to Imam Rabbani, all beings are "shadow beings" relative to Allah.

Islamic intellectuals such as Imam Rabbani, Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi and Mevlana Cami realised this fact from the signs of the Qur'an and by using their reason. Some Western philosophers like George Berkeley have grasped the same reality through reason. Imam

Rabbani wrote in his Mektubat (Letters) that the whole material universe is an "illusion and supposition (perception)" and that the only absolute being is Allah:

Allah... The substance of these beings which He created is but nothingness... He created all at the sphere of senses and illusions... The existence of the universe is at the sphere of senses and illusions, and it is not material... In real, there is nothing in the outside except the Glorious Being, (Who is Allah).

However, the number of those who have understood this fact throughout history has always been limited. Great scholars such as Imam Rabbani have written that it might have been inconvenient to tell this fact to the masses and that most people would not be able to grasp it.

However, in the age we live in, this fact has been made empirical by the body of evidence put forward by science. For the first time, the fact that matter is not absolute and our knowledge of it is extremely limited is described in a concrete, clear, and explicit way.

For this reason, the 21st century will be a turning point when people in general will comprehend the Divine realities and be led in crowds to Allah, the only Absolute Being. In the 21st century, materialistic 19th-century creeds will be relegated to the trash-heaps of history; Allah's existence and creation will be grasped; facts like spacelessness and timelessness will be better understood. Humanity will break free of the centuries-old veils, deceptions, and superstitions enshrouding us.

It's not possible for any shadow being to impede this inevitable course.

RELATIVITY OF TIME AND THE REALITY OF FATE

Everything related so far demonstrates that we never have direct contact with the "three-dimensional space" of reality, and that we lead our whole lives within our minds. Asserting the contrary would be to profess a superstitious belief removed from reason and scientific truth, for by no means can we achieve direct contact with the original of the external world.

This refutes the primary assumption of the materialist philosophy underlying evolutionary theory - the assumption that matter is absolute and eternal. The materialistic philosophy's second assumption is that time is also absolute and eternal - a supposition just as superstitious as the first.

The Perception of Time

What we call "time" is in fact a method by which one moment is compared to another. For example, when a person taps an object, he hears a particular sound. If he taps the same object five minutes later, he hears another sound. Thinking there is an interval between the two sounds, he calls this interval "time." Yet when he hears the second sound, the first one he heard is no more than a memory in his mind, merely a bit of information in his imagination. A person formulates his perception of time **by comparing the moment in which he lives with what he holds in memory. If he doesn't make this comparison, he can have no perception of time either.**

Similarly, a person makes a comparison when he sees someone enter through a door and sit in an armchair in the middle of the room. By the time this person sits in the armchair, the images of the moment he opened the door and made his way to the armchair are compiled as bits of information in memory. The perception of time takes place when one compares the man sitting on the armchair with those bits of recalled information.

Briefly, **time comes about as a result of comparisons of information stored in the brain.** If man had no memory, his brain could not make such interpretations and therefore, he would never form any perception of time. One determines himself to be thirty years old, only because he has accumulated in his mind information pertaining to those thirty years. If his memory did not exist, then he could not think of any such preceding period and would be experiencing only the single "moment" in which he was living.

The Scientific Explanation of Timelessness

We can clarify this subject by quoting various scientists' and scholars' explanations. Regarding the idea of time flowing backwards, François Jacob, a famous intellectual and Nobel laureate professor of genetics, states the following in his book *Le Jeu des Possibles* (The Play of Possibilities):

Films played backwards let us imagine **a world in which time flows backwards**. A world in which cream separates itself from the coffee and jumps out of the cup to reach the creamer; in which the walls emit light rays that are collected in a light source instead of radiating out from it; a world in which a stone leaps up to a man's hand from the water where it was thrown by the astonishing cooperation of innumerable drops of water surging together. Yet, in such a time-reversed world with such opposite features, **our brain processes, and the way our memory compiles information, would similarly function backwards**. The same is true for the past and future, though the world will appear to us exactly as it does currently.

