

THE DEBASED CULTURE OF SUPERFICIALITY

**If anyone desires anything other than Islam as a religion,
it will not be accepted from him,
and in the Hereafter he will be among the losers.
(Surah Al 'Imran: 85)**

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INTRODUCTION

When we think of a *superficial person* as understood by most people, generally we imagine an individual ignorant of the rules of etiquette; one who is uneducated, uninformed, immoderate and who often does not know how to behave in certain situations. But what this book will dwell on is not the kind of superficiality as generally understood; we will discuss, in terms of religious morality, how superficiality can become a spiritual state. The superficiality we will examine here is much deeper, more radical: a sickness that is more serious than commonly understood. And, unless Allah wills otherwise, it is a great danger that can draw a person into Hell.

We will discuss the superficiality that infects a person's behavior and thinking when he does not expand his spirit according to the moral teaching of the Qur'an and is unwilling to draw closer to Allah and seek His favor. This superficiality manifests itself when a person has only a weak grasp of Allah's infinite power, of the purposes that lie behind events that transpire in the world at large, and of the true meaning of life. There is a total difference between moral character of a true Muslim, who comprehends Allah's existence and mighty power, and the character, personality and behavior of a superficial person who thinks too little, if at all. Muslims have nobility of spirit, high personal qualities and a deep understanding, whereas superficial individuals are debased by the weakness of their character.

Superficiality—an aberration in behavior, thinking and speaking—stems from a basic inner poverty that, for some individuals, becomes a way of life. But when we speak of superficiality, we must not get the wrong impression. Natural, unpremeditated behavior is not superficial; being natural has its own appealing beauty and integrity. Therefore, avoiding superficiality does not mean restricting spontaneity. Superficiality is quite something different; it comes not from the natural expression of intimacy but from a closed consciousness that remains unaware of compulsive, negative, and trivial behavior that goes against religious morality. In ignorant societies, some individuals think that avoiding superficiality entails a false show of sobriety and dignity. But these individuals have another behavioral aberration at least as false and compulsive as superficiality; they think that dignity requires coolness, officiousness, haughtiness and artificial refinement in behavior. However, the way to avoid superficiality is not through false dignity, but only through the moral teachings of the Qur'an.

Many people see superficiality as an inevitable fact of life. Regarding it as normal, they are not made uncomfortable by either their own or others' behavior in this regard. On the contrary, they urge this unseemly behavior on one another and feel obliged to practice the same superficial behavior that everyone else does. So conditioned are they in this regard that superficiality—with its ways of speaking and thinking and its particular codes of behavior—actually becomes a sort of false religion.

However, superficiality is a major behavioral aberration that prevents any individual from living a good moral life, developing a quality personality and thinking admirable thoughts. Anyone who adopts this false "Religion of Superficiality" can never practice true religious morality, even if he claims to be religious. He may claim that he is a Muslim and believes in Allah, but so long as he is not saved from this superficial sickness, he cannot practice the moral teachings of the Qur'an in any valid sense. In this regard, the Qur'an tells us about the shallow and superficial moral understanding of a group of

individuals: a group of Bedouins who lived in the time of the Prophet Muhammad (saas). The following chapters will examine the superficial behavior and way of thinking of these Bedouins in the light of the Qur'an. Allah reveals that they were different from real Muslims and that faith had not really taken root in their hearts:

The desert Arabs say, "We believe." Say: "You do not believe." Say rather, "We have become Muslim," for faith has not yet entered into your hearts. (Surat al-Hujurat: 14)

True Muslims who fashion their behavior purely according to the moral teachings of the Qur'an avoid shallow behavior and superficial thinking because they lead a moral life that Allah has chosen for them and that is most befitting their nature. Everything they do, say and think reflects their depth of noble spirit. Muslims judge everything on the basis of the Qur'an and, for this reason,—by relying on what Allah reveals in the Qur'an—they are keenly able to discern superficiality. Individuals who live a superficial life see no great danger in it. And as long as they think that superficiality is a fact of life, they cannot become aware of the harm it does them. Yet superficiality is a debased and blemished culture, totally removed from the morality and understanding of the Qur'an; and it prevents an individual from living the life of a Muslim.

Some people call themselves religious, even though they are far removed from practicing religious morality. This book examines every aspect of the debased culture into which these people have fallen—and offers a solution.

Never forget, those who live debased by superficiality are still responsible for their lives. Such people who live far from the Qur'an and the subtleties of its moral teaching, pursuing superficial ideals, do not consider that they will be held accountable for their lives. And when they see the angels of death coming to take their souls, they will awaken up to the profound error that they have been living. But this awakening comes too late. This is because the purpose of human creation is for them to live their lives practicing a morality that is pleasing to Allah, and the worst possible time for them to realize that purpose is at the moment of death when this life is about to be left behind.

Allah tells us of the reward in the world to come that awaits those who do not renounce superficiality in this world and fail to submit to the true moral teachings of the Qur'an:

Those who did evil used to laugh at those who believed. When they passed by them, they would wink at one another. When they returned to their families, they would make a joke of them. When they saw them, they would say, "Those people are misguided." But they were not sent as guardians over them. So today those who believe are laughing at the disbelievers, on couches, gazing in wonder. Have the disbelievers been rewarded for what they did? (Surat al-Mutaffifin: 29-36)

SUPERFICIAL People Live Lives far Removed from the Purposes of Creation

A Muslim realizes the beauty of the morality pleasing to Allah and appropriate to Paradise, and aims to live by it. However, some people are unaware of such a goal. They do not feel the inner desire to attain the moral qualities pleasing to Allah. They think it's enough if they attain a level of morality and personal qualities generally acceptable to others, that will let them survive in this world, keep them from being lonely, establish friendships and reach the worldly goals they desire. Allah has revealed the kind of moral behavior that pleases Him; but these people's narrow goals prevent them from caring about trying to win Allah's favor and mercy and attain Paradise. They prefer to be among those who strive for the ordinary, the mediocre. Worldly goals are enough for them.

However, the basic purpose of human creation is quite different, and of a higher order than these worldly ambitions. Allah reveals us in the Qur'an what this purpose is: “[He] **created death and life to test which of you is best in action . . .**” (Surat al-Mulk: 2). In another verse, He asks this question of those who are unaware of this purpose and choose to live a shallow, superficial life:

Did you suppose that We created you for amusement and that you would not return to Us?
(Surat al-Muminun: 115)

During their time of testing in this world, humans are responsible for seeking Allah's favor in everything they think and do, acting according to their conscience, leading a good moral life and doing good deeds. In spite of this evident truth, as we said earlier, many live without regard for the purpose of creation and establish other superficial goals for themselves. Though these goals differ in every culture and segment of society, none of them in fact is directed purely toward serving Allah and winning His favor.