But since our brain is accustomed to a certain sequence of events, the world does not operate as related above. We assume that time always flows forward. However, this is a decision reached in the brain and is, therefore, completely relative. In reality, we never can know how time flows - or even whether it flows or not! This is because **time is not an absolute fact, but only a form of perception**.

That time is a perception is also verified by Albert Einstein in his Theory of General Relativity. In his book *The Universe and Dr. Einstein*, Lincoln Barnett writes:

Along with absolute space, Einstein discarded the concept of absolute time - of a steady, unvarying inexorable universal time flow, streaming from the infinite past to the infinite future. Much of the obscurity that has surrounded the Theory of Relativity stems from man's reluctance to recognize that **sense of time, like sense of color, is a form of perception**. Just as space is simply a possible order of material objects, so **time is simply a possible order of events**. The subjectivity of time is best explained in Einstein's own words. "The experiences of an individual," he says, "appear to us arranged in a series of events; in this series the single events which we remember appear to be **ordered according to the criterion of 'earlier' and 'later'**". There exists, therefore, for the individual, an I-time, or **subjective time**. This in itself is not measurable. I can, indeed, associate numbers with the events, in such a way that a greater number is associated with the later event than with an earlier one.

As Barnett wrote, Einstein showed that, "space and time are forms of intuition, which **can no more be divorced from consciousness** than can our concepts of color, shape, or size." According to the Theory of General Relativity: **"time has no independent existence apart from the order of events by which we measure it."**

Since time consists of perception, it depends entirely on the perceiver - and is therefore relative.

The speed at which time flows differs according to the references we use to measure it, because the human body has no natural clock to indicate precisely how fast time passes. As Barnett wrote, "Just as there is no such thing as color without an eye to discern it, so an instant or an hour or a day is nothing without an event to mark it."

The relativity of time is plainly experienced in dreams. Although what we perceive in a dream seems to last for hours, in fact, it only lasts for a few minutes, and often even a few seconds.

An example will clarify the point. Assume that you were put into a room with a single window, specifically designed; and were kept there for a certain period of time. A clock on the walls shows you the amount of time that has passed. During this "time," from the room's window, you see the sun setting and rising at certain intervals. A few days later, questioned about the amount of time spent in the room, you would give an answer based on the information you had collected by looking at the clock from time to time, as well as by counting how many times the sun had set and risen. Say, for example, you estimate you'd spent three days in the room. However, if the person who put you in there says that you spent only two days in there; that the sun you saw from the window was falsely produced; and that the clock in the room was especially regulated to move faster, then your calculation would be erroneous.

This example dramatizes that the information we have about the rate of time's passing is based only on references that change according to the perceiver.

That time is relative is a scientific fact, also proven by scientific methodology. Einstein's Theory of General Relativity maintains that the speed of time changes depending on the speed of the object and its distance from the centre of gravity. As speed increases, time is shortened - compressed - and slows down until it approaches to the point of stopping entirely.

Einstein himself gave an example. Imagine two twins, one of whom remains on Earth while the other goes into space at a speed close to the speed of light. On his return, the traveler will find that his brother has grown much older than he has. The reason is that time flows much more slowly for the person who travels at near-light speed. What about a space-traveling father and his son who stays behind on Earth? If the father were 27 years old when he set out, and his son was only three, the father, when he comes back 30 years later in Earth time, will be only 30, whereas his son will be 33 years old!

This relativity of time is caused not by clocks slowing down or running fast. Rather, it's the result of the differentiated operational periods of the entire material system, as deep as sub-atomic particles. In such a setting where time stretches out, one's heartbeat, cell replications, and brain functions all operate more slowly. The person continues with his daily life and does not notice the slowing of time at all.

Relativity in the Qur'an

The conclusion to which we are led by the findings of modern science is that **time is not an absolute fact as supposed by materialists, but only a relative perception.** What is more interesting is that this fact, undiscovered until the 20th century by science, was imparted to mankind in the Qur'an 14 centuries ago. There are various references in the Qur'an to the relativity of time.