They want to graduate from good schools, attend the university of their choice, have good marriages with beautiful healthy children, endow their children with a good future, rise to high positions in their career, make good investments, buy a comfortable house, a late-model car and a summer home, have fashionable clothes for themselves and their children, and travel.

Most superficial people live for these goals only. But none of them is the purpose for which humans find themselves in this world. And these worldly things should not be made into goals or ideals; each one is merely a means to an end. Clearly, a person is in this world not to graduate from a good school or to rise in his or her career. Of course, these things are all blessings from Allah and there is no harm in enjoying them. But in the pursuit of these temporary goals, it is a mistake for anyone to disregard Allah and the Hereafter. It is also commendable to be knowledgeable and have a good education, however it's not the goal of life to become an intellectual hoping to please others, while disregarding Allah and the life to come. In the Qur'an, Allah tells us that this is not the purpose of His creation:

We did not create heaven and Earth and everything in between them as a game. If We had desired to have some amusement, We would have derived it from Our Presence, but We did not do that. (Surat al-Anbiya': 16-17)

The world is not a place of games and entertainment, but an arena in which to serve Allah and work toward the Hereafter. The ideals of those who cannot grasp this truth are so trivial and fleeting that, even if they attained all their worldly goals, they would realize their loss when the angels of death came for them. Imagine a person who has become an expert in his field and become a world-famous professor. He has children and grandchildren; he has bequeathed them a good standard of living. But he has disregarded Allah and not lived the kind of moral life that pleases Him. Such a person may have worked hard for years, but he has nothing that counts toward the world to come, where he will live forever.

As pointed out in the Qur'an, such a person has left behind everything that is good: **“. . . You dissipated the good things you had in your worldly life and enjoyed yourself in it. . . .”** (Surat al-Ahqaf: 20). Compared to eternity, the 60 or perhaps 70 years that he has lived are of no value. The Prophet (saas) describes the folly of such people:

“He is the man of wisdom and of consciousness who makes his lower self a slave [to Allah] and engages in good deeds for the life after death. The one who fails to prevail over his lower self is the man who fails to guard his lower self from the prohibited deeds. And then he asks for forgiveness from Allah.” (Ibn Majah)

Those who persist in this error see the world too simply: only as a place where they can fulfill their desires and passions. As they live to satisfy their egos, they have no inclination to become esteemed, build a strong faith or possess the superior moral qualities that prophets had. They have no real desire to be closer to Allah and, as a result, their behavior doesn't display the maturity and moderation of a Muslim nor the nobility that arises from these qualities. Rather, they seem totally unaware of Allah's existence and the closeness of death. They disregard the fact that Allah sees them and knows what they are doing. However, no matter where one glances, he sees evidence of Allah's existence.

Clearly, everything that exists has been created by Allah's infinite power. A person needs only to consider the workings of his own body in order to arrive at faith. As revealed in the Qur'an, Allah has given humans “the best of forms” endowing their bodies with many excellent systems. To come to faith, it is enough for a person to gaze up into the heavens. In the Qur'an, Allah says:

Have they not looked at the sky above them: how We structured it and made it beautiful and how there are no fissures in it? And the Earth: how We stretched it out and cast firmly embedded mountains onto it and caused luxuriant plants of every kind to grow in it, an instruction and a reminder for every penitent human being. And We sent down blessed water from the sky and made gardens grow by it and grain for harvesting and soaring date-palms with layered spathes, as provision for Our servants; by it We brought a dead land to life. That is how the Emergence will take place. (Surah Qaf: 6-11)

From the cells that make up our bodies to the planets in the universe, everything proclaims the supreme power of Allah. He is the Lord and Creator of the heavens and the Earth and everything in between. No matter where we turn our gaze, we see His works. An ant walking over the ground, a bird flying through the air, each day's sunrise, sweet-smelling flowers, a huge ship sailing on the sea, gently falling rain—all these things announce the existence of Allah the Almighty.

Most shallow minds perceive this marvelous, perfect creation that prevails the whole universe, but they do not use their consciences to ponder deeply about it. They never ask who created the delicate balances that maintain every aspect of the universe, the flawless interrelation of its systems, the countless blessings of good things around them. They never even ask who created them or for what purpose everything was created. As revealed in the Qur'an:

How many signs there are in the heavens and Earth! Yet they pass them by, turning away from them. (Surah Yusuf: 105)

They disregard the fact that Allah in His infinite power and wisdom created everything, both animate and inanimate, in the universe. If they considered these things, they would realize that they are responsible for living the kind of moral life that is pleasing to Him. But instead, they prefer to live in their own superficial worlds striving for ordinary and transient goals.

However, every human has been created to be Allah's servant. To disregard this basic purpose and seek other ideals leads people to a debased and superficial way of life. Allah has created humans so that they can become superior and noble only if they serve Him. We are told in the Qur'an that Allah created human beings, that He knows what is good for them and what will bring them honor and respect: **"Does He Who created not then know? . . . "** (Surat al-Mulk: 14). Therefore, Allah has chosen for humans the religion of Islam as the way of life most befitting their nature. Allah reveals this truth in the Qur'an:

So set your face firmly towards the Religion, as a pure natural believer, Allah's natural pattern on which He made humanity. There is no changing Allah's creation. That is the true Religion but most people do not know it. (Surat ar-Rum: 30)

Elsewhere in the Qur'an, Allah reveals that He is pleased with the religion of Islam for His servants:

. . . Today I have perfected your religion for you and completed My blessing upon you and I am pleased with Islam as a religion for you. . . (Surat al-Ma'ida: 3)

Religion teaches humans the kind of moral behavior that pleases Allah. Every other way of life conflicts with human creation. This truth lies at the root of the superficiality of those who embrace different ideals and live apart from religious morality. They cast aside the way of life that Allah has chosen for them and live according to the shallowness of their own minds. Such individuals cannot

rescue themselves from superficiality or from the debased culture that then inevitably reflects in their thoughts and behavior. Even if they try to present themselves as apart from this culture with various mind games and false personalities, it will be of no use because superficiality can never be hidden, no matter what personality one pretends. This debased attitude is unavoidably reflected in a person's conversation, behavior and, most importantly, in his way of thinking. This is no ordinary behavioral aberration that can be hidden and covered up, as is usually believed.

Therefore, anyone who fears Allah and is careful to avoid Hell must not try to deceive himself or those around him by pretending to be religious, but live an authentically religious life. Even if being religious conflicts with a person's ego and with worldly gain, he must never compromise on the moral teachings of the Qur'an.