It is possible to see the scientifically-proven fact that time is a psychological perception dependent on events, setting, and conditions in many verses of the Qur'an. For instance, the entire life of a person is a very short time as we are informed by the Qur'an:

On the Day when He will call you, and you will answer [His Call] with [words of] His Praise and Obedience, and you will think that you have stayed [in this world] but a little while! (Surat al-Isra': 52)

And on the Day when He shall gather them together, [it will seem to them] as if they had not tarried [on earth] longer than an hour of a day: they will recognise each other. (Surah Yunus: 45)

In some verses, it is indicated that people perceive time differently and that sometimes people can perceive a very short period of time as a very lengthy one. The following conversation of people held during their judgement in the Hereafter is a good example of this:

He will say: "What number of years did you stay on earth?" They will say: "We stayed a day or part of a day: but ask those who keep account." He will say: "You stayed not but a little, if you had only known!" (Surat al-Muminun: 112-114)

In some other verses it is stated that time may flow at different paces in different settings:

Yet they ask you to hasten on the Punishment! But Allah will not fail in His Promise. Verily a Day in the sight of your Lord is like a thousand years of your reckoning. (Surat al-Hajj: 47)

The angels and the spirit ascend unto him in a day the measure whereof is [as] fifty thousand years. (Surat al-Ma'arij: 4)

He directs the whole affair from heaven to Earth. Then it will again ascend to Him on a day whose length is a thousand years by the way you measure. (Surat as-Sajda: 5)

These verses are all manifest expressions of the relativity of time. The fact that this result only recently understood by science in the 20th century was communicated to man 1,400 years ago by the Qur'an is an indication of the revelation of the Qur'an by Allah, Who encompasses the whole time and space.

The narration in many other verses of the Qur'an reveals that time is a perception. This is particularly evident in the stories. For instance, Allah has kept the Companions of the Cave, a believing group mentioned in the Qur'an, in a deep sleep for more than three centuries. When they were awoken, these people thought that they had stayed in that state but a little while, and could not figure out how long they slept:

Then We draw [a veil] over their ears, for a number of years, in the Cave, [so that they heard not]. Then We raised them up that We might know which of the two parties would best calculate the time that they had tarried. (Surat al-Kahf: 11-12)

Such [being their state], we raised them up [from sleep], that they might question each other. Said one of them, "How long have you stayed [here]?" They said, "We have stayed [perhaps] a day, or part of a day." [At length] they [all] said, "Allah [alone] knows best how long you have stayed here... (Surat al-Kahf: 19)

The situation told in the below verse is also evidence that time is in truth a psychological perception.

Or [take] the similitude of one who passed by a hamlet, all in ruins to its roofs. He said: "Oh! how shall Allah bring it [ever] to life, after [this] its death?" but Allah caused him to die for a hundred years, then raised him up [again]. He said: "How long did you tarry [thus]?" He said: [Perhaps] a day or part of a day." He said: "Nay, you have tarried thus a hundred years; but look at your food and your drink; they show no signs of age; and look at your donkey: And that We may make of you a sign unto the people, Look further at the bones, how We bring them together and clothe them with flesh." When this was shown clearly to him, he said: "I know that Allah has power over all things." (Surat al-Baqara: 259)

The above verse clearly emphasizes that Allah Who created time is unbound by it. Man, on the other hand, is bound by time that Allah ordains. As in the verse, man is even incapable of knowing how long he stayed in his sleep. In such a state, to assert that time

is absolute [just like the materialists do in their distorted mentality], would be very unreasonable.

Destiny

Time's variable relativity reveals a very important reality: A period of time of apparently billions of years' duration to us, may last only a second in another dimension. Moreover, an enormous period of time - from the world's beginning to its end - may not last even a second, but just an instant in another dimension.

This is the very essence of destiny's reality - one that is not well understood by most people, especially materialists, who deny it completely. Destiny is Allah's perfect knowledge of all events, past or future. Many, if not most, question how Allah can already know events that have not yet been experienced, and this leads them to fail to understand the authenticity of destiny. However, events not yet experienced are not yet experienced **by us only**. Allah is not bound by time or space, for He Himself has created them. For this reason, **the past, the future, and the present are all the same to Allah; for Him, everything has already taken place and is finished.**

In *The Universe and Dr. Einstein*, Lincoln Barnett explains how the Theory of General Relativity leads to this insight. According to him, the universe can be "encompassed in its entire majesty only by a **cosmic intellect**."³⁴ What Barnett calls "the cosmic intellect" is **the wisdom and knowledge of Allah, Who prevails over the entire universe**. Just as we easily see the beginning, middle, and end of a ruler and all the units in between as a whole, so Allah knows the time to which we're subjected right from its beginning to the end, like a single moment. People experience incidents only when their time comes for them to witness the fate Allah has created for them.

It is also important to consider society's distorted understanding of destiny. This distorted conviction presents the superstitious belief that Allah has determined a "destiny" for every man, but sometimes that people can change these destinies. For instance, speaking of a patient who's returned from death's door, people make superficial statements like, "He defeated his destiny." Yet no one is able to change his destiny. The person who turns from death's door is destined not to die then. Again, it's the destiny of those people to deceive themselves by saying, "I defeated my destiny" and maintain such a mindset.

Destiny is the eternal knowledge of Allah. And for Allah, Who knows the whole time as a single moment and Who prevails over the whole time and space, everything is determined and finished in its destiny.

We also understand from what is related in the Qur'an that time is one for Allah: some incidents that appear to happen to us in the future are related in the Qur'an in such a way that they already took place long before. For instance, the verses that describe the account that people are to give to Allah in the hereafter are related as events which already occurred long ago:

And the trumpet is *blown*, and all who are in the heavens and all who are in the earth *swoon away*, save him whom Allah willeth. Then it is *blown* a second time, and behold them standing waiting! And the earth *shineth* with the light of her Lord, and the Book is set up, and the prophets and the witnesses are *brought*, and *it is judged* between them with truth, and they *are not wronged*... And those who disbelieve are driven unto hell in troops... And those who keep their duty to their Lord are driven unto the Garden in troops..." (Surat az-Zumar: 68-73)

Some other verses on this subject are:

And every soul came, along with it a driver and a witness. (Surah Qaf: 21)

And the heaven is cloven asunder, so that on that day it is frail. (Surat al-Haqqa: 16)

And because they were patient and constant, He rewarded them with a Garden and [garments of] silk. Reclining in the [Garden] on raised thrones, they saw there neither the sun's [excessive heat] nor excessive cold. (Surat al-Insan: 12-13)

And Hell is placed in full view for [all] to see. (Surat an-Nazi'at: 36)

But on this Day the Believers laugh at the Unbelievers (Surat al-Mutaffifin: 34)

And the Sinful saw the fire and apprehended that they have to fall therein: no means did they find to turn away therefrom. (Surat al-Kahf: 53)

As may be seen, occurrences that are going to take place after our death (from our point of view) are related as already experienced and past events in the Qur'an. Allah is not bound by the relative time frame that we are confined in. Allah has willed these things in timelessness: people have already performed them and all these events have been lived through and ended. It is imparted in the verse below that every event, be it big or small, is within the knowledge of Allah and recorded in a book:

In whatever business thou may be, and whatever portion you may be reciting from the Qur'an, and whatever deed you [humanity] may be doing, We are witnesses thereof when you are deeply engrossed therein. Nor is hidden from your Lord [so much as] the weight of an atom on the earth or in heaven.

And not the least and not the greatest of these things but are recorded in a clear record. (Surah Yunus: 61)

The Worry of the Materialists

The facts discussed in this chapter, namely the truth underlying matter, timelessness, and spacelessness, are extremely clear indeed. As expressed earlier, these are hardly some sort of philosophy or way of thinking, but **crystal-clear scientific truths, impossible to deny**. On this issue, rational and logical evidence admits no other alternatives: For us, the universe - with all the matter composing it and all the people living on it - is **an illusory entirety**, a collection of perceptions that we experience in our minds and whose original reality we cannot contact directly.