Superficiality: A Common Culture of Ignorance

Those who rightly understand the greatness of Allah will behave with moral rectitude in everything they do. But superficiality distances a person completely from the sort of life that accords with the Qur'an. The Prophet (saas) says, *"Wherever indecency and vile language enters becomes indecent"* (Tirmidhi Hadiths). These words warn us that baseness and chaos rule the life of anyone in such an unaware spiritual state. The place where he lives devolves into an unhappy environment open to tension and confusion and where issues can in no way be resolved. But here, an important characteristic of superficiality comes to light: It is not wholly one-sided. Individuals who must endure the base culture of superficial people are also a part of their same unaware mindset. Members of the Religions of Superficiality immediately recognize one another and urge one another to distance themselves from the moral teachings of the Qur'an. In effect, they practically call one another to the Fire. Allah reveals this danger in the Qur'an:

. . . Such people call you to the Fire whereas Allah calls you, with His permission, to the Garden and forgiveness. He makes His signs clear to people so that hopefully they will pay heed. (Surat al-Baqara: 221)

In other verses, Allah reveals how people can lead one another astray:

Say: "Can any of your partner-deities guide to the truth?" Say: "Allah guides to the truth. Who has more right to be followed—He Who guides to the truth, or he who cannot guide unless he is guided? What is the matter with you? How do you reach your judgment?" Most of them follow nothing but conjecture. Conjecture is of no use whatsoever against the truth. Allah most certainly knows what they are doing. (Surah Yunus: 35-36)

If you obeyed most of those on Earth, they would misguide you from Allah's way. They follow nothing but conjecture. They are only guessing. (Surat al-An'am: 116)

As in most other ways, those with weak faith and sick hearts exert a negative influence on others to live by superficiality. However, it must be emphasized that these people are in fact conscious of the superficiality they live out. They very well differentiate those with whom they could never share such a debased culture. They know that by means of this debased culture, it is impossible to form a relationship with genuine Muslims. For this reason, when they come into contact with Muslims, they try their utmost to conceal their own trivial tendencies. They do not only try to hide themselves from Muslims, but also from others who seem superficial to a lesser extent. For example, such an employee may try to show his boss that he has some depth and quality to his character.

Such people display a very different personality in the company of their superficial friends. They have a distinctive way of sitting and standing; they choose different terms when they speak and a different tone of voice, assume different body language, and interpret happenings quite differently. When such a person meets public officials, he may sometimes change his personality by such lavish demonstrations of respect to the point that he becomes unrecognizable.

In the same way, such a person, who can easily engage in a superficial conversation with someone who shares his way of thinking, would avoid behaving this way when he is with devout Muslims whose moral character he recognizes. He would avoid the shallow expressions of this culture, pointless and unhelpful chitchat, and making his points with exaggerated facial expressions. However his sudden change reveals a very important fact apart from his basic superficiality he actually lives in his soul. That is, these people deliberately and willingly choose their superficial culture and choose to live in the unaware environment it creates. In this matter they shroud their consciences and feel no sense of discomfort, even though they know that Allah sees what they have become by acting as this debased culture demands, and that He witnesses their every moment.

However, this is a weak culture that one can easily get free of, with a genuine intention. A person who decides to live only the moral life of a Muslim can decisively abandon the unawareness that this culture brings. By embracing moral qualities pleasing to Allah and appropriate for life in the next world, a person can go on living as a sincere Muslim with a good moral character. He can stand as an example for others in this regard and may expect a fine reward from Allah.

THE CAUSES OF SUPERFICIALITY

The superficiality that some people display without feeling any discomfort in their consciences can be defined as a blemished, debased, degenerated culture of ignorance. Examining the behavior and thought patterns of the people who live within this debased culture, we see the serious deficiencies in their faith. Their childhood upbringing, their current environment, and the people they associate with strongly influence their adopting this debased superficiality. Taken altogether, these elements comprise a kind of culture that no sincere Muslim can ever adopt. This system shamelessly practices types of humiliating behavior unbefitting human nature and keeps its adherents from living the noble, honorable and respected life envisioned in the Qur'an. The following pages will examine why such people adopt this false Religion of Superficiality and some of the influences that keep them from living the good moral life that Allah commands.

Forgetting Allah and Favoring Others Draws People into Superficiality

As stated at the beginning of this book, the word *superficiality* makes most people imagine individuals who cannot speak compellingly, with weak personalities, insincere smiles and awkward behavior. However, superficiality has a far wider range. It is not only crude and insincere, but basically a moral aberration that arises when a person does not appreciate the power of Allah as he should. Therefore, anyone with such a character needs not behave in such an absurdly exaggerated manner.

The fear of losing the esteem of others, preferring to gain their affection rather than the pleasure, love, and assistance of Allah leads an individual to act superficially. Besides, when confronted by certain things that happen to him, this individual becomes panic-stricken. He complains, becomes angry, and reacts superficially because he is unmindful that these events are under Allah's control. These are all indications of superficiality.

But some people, unaware of this, think that superficiality has nothing to do with them and see themselves removed from such danger. It may lead them into error that they are careful to practice certain rules of etiquette. However, a person who acts politely in certain situations may actually be living superficiality, because superficiality is not limited to behavioral aberrations.

For example, one who attaches too much importance to decorum politeness may believe that certain events happen by chance, the others he is dealing with are separate and independent of Allah (surely Allah is beyond that) and act according to their own wills. He may never act without first considering what others may think—a way of thinking that does not justly appreciate Allah, and which is reflected by the actions, reactions and conversations of this individual. Someone unaware of the Qur'an's moral teachings may regard this behavior as wholly normal. But anyone who claims he is not superficial but who gets angry, weeps, and even becomes depressed for days when something undesired happens has a very superficial character and cannot understand the depth of faith as described in the

Qur'an. A true Muslim knows that behind this behavior lies shallowness with regard to religion. Someone who knows Allah as he ought, knows the Qur'an and lives according to it, would never fall into such a state. Such untrusting behavior may indicate that an individual looks at events as separate forces, apart from Allah (surely Allah is beyond that), and does not realize that Allah is in control of everything.

As explicitly stated in the Qur'an, Allah is the One and Only god and He has infinite power:

Your god is One God. There is no god but Him, the All-Merciful, the Most Merciful. (Surat al-Baqara: 163)

Everything, animate and inanimate, exists according to His will. Every human must understand this truth and consider it carefully. To think otherwise and to associate His creations with Him is a great sin as revealed in the Qur'an:

Allah does not forgive anything being associated with Him but He forgives whoever He wills for anything other than that. Anyone who associates something with Allah has committed a terrible crime. (Surat an-Nisa': 48)

When we look into the Qur'an, we see that believing otherwise is one of the roots of superficiality in action and attitude. To act with the idea that any other being has the attributes of Allah brings with it artificiality in behavior, unnecessary refinement of manners, and meanness. Such an individual is given to anger, always pursuing small gains, trying to make others feel sorry for him or exaggerating his own importance. Having superior personal and moral qualities is characteristic of Muslims with nobility of spirit, who do not desire the things of this world and, in everything they do and think, turn only to Allah.