Materialists have a hard time in understanding this - for example, if we return to the example of Politzer's bus. Although Politzer technically knew that he could not step out of his perceptions, he could admit it only for certain cases. For him, events take place in the brain until the bus crash takes place, then events escape from the brain and assume a physical reality. At this point, the logical defect is very clear: Politzer has made the same mistake as the materialist Samuel Johnson, who said, "I hit the stone, my foot hurts, therefore it exists." Politzer could not understand that in fact, the shock felt after a bus impact was a mere perception too.

One subliminal reason why materialists cannot comprehend this is their fear of the implication they must face if they comprehend it. Lincoln Barnett tells of the fear and anxiety that even "discerning" this subject inspires in materialist scientists:

Along with philosophers' reduction of all objective reality to a shadow-world of perceptions, scientists became aware of the alarming limitations of man's senses.

Any reference to the fact that we cannot make contact with original matter, and that time is a perception, arouses great fear in a materialist because these are the only notions he relies on as absolutes. In a sense, he takes these as idols to worship; because he thinks that he has been created by matter and time, through evolution.

When he feels that he cannot get to the essence of the universe he lives in, nor the world, his own body, other people, other materialist philosophers whose ideas he is influenced by - in short, to anything - he feels overwhelmed by the horror of it all. Everything he depends on and believes in suddenly vanishes. He feels the despair which he, essentially, will experience on Judgement Day in its real sense as described in the verse **"That Day shall they [openly] show [their] submission to Allah; and all their inventions shall leave them in the lurch."** (Surat an-Nahl: 87)

From then on, this materialist tries to convince himself that he's really confronting external, original matter, and makes up "evidence." He hits his fist on the wall, kicks stones, shouts, and yells. But he can never escape from the reality.

Just as materialists want to dismiss this reality from their minds, they also want other people to discard it. They realize that if the true nature of matter becomes known

to people in general, the primitiveness of their own philosophy and the ignorance of their worldview will be laid bare for all to see. No ground will be left on which they can rationalize their views. These fears explain why they are so disturbed by the facts related here.

Allah states that the fears of the unbelievers will be intensified in the hereafter. On Judgement Day, they will be addressed thus:

One day shall We gather them all together: We shall say to those who ascribed partners [to Us]: "Where are the partners whom you [invented and] talked about?" (Surat al-An'am: 22)

In the Hereafter, unbelievers will bear witness to their possessions, children and close friends leaving them and vanishing. They had assumed themselves to be in contact with their originals in the world and flattered themselves as partners with Allah. Allah stated this fact in the verse **"Behold! how they lie against their own souls! But the [lie] which they invented will leave them in the lurch."** (Surat al-An'am: 24)

The Gain of Believers

The facts - that matter is not absolute and that time is a perception -alarm materialists, but for true believers, just the opposite holds true. People with faith in Allah become very glad to have perceived the secret behind matter, because this reality is the key to every question. With this, all secrets are unlocked, and one can easily understand many issues that previously seemed hard to grasp.

As said before, the issues of death, Paradise, Hell, the Hereafter, and changing dimensions will be comprehended. Important questions such as, "Where is Allah?," "What existed before Allah?," "Who created Allah?," "How long will the life in cemetery last?," "Where are Paradise and Hell?," and "Do Paradise and Hell currently exist?" will be easily answered. Once it's understood that Allah created the entire universe from nothingness, **the questions of "When?," and "Where?" become meaningless**, because there will be no time or place left. When spacelessness is comprehended, it can be understood that Hell, Paradise and Earth are **all actually in the same location**. If timelessness is understood, it will be understood that everything takes place **at one single moment**: Nothing need be awaited, and time does not go by, because everything has already happened and finished.

When this secret is comprehended, **the world becomes like Paradise for any believer**. All distressful material worries, anxieties, and fears vanish. The person grasps that the entire universe has one single Sovereign, that He creates the entire physical world as He pleases, and that all one has to do is to turn unto Him. He then submits himself entirely to Allah **"to be devoted to His service"**. (Surah Al 'Imran: 35)

To comprehend this secret is the greatest gain in the world.