For example, if a person who is very knowledgeable assumes that his knowledge comes only from himself, his mind is superficial. This means that he has forgotten that the real possessor of all knowledge is Allah, that Allah has given him all the knowledge he has and can take it away whenever He wishes. Also, such a person does not consider that everyone, including himself, is absolutely helpless before Allah.

Another aspect of superficial thinking is that the ignorant admire such people. Their admiration is directed not only to knowledgeable individuals, but also toward attractive people, talented artists, sports figures and the wealthy. However, it is Allah Who has given them their beauty, talent, intelligence, and success. For example, when considering a person with material wealth, the important thing is not what he owns, but to realize he is a helpless servant of Allah.

Those with superficial understanding look to such people for help, forgetting that Allah is the ultimate possessor of all things, and feel an exaggerated and insincere sense of respect for these people. They ignore this truth that Allah reveals in the Qur'an:

. . . Those you worship besides Allah have no power to provide for you. So seek your provision from Allah and worship Him and give thanks to Him . . . (Surat al-'Ankabut: 17)

We are told in another verse that some individuals do not realize that Allah has given them everything they possess:

When harm touches man he calls on Us. Then when We grant him a blessing from Us he says, “I have only been given this because of my knowledge.” In fact it is a trial but most of them do not know it. (Surat az-Zumar: 49)

One striking example of such a debased character provided in the Qur’an is a man called Qarun, to whom Allah gave great wealth. But instead of thanking Him, Qarun became avaricious:

Qarun was one of the people of Musa but he lorded it over them. We gave him treasures, the keys alone to which were a heavy weight for a party of strong men . . . (Surat al-Qasas: 76)

As this verse goes on to say, his people warned him about this:

. . . his people said to him, “Do not gloat. Allah does not love people who gloat.” (Surat al-Qasas: 76)

But despite these warnings, he became spoiled by the gifts given to him and began to think that he deserved them:

. . . “I have only been given it because of knowledge I have . . .” (Surat al-Qasas: 78)

From this verse, we can understand that Qarun ignored Allah’s generosity. In his arrogance, he claimed that his wealth came from his own abilities. Qarun’s superficiality can be seen in his avarice, overindulgence and from his own words. Among Qarun’s acquaintances, there were similar individuals who disregarded Allah, ignored the Afterlife and concentrated on this world. As revealed in the Qur’an, Qarun **“ . . . went out among his people in his finery . . . ”** (Surat al-Qasas: 79). Allah tells us about the state of some of these individuals:

. . . Those who desired the life of this world said, “Oh! If only we had the same as Qarun has been given! What immense good fortune he possesses.” (Surat al-Qasas: 79)

From this verse, we learn that these people admired Qarun. We can tell from their manner that they had a shallow way of thinking. We are told in another verse that devout, Allah-fearing and noble-spirited Muslims behave differently; they warn such ignorant people and remind them of the truth:

But those who had been given knowledge said, “Woe to you! Allah’s reward is better for those who believe and act rightly. But only the steadfast will obtain it . . . ” (Surat al-Qasas: 80)

But since superficiality prevents people from thinking deeply and seriously, these people were unaware of their own state as well as Qarun's, right up until Qarun received from Allah the torment he deserved:

We caused the Earth to swallow up both him and his house. There was no group to come to his aid, besides Allah, and he was not someone who is helped. Those who had longed to take his place the day before woke up saying, "Allah expands the provision of any of His servants He wills or restricts it. If Allah had not shown great kindness to us, we would have been swallowed up as well. Ah! Truly the disbelievers are not successful." (Surat al-Qasas: 81-82)

From these examples, we can see that the correct course of action is to acknowledge that Allah alone has all intelligence, ability, wealth and knowledge, that His wisdom is infinite; and to praise and exalt Him for His wonderful manifestations in human beings. The Qur'an tells us that nobility among people lies solely in godliness:

... The noblest among you in Allah's sight is the one with the most taqwa [godliness, fear of Allah] ... (Surat al-Hujurat: 13)

Muslims feel respect and appreciation for people only because of the good moral character they manifest. They know that only the absolute power of Allah is to be revered, that they can expect help from Him alone. This truth is revealed in the Qur'an:

They do not measure Allah with His true measure. Allah is All-Strong, Almighty. (Surat al-Hajj: 74)

Because deniers are immersed in superficial culture, they have a shallow way of thinking. They overestimate some individuals but cannot appreciate the substantial intelligence and profound ideas of others. Throughout history they have never appreciated the value of people with moral nobility, foremost the prophets. In their resentment, they have even been hateful and extremely aggressive to these blessed individuals for calling them to practice religious morality. In the Qur'an, Allah reveals the violence of their rejection:

They said, "Shu'ayb, We do not understand much of what you say and we see you are weak among us. Were it not for your clan, we would have stoned you. We do not hold you in high esteem!" (Surah Hud: 91)

They deferred to some individuals and gave them esteem they did not deserve. Yet they did not appreciate the distinctive qualities, noble personality, faithfulness and moral character of the prophet Shu'ayb (as) whom Allah loved and chose. They were just influenced and intimidated by those close to

him. Because of the depravity of their denial, these people preferred to live in the debased culture of superficiality, completely divorced from moral goodness and humanity.

They Live a Life of Unawareness

The word *unawareness* refers to those who forget our Lord's existence, disregard the realities of death and the Hereafter, give themselves over to worldly desires and passions and as a result, do not obey Allah's sublime commands. We are told in the Qur'an that these people are content to evaluate things by their external appearance:

**They know an outward aspect of the life of this world but are heedless of the Hereafter.
(Surat ar-Rum: 7)**

They do not consider that Allah has absolute sovereignty over all matters. A shallow way of looking at the world has become a culture for them, largely due to deficiencies in their faith. They cannot properly conceive of Allah's infinite power and sovereignty; and this failure of theirs has endowed them with an unbecoming boldness to live in this culture.

If an individual understands that Allah sees him every moment, is aware of what he does and what he thinks, and that all this is recorded in his name in Allah's presence, then fear of Allah will lead him to practice the moral teachings of the Qur'an. This will give him a special behavior and way of thinking that are easily recognized. This is a quality far removed from superficiality; it is a natural purity that resides in no culture apart from the morality of the Qur'an; and is seen in the dignity, penitence, faithfulness and conscience of the prophets. In this morality there is a definite heedfulness and awareness that leads an individual to be aware every moment of the existence of Allah and the Hereafter, and to seek His pleasure in everything he does. In every word he utters, he knows he is in Allah's presence, and he lives with this idea constantly in his mind. Such a person could not possibly (unless Allah wills the contrary) demonstrate a superficial personality's manners and expressions. He will take great pains to make sure that his choices, facial expressions, and tone of voice befit the dignity of a Muslim.

But a person lacking this awareness disregards the existence of Allah and the Hereafter for the most part of his daily life. Very often, he is literally hypnotized by his contact with others, the variety of events that happen to him, and the countless details that confront him. It never occurs to him that Allah has created these things as tests and that Allah can easily create all these details. On the contrary, he disregards Allah and concentrates merely on the details. He believes that everything that happens in his life is the result of chance, under no one's control. As a result of these unaware ideas, he thinks that human beings are absolute entities, and that their reactions result from a chain of chance occurrences. Therefore, he adjusts all his expressions, reactions, way of life and future plans in favor of his relationships with others.

A person unaware of Allah's existence and infinite power, or who is aware but sees nothing wrong with the false religion of superficiality, cannot truthfully say that he fears Allah. So it seldom occurs to him that he should make preparations for the next life. He does not hold the ideal of developing his personality and raising his morality to a level that will please Allah and be worthy of Paradise.

An Example from the Qur'an of a Person with Superficial Ideals: The Israelites who Followed Samaritan

Allah tells in the Qur'an about the general behavior of the peoples addressed by the prophets with regard to the Divine judgments. Many of their superior moral qualities are underscored, such as their patience, determination in faith and their trust and discernment in the face of the difficulties brought against them while they were conveying the message. In one story about the Prophet Musa (as) teaching the Israelites about the religion of Allah, the Qur'an mentions a person called Samaritan who, when Musa (as) was not among the people, seized the opportunity to incite spiritual corruption among them and urge them to worship idols. He then tried to distance them from their faith.

We are told in the Qur'an that Musa (as) left his people and went up to Mount Sinai to receive a revelation from Allah:

"Why have you hurried on ahead of your people, Musa?" He [Musa] said, "They are following in my tracks. I have hurried on ahead to You, my Lord, to gain Your good pleasure." (Surah Ta Ha: 83-84)

The people did not have the Prophet Musa (as) to direct them. Samaritan seized the opportunity; the people were weak in their faith and open to suggestion, and he led them astray. They fell into strife and contention.

He [Allah] said, "We tried your people after you left and the Samaritan has misguided them." (Surah Ta Ha: 85)

While Musa (as) was receiving the revelation, he realized that his people had ceased following him. Returning to them, he reminded them of the world to come and Allah's promises to those with faith. Then he told them about the great trouble that would befall those who lost their faith in Allah's promises and the strife that would overtake them:

Musa returned to his people in anger and great sorrow. He said, “My people, did not your Lord make you a handsome promise? Did the fulfillment of the contract seem too long to you or did you want to unleash your Lord’s anger upon yourselves, so you broke your promise to me?” (Surah Ta Ha: 86)

At this, those who had departed from the truth by heeding Samaritan’s twisted incitements described what had happened after the departure of the Prophet Musa (as):

They said, “We did not break our promise to you of our own volition. But we were weighed down with the heavy loads of the people’s jewelry and we threw them in, for that is what the Samaritan did.” (Surah Ta Ha: 87)

As plainly said in this verse, Samaritan urged the people to throw their jewelry into the fire, throwing his own into the flames to prove that he was sincere. He persuaded the people with this insidious ploy. Those who were weak in faith or willpower were open to his rebellious suggestions; their moral character made them susceptible to abandoning the way of Allah, and they did not hesitate to do what Samaritan told them to. Despite the truths they had learned from Musa (as) and the miracles he had performed, they had no compunction in following the perverse suggestions of one of their own who had no power or authority. Then, using those molten ornaments, Samaritan made a statue of a calf. After that, he depicted this calf as (Allah forbid) their true deity. At the same time, in order to destroy the influence of Musa (as) over the people, he began to make some negative insinuations about him:

Then he produced a calf for them, a physical form which made a lowing sound. So they said, “This is your deity—and Musa’s deity as well, but he forgot.” (Surah Ta Ha: 88)

Allah reveals in the Qur’an that the idol made by Samaritan had no power; it had no strength or will to speak to them, to answer their questions or to do anything good or evil. But the people pretended not to recognize these plain facts and heeded Samaritan’s call:

Could they not see that it did not reply to them and that it possessed no power to either harm or benefit them? (Surah Ta Ha: 89)

Besides Musa (as), the people also had his brother Harun (as) as a prophet among them. When Musa (as) went up Mount Sinai, he put Harun (as) in charge of them. But the people put their faith in Samaritan’s calf statue and started to worship it; they did not listen to the warnings of Harun (as), even though he told them that the statue was a trial for them and that their true god was Allah, the Israelites did not listen. Although Harun (as) was a prophet, they rebelled and refused to obey him.

Harun had earlier said to them, “My people! It is just a trial for you. Your Lord is the All-Merciful, so follow me and obey my command!” (Surah Ta Ha: 90)

Later, to gain time they offered a lame excuse, such as should never be spoken to a prophet, for the evil they had done.

They said, “We will not stop devoting ourselves to it until Musa returns to us.” (Surah Ta Ha: 91)

In their ignorance and lack of intelligence, they imputed power to this statue that had been crafted before their own eyes and began to bow down to it. When Musa (as) came down from Mount Sinai and rejoined his people, he asked, “. . . **What do you think you were doing, Samaritan?**” (Surah Taha: 95). Samaritan replied, “. . . **I saw what they did not see. So I gathered up a handful from the messenger’s footprints and threw it in. That is what my inner self urged me to do**” (Surah Ta Ha: 96).

Samaritan knew that some among the Israelites did not have the high level of consciousness that true religion gives and were basically out for their own gain. He also knew that they were not about to give up their worldly desires and he could take advantage of these weaknesses. Finding his opportunity in the absence of the prophet, he established a way to lead them back to their idolatrous lives. As we can deduce from his words **“I saw what they did not see,”** he presented himself as having special abilities; he wanted to satisfy his own passion for rank and position. But those who did what Samaritan said, instead of seeking Allah’s favor and obeying the prophet, accommodated themselves to the direction of an opportunist with worldly aspirations. Such people have small goals and basic ideals. Their morality is such that they take no pleasure in living as they should to win Allah’s favor. And at the least suggestion of worldly gain, they lose their faith.