With this secret, another very important reality mentioned in the Qur'an is unveiled: the fact that **"Allah is nearer to man than his jugular vein."** (Surah Qaf: 16) As everybody knows, the jugular vein is inside the body. What could be nearer to a person than his inside? This situation can be easily explained by the fact that we cannot get out of our minds. This verse can also be much better comprehended by understanding this secret.

This is the plain truth. It should be well established that there is no other helper and provider for man than Allah. **Nothing is absolute but Allah**; He is the only absolute being in Whom one can seek refuge, appeal for help, and count on for reward.

Wherever we turn, there is the Face of Allah ...

THE DECEPTION OF EVOLUTION

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

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

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

The Scientific Collapse of Darwinism

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

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

- 1) The theory cannot explain how life originated on Earth.
- 2) No scientific finding shows that the "evolutionary mechanisms" proposed by the theory have any evolutionary power at all.

3) The fossil record proves the exact opposite of what the theory suggests.

In this section, we will examine these three basic points in general outlines:

The First Insurmountable Step: The Origin of Life

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

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

"Life Comes From Life"

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

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

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

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

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

Inconclusive Efforts of the Twentieth Century

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Complex Structure of Life

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

The conditions required for the formation of a cell are too great in quantity to be explained away by coincidences. The probability of proteins, the building blocks of a cell, being synthesized coincidentally, is 1 in 10^{950} for an average protein made up of 500 amino acids. In mathematics, a probability smaller than 1 over 10^{50} is considered to be impossible in practical terms.

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

A very interesting dilemma emerges at this point: DNA can replicate itself only with the help of some specialized proteins (enzymes). However, the synthesis of these

enzymes can be realized only by the information coded in DNA. As they both depend on each other, they have to exist at the same time for replication. This brings the scenario that life originated by itself to a deadlock. Prof. Leslie Orgel, an evolutionist of repute from the University of San Diego, California, confesses this fact in the September 1994 issue of the *Scientific American* magazine:

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

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

Imaginary Mechanism of Evolution

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

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

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

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

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

Lamarck's Impact

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

Darwin also gave similar examples. In his book *The Origin of Species*, for instance, he said that some bears going into water to find food transformed themselves into whales over time.

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

Neo-Darwinism and Mutations

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

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

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

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

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

The Fossil Record: No Sign of Intermediate Forms

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

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

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

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

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

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

Darwin's Hopes Shattered

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

One famous British paleontologist, Derek V. Ager, admits this fact, even though he is an evolutionist:

The point emerges that if we examine the fossil record in detail, whether at the level of orders or of species, we find—over and over again—not gradual evolution, but the sudden explosion of one group at the expense of another.

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

Creation and evolution, between them, exhaust the possible explanations for the origin of living things. Organisms either appeared on the earth fully developed or they did not. If they did not, they must have developed from pre-existing species by some

process of modification. If they did appear in a fully developed state, they must indeed have been created by some omnipotent intelligence.

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

The Tale of Human Evolution

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

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

Evolutionists call man's so-called first ape-like ancestors *Australopithecus*, which means "South African ape." These living beings are actually nothing but an old ape species that has become extinct. Extensive research done on various *Australopithecus* specimens by two world famous anatomists from England and the USA, namely, Lord Solly Zuckerman and Prof. Charles Oxnard, shows that these apes belonged to an ordinary ape species that became extinct and bore no resemblance to humans.⁴⁸

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

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

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

This situation apparently indicates the invalidity of the claim that they are ancestors of one another. Stephen Jay Gould explained this deadlock of the theory of evolution, although he was himself one of the leading advocates of evolution in the twentieth century:

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

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

Lord Solly Zuckerman, one of the most famous and respected scientists in the U.K., who carried out research on this subject for years and studied *Australopithecus* fossils for 15 years, finally concluded, despite being an evolutionist himself, that there is, in fact, no such family tree branching out from ape-like creatures to man.

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

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

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

Darwinian Formula!