Instead of following their prophet and waiting faithfully for the revelation of Allah, the Israelites followed the fabrications of some ill-intentioned individual and chose to pursue transient worldly gain. As we are told in the Qur’an, they did not obey Harun (as) but acted as unbelievers do toward the prophets:

Say, “Obey Allah and the messenger.” Then if they turn away, Allah does not love the unbelievers. (Surah Al ‘Imran: 32)

As you can see, those who pursue simple gains with no view to the Hereafter can be deceived with very superficial logic. It is no effort for them to abandon their faith. Their weak wills can be broken by the slightest suggestion. They can immediately fall into despair and be persuaded by nonsense. Their faith, not founded on the fear of Allah or a belief in the world to come, can be quickly shattered. Material things that they can see with their eyes seem more real to them than the endless blessings promised to them in the life to come. However, the blessings of Paradise that Allah has promised in the Hereafter will (Allah willing) keep their value and their beauty for eternity. About the perfect blessings of Paradise, the following is revealed in the Qur’an:

The people who guard against evil will have Gardens of Delight with their Lord. (Surat al-Qalam: 34)

Some people think that death is remote for them; they make the mistake of laying more importance on pursuing the simple material gains and worldly targets they set for themselves. But contrary to what they think, the reality of life in this world and its material goods are deceptive: “. . . **The life of this world is just the enjoyment of delusion**” (Surah Al ‘Imran: 185). In another verse, Allah describes the real nature of these material goods that are regarded as being so valuable. “. . . **Say, ‘The enjoyment of this world is very brief. The Hereafter is better for those who guard against evil . . .’**” (Surat an-Nisa’: 77).

Instead of being subject to Musa (as), the people obeyed someone like Samaritan who deceived them with material things and false words. They listened to him, hoping to make some small gain in their Earthly lives. Because of this, they fell into a state of humiliation while still in this world. Allah intends every story in the Qur’an to teach and advise those of pure minds. This story has served as a reminder of such advice for every individual from the time of Musa (as) to the present.

In this way We give you news of what has gone before and We have given you a reminder direct from Us. (Surah Ta Ha: 99)

There is instruction in their stories for people of intelligence . . . (Surah Yusuf: 111)

Anyone who takes this advice will never exchange his faith in Allah for some valueless worldly gain. He would never want to damage his faith by pursuing shallow goals or do anything that would cause him to lose the Paradise of the world to come. He determines his ideals with a view to please Allah and recoils from anything that He would not approve of. He does not adopt a way of life or a culture that would distance him from the life of Paradise. He would strenuously avoid it and wouldn’t want his friends and acquaintances to live in this way either. He would be afraid of demonstrating any behavior that showed an ignorant moral character or taking the responsibility for the negative effect such behavior might have on others. As we see in the moral character of Musa (as), he makes every effort for the faith and godliness of others as well. He does not want to abandon them mired in the debased and idolatrous culture of superficiality.

There is No Place in Their Lives for High Ideals

Muslims have great hopes for the Hereafter. The most important of these is the desire to enter the Paradise that Allah has prepared for the believers. But chief of all these hopes is that Allah will be pleased with them:

Allah has promised the men and women of the believers Gardens with rivers flowing under them, remaining in them timelessly, forever, and fine dwellings in the Gardens of Eden. And Allah's good pleasure is even greater . . . (Surat at-Tawba: 72)

Paradise abounds in all the blessings that the heart desires. It is the abode of endless delights where any individual who practices the morality of the Qur'an desires passionately to live and expends every effort to attain. Allah tells us in the Qur'an that the most important thing for a believer is to please Him, Whose power is infinite. With this goal in mind, a Muslim improves his moral character every moment and sets his target higher every day so that he can develop his strength of character. For this reason, a sincere Muslim never regards his development as sufficient. He never gives up trying to develop himself and change any of those personality traits, habits and behavior that he regards as wanting. He is not content to limit his personality development by worldly comparisons. He has the will to improve his character every moment, and hopes to attain the maturity pleasing to Allah. He develops himself not by worldly measures but by the measure of Paradise, and prepares himself in the hopes that he will live among people with the kind of superior morality that Allah has been pleased to award the prophets. For this reason, his goal is always high.

However, as said earlier, those unaware individuals whose faith in Allah and the Hereafter is weak usually have their hopes squeezed within four walls. Anyone living in such a culture cannot easily share the high ideals of a Muslim. Such a person's hopes are always limited by this world; he wants a nice house, a good job and family environment and standard of living. Segments of the population want only to attain these classic goals, and they work hard all their lives to attain them.

Someone who lives superficially without a good moral character may attain some or even all of these goals. Some people don't even hesitate to display the wickedness in their hearts in order to attain those. For example, a person thinking only of himself and his loved ones may act selfishly and meanly to please them. He does not think about winning Allah's favor; it is enough for him to work to satisfy his desires for worldly gain. He may never consider what return he will receive in the next world for the gains he has made in this one. However, a gain that satisfies a person's Earthly desires may cause him eternal misery in the world to come.

Anyone who ignores the infinite blessings that Allah will give to his faithful servants in the next world and limits himself to transient material satisfactions of this world is practically blind to reality. In the Qur'an, Allah tells us that the gains of this world are passing: **“ . . . They rejoice in the life of this world. Yet the life of this world, compared to the Hereafter, is only fleeting enjoyment”** (Surat ar-Ra'd: 26). In another verse, He describes such individuals as: **“... the people who trade the Hereafter for this world”** (Surat al-Baqara: 86). In these words, this verse gives an important indication of how limited these people's ideals are. They ignore the infinite blessings of Paradise that Allah has prepared for His faithful servants, preferring to be content with this world's very short-lived material goods. This choice draws them into the debased culture of superficiality, to live in a shallow culture with limited ideals and as humans of low quality.

However, no one will escape the death that draws nearer and nearer. It is a great mistake to knowingly disregard the next life and limit one's goals only to his own small world. Such a way of thinking is the choice of shallow-minded individuals who cannot see the plainest facts.

In determining his worldly hopes and ideals, a person must bear in mind that one day, somewhere, he will come face to face with death. When that day comes, all his worldly plans and ideals he strove to realize will mean nothing any more. Entering the next life, he will leave everything behind. Allah tells us that, when the time of death comes, an individual will come into His presence all alone, with nothing he possessed in this world:

You have come to Us all alone just as We created you at first, leaving behind you everything We bestowed on you . . . (Surat al-An'am: 94)

For this reason, the most reasonable and right thing for a person to do is think like a Muslim and determine his Earthly ideals as a Muslim does. This is the only way a person can be saved from shallow-mindedness and from setting superficial worldly goals.

How People are Trained and Educated into This Culture

The superficial cues people take from their family environments, close friendships and social surroundings exert an important influence on the culture they live in. The process of education begins in the family and continues in school. The manner of thinking and behaving they acquire from people they associate with has a lifelong influence. If an individual raised in an ignorant society has not adopted the moral teachings of the Qur'an, the ill character acquired from his environment will remain unchanged.

Childhood observations play an important role in the acquisition of character. The culture a child learns from parents, relatives and friends deeply affects him. He remembers the good and bad things he observed in those around him during those years. Later, at a certain point, he imitates their behavior, reacting in the same way to similar occurrences and adopting the same expressions and manners. Up to a certain age, his likings, habits and behavior copy what he observes in others. Even if he is to be taught some new, useful, improved behavior, he may hesitate to follow such advice, claiming that it is not what he has learned from his mother, father or anyone else whose culture he has adopted.

Allah tells us in the Qur'an that some ignorant people insist on following the old practices of their ancestors:

They said, "No, but this is what we found our fathers doing." (Surat ash-Shu'ara': 74)

When they are told, "Follow what Allah has sent down to you," they say, "We are following what we found our fathers doing . . . " (Surat al-Baqara: 170)

However, when a person reaches the age where he is able to distinguish right from wrong and consciously adopts the Qur'an as his guide, he will realize he is surrounded by a wicked, debased culture. With his fear of Allah and his moral understanding, he cannot fit into such a culture. He could never reflect this culture in his actions and understanding and for this reason, rejects being a part of it.

No matter under what conditions he has been brought up, his level of education or his physical appearance, a sincere Muslim responds with trust and gratitude to everything that Allah sends him. No matter how ignorant the culture around him, his high moral character easily raises him above it. The difference in such an individual's appearance and behavior and his noble faith and spiritual quality are noticeable immediately. The finest examples are the prophets who have lived throughout the ages. For example, though his father was a shallow and aggressive idolater, Ibrahim (as) was an honored prophet whom Allah loved, chose as His messenger and made His friend:

. . . Allah took Ibrahim as an intimate friend. (Surat an-Nisa': 125)

Ibrahim (as) never adopted the superficial culture of his society, but completely removed himself from it. He never accepted anything they told him or taught him; his personality was faithful, honorable and powerful, and he lived his life in a way so as to win Allah's favor:

"I will separate myself from you and all you call upon besides Allah and I will call upon my Lord. It may well be that, in calling on my Lord, I will not be disappointed." (Surah Maryam: 48)

Fallacious criteria that contradict the moral values contained in the Qur'an carry weight in ignorant morality. For example, a person will regard himself as having no value if he was brought up in a bad environment according to the norms of ignorance. If he lacks the wealth or fame that is seen as so vital in societies removed from religious morality, he will develop a false sense of being oppressed and inferiority complex. Because he sees himself in this light, he will not try to seek out what is good and beautiful. Because he has no faith, he seeks out what others regard as important and disregards what is valuable in Allah's sight. As a result, he becomes weak and powerless, with little strength of will or personality. He has no response to negative ideas and suggestions that come to him. It is very easy for such a person to be influenced by negativity in his environment.

Without having the ability that faith gives to distinguish between right and wrong, a personality may be weakened by wrong information, wrong suggestions and wrong directions. This results in one who is insecure in his environment, whose behavior is shallow, with no sense of self-worth. Because of his situation, he never thinks that he should trust in Allah and be steadfast in acquiring a noble moral character. On the contrary, he becomes unable to understand or practice any other morality than the one formed by this debased culture.

But anyone living according to the moral precepts of the Qur'an thanks Allah for creating him as a Muslim. He knows that it is being a Muslim, having faith, intelligence and a godly conscience that gives a person value. None of his shortcomings leads him to act in an unseemly superficial way. On the contrary, they lead him to trust in Allah, correct his faults and shortcomings as much as he can, and

behave in a way conforming to the Qur'an. Even if this person was brought up in a mean, selfish and aggressive environment, he will never react to occurrences as others do. But, as Allah says in the Qur'an, he is generous, gentle and good-natured.

. . . Those who give in times of both ease and hardship, those who control their rage and pardon other people . . . (Surah Al 'Imran: 134)

As we are told in the Qur'an, such people care for the needy in every situation. Instead of being overcome by anger, they forgive; and are humble in their demeanor. They never set themselves superficial goals; never forget the next world or develop ambitions that attach them to this one. They never exhibit the kind of moral behavior of those who pursue worldly gains with no care for winning Allah's favor. The change they attain in their character by making the Qur'an their guide enables them to abandon everything they learned in their life of ignorance.

The Example of the Prophet Musa (as) and Pharaoh

Musa (as) grew up in the Pharaoh's palace. Pharaoh wanted to present himself to his people as a deity (surely Allah is beyond that!); he inflicted a life of oppression on them under his cruel laws.

Some of Pharaoh's character traits are mentioned in the Qur'an. He was an arrogant individual who claimed to be a deity (surely Allah is beyond that):

Pharaoh said, "Council, I do not know of any other deity for you apart from me." (Surat al-Qasas: 38)

He continually exalted himself and belittled the people:

. . . he swayed his people and they succumbed to him . . . (Surat az-Zukhruf: 54)

From what is revealed in the Qur'an, we can also see that Pharaoh was mentally unbalanced. He desired power and wealth, and rejected the fact that Allah was the real Lord of his wealth. He was a tyrannical dictator who wanted to be extolled for his riches and material power.

Pharaoh called to his people, saying, "My people, does the kingdom of Egypt not belong to me? Do not all these rivers flow under my control? Do you not then see?" (Surat az-Zukhruf: 51)

Musa (as) was brought up in the house of someone with such a mindset. But he was completely different from the others because of his deep faith and awareness. He was a sincere believer with a superior moral character, and a moral understanding totally different from that of the surrounding

community. Pharaoh and other deniers lived in moral laxity; they were praised for their possessions, were arrogant, and belittled and degraded others. They were self-satisfied, heedless, and their hopes and ideals were circumscribed by this Earthly life. Musa (as), however, was far superior with his morality and noble personality. In the Qur'an, Allah calls Musa (as) a "noble messenger": **"Before them We put Pharaoh's people to the test when a noble messenger came to them"** (Surat ad-Dukhan: 17). We can see that, unlike the bad moral character of Pharaoh, unique to deniers, Musa (as) had the kind of character proper to believers; he was a noble person. [For more detailed information, see Harun Yahya's, *The Prophet Musa (as)*]

In stories related in the Qur'an about the lives of Musa (as) and other prophets, we can see that they lived among people with very different characters and beliefs. But the lives they lived and their personalities are examples of high morality, nobility and excellence. They built an indestructible wall between themselves and the ignorant cultures others lived in. With the superior awareness their faith gave them, they remained always apart from the debased culture that the majority had fallen into. Because of his conscience, as we said above, a person with faith would never accept being a part of such a culture no matter what circumstances he was brought up under. For him, living in such a way would not seem fitting. Even if he knew that he would cause consternation among his acquaintances and lose their affections, he would never allow a single thought or action of such debased culture to adulterate his character as a Muslim.