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

The theory of evolution asserts that life is formed by chance. According to this claim, lifeless and unconscious atoms came together to form the cell and then they somehow formed other living things, including man. Let us think about that. When we bring together the elements that are the building-blocks of life such as carbon,

phosphorus, nitrogen and potassium, only a heap is formed. No matter what treatments it undergoes, this atomic heap cannot form even a single living being. If you like, let us formulate an "experiment" on this subject and let us examine on the behalf of evolutionists what they really claim without pronouncing loudly under the name "Darwinian formula":

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

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

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

Technology in the Eye and the Ear

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

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

The brain is insulated from light. That means that its inside is completely dark, and that no light reaches the place where it is located. Thus, the "centre of vision" is never touched by light and may even be the darkest place you have ever known. However, you observe a luminous, bright world in this pitch darkness.

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

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

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

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

The situation in the eye is also true for the ear. That is, the brain is insulated from sound just as it is from light. It does not let any sound in. Therefore, no matter how noisy is the outside, the inside of the brain is completely silent. Nevertheless, the sharpest sounds are perceived in the brain. In your completely silent brain, you listen to

symphonies, and hear all of the noises in a crowded place. However, were the sound level in your brain measured by a precise device at that moment, complete silence would be found to be prevailing there.

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

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

To Whom Does the Consciousness That Sees and Hears within the Brain Belong?

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

The stimulations coming from a person's eyes, ears, and nose travel to the brain as electro-chemical nerve impulses. In biology, physiology, and biochemistry books, you can find many details about how this image forms in the brain. However, you will never come across the most important fact: Who perceives these electro-chemical nerve impulses as images, sounds, odors, and sensory events in the brain? There is a consciousness in the brain that perceives all this without feeling any need for an eye, an ear, and a nose. To whom does this consciousness belong? Of course it does not belong to the nerves, the fat layer, and neurons comprising the brain. This is why Darwinist-materialists, who believe that everything is comprised of matter, cannot answer these questions.

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

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

A Materialist Faith

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Words cannot express just how astonishing it is that this spell should hold such a wide community in thrall, keep people from the truth, and not be broken for 150 years. It is understandable that one or a few people might believe in impossible scenarios and claims full of stupidity and illogicality. However, "magic" is the only possible explanation for people from all over the world believing that unconscious and lifeless atoms suddenly

decided to come together and form a universe that functions with a flawless system of organization, discipline, reason, and consciousness; a planet named Earth with all of its features so perfectly suited to life; and living things full of countless complex systems.

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

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

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

We revealed to Musa, "Throw down your staff." And it immediately swallowed up what they had forged. So the Truth took place and what they did was shown to be false. (Surat al-A`raf: 117-118)

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

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

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

**Glory to You, of knowledge We have none,
save what You have taught us,
In truth it is You Who is perfect
in knowledge and wisdom.
(Surat al-Baqara: 32)**

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One of the major reasons why people feel a profound sense of attachment for life and cast religion aside is the assumption that life is eternal. Forgetting that death is likely to put an end to this life at any moment, man simply believes that he can enjoy a perfect and happy life. Yet, he evidently deceives himself. The world is a temporary place specially created by Allah to test man. That is why it is inherently flawed and far from satisfying man's endless needs and desires. Every attraction existing in the world eventually wears out, becomes corrupt, decays and finally disappears. This is the never-changing reality of life. This book explains this essential nature of life and leads man to ponder the real place to which he belongs, namely the Hereafter.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The author, who writes under the pen-name Harun Yahya, was born in Ankara in 1956. He studied arts at Istanbul's Mimar Sinan University and philosophy at Istanbul University. Since the 1980s, the author has published many books on political, faith-related and scientific issues. Some of the books of the author have been translated into more than 40 languages and published in the countries concerned. Harun Yahya's books appeal to all people, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, regardless of their age, race, and nationality, as they center around one goal: to open the readers' mind by encouraging them to think about some critical issues such as the existence of Allah and His unity, and to display the decrepit foundations and perverted works of godless systems.