Those who live in the debased culture of ignorance may make themselves a lot of friends in their society. They may gain material means and form friendships based on profit. They may be deceived by the large numbers of people living shallow lives, and advance friendships with such people with the idea of increasing their own gain. They may think they can obtain power and respect by conforming to the majority—even if the majority is made up of those with debased moral characters. According to the Qur'an, however, this idea is totally wrong. In the following verses, Allah tells us that real excellence and nobility come from living the moral life of faithful Muslims and making friends with them:

Do those who take the unbelievers as protectors, rather than the believers, hope to find honor with them? Honor belongs entirely to Allah. (Surat an-Nisa': 139)

. . . But all honor belongs to Allah and to His messenger and the believers . . . (Surat al-Munafiqun: 8)

For this reason, a faithful Muslim would never support this kind of moral behavior, even if it meant losing all the advantages and means at his disposal. He feels no need to conform to the situation and conditions he lives in. On the contrary, he does his best to create circumstances that will be pleasing to Allah. In return for this faithful and honorable character, Allah will reward devout Muslims both in this world and the Hereafter:

Those who believe and migrate and strive in the way of Allah with their wealth and themselves have a higher rank with Allah. They are the ones who are victorious. Their Lord gives them the good news of His mercy and good pleasure and Gardens where they will enjoy everlasting delight, remaining in them timelessly, forever and ever. Truly there is an immense reward with Allah. (Surat at-Tawba: 20-22)

HOW SUPERFICIALITY MANIFESTS ITSELF

Bedouins and Their Debased Culture

In the days of the Prophet Muhammad (saas), as in every period of history, there were those whose crude and shallow minds could not understand the subtleties of religious morality. Faith had not settled into their hearts. As already said at the beginning of this book, some who adopted this religion of superficiality were the Bedouins:

The desert Arabs are more obdurate in disbelief and hypocrisy and more likely not to know the limits which Allah has sent down to His Messenger . . . (Surat at-Tawba: 97)

It is revealed in the Qur'an that the Bedouins were more given to disobedience and ignoring boundaries. Even though they personally met a blessed individual like the Prophet (saas), engaged him in conversation and heard his message, and even though they witnessed his special moral character and noble and modern demeanor, most Bedouins remained backward, crude and shallow. This could be seen in their inability to properly appreciate Allah's glory, their wrong attitudes toward religion and obedience, the way they sat and stood and how they ate—and their lack of respect toward the Prophet (saas).

In the Qur'an, Allah reveals that some Bedouins and others with the same moral character were ignorant in their behavior toward the Prophet (saas). With no subtlety of mind, courtesy, respect or love for others, these people acted in a way quite remote from the standard of morality found in the Qur'an. Allah tells us about the shallow behavior of these people, who may have been in close proximity to the Prophet (saas):

You who believe! Do not go into the Prophet's rooms except when you are invited to come and eat. Do not wait there while the food is being cooked. However, when you are called, go in, and when you have eaten, disperse, not remaining there to chat with one another. Doing that causes annoyance to the Prophet though he is too reticent to tell you so. But Allah is not reticent with the truth . . . (Surat al-Ahzab: 53)

As said earlier, these people could not ponder subtle matters. For example, some called out to the Prophet (saas) from outside his private quarters. They interrupted him and raised their voices during conversations with him. In the Qur'an, Allah warned them about this behavior:

As for those who call out to you from outside your private quarters, most of them do not use their intellect. If they had only been patient until you came out to them, it would have been better for them . . . (Surat al-Hujurat: 4-5)

Because their crude minds could not appreciate his superior moral character, high sense of conscience, patience and tolerance, they knew nothing of etiquette or respect. And they were not aware of what a great blessing it was to live at the same time as a blessed prophet loved and chosen by Allah, to see him and to know him.

Allah sent down a revelation about the shallow behavior of these people who raised their voices and interrupted conversations. He revealed that their good deeds would count for nothing:

You who believe! Do not put yourselves forward in front of Allah and of His Messenger; and have fear of Allah. Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. You who believe! Do not raise your voices above the voice of the Prophet and do not be as loud when speaking to him as you are when speaking to one another, lest your actions should come to nothing without your realizing it. (Surat al-Hujurat: 1-2)

As you see, this verse is addressed to those who have faith. These people once lived in the vicinity of the Prophet (saas), could enter his house and engage in conversation with him. In these verses, Allah points out that people of shallow character may live among believers, but have no real sense of religious morality. They feel no real love or respect in their hearts for those who have faith.

This lack of respect could never be observed in devout believers. They fear Allah and speak in a way that makes others feel comfortable. Their fear of Allah leads them to be in a highness of character mastered by sincerity and modesty. For this reason, believers speak plainly and clearly. They say openly what they think and never use innuendo to express what they feel. They regard it as unfitting to say anything disrespectful that would plant doubt or resentment in the heart of another. This conscientious, intelligent and fine fashion is seen not only in how they speak to others but also in their logic and behavior. We can easily understand from what Allah says in the Qur'an that believers are meticulous about showing respect:

. . . Those who lower their voices when they are with the Messenger of Allah are people whose hearts Allah has tested for heedfulness. They will have forgiveness and an immense reward. (Surat al-Hujurat: 3)

Just as sincere Muslims have good spirit and noble character, so those who adopt the religion of superficiality have debased spirits and ignoble characters. Even if such people were in the same company with Muslims, they would not change themselves. They feel no need to develop and improve themselves. Because they have shrouded their consciences and followed the path of satan, they do not find it necessary to compare the good and refined behavior of Muslims with their own crude, superficial moral quality. Pleased with their intelligence, they regard their superficial behavior as natural. These

people's situation is like that of a fish; it swims in water and knows nothing of the world above it. However, those of shallow character who lived in the Age of Happiness had our respected and honorable Prophet (saas) whom they could take as an example:

You have an excellent model in the Messenger of Allah, for all who put their hope in Allah and the Last Day and remember Allah much. (Surat al-Ahzab: 21)

As Allah says in the Qur'an, the Prophet (saas) is the best example for humanity in all ways.

Just as our blessed Prophet (saas) was a good example for everyone living in his day, he is also the best example for everyone living after him until the Day of Judgment. In the Qur'an, Allah has revealed the Prophet's (saas) superior moral character. And, both in the hadiths of the Prophet (saas) and the interpretations concerning him passed down to us by his companions, we can learn from the high quality of his morality and take his character as an example.

But whether in the past or present, those who have adopted the religion of superficiality cannot experience the noble quality of Muslim behavior as revealed by Allah in the Qur'an and seen in the life of the Prophet (saas). Those with weak faith, narrow minds and dull intellects cannot bring the morality of the Qur'an into their lives. Their spiritual state is revealed in how they think and speak, in their crude sense of humor and the means of entertainment they choose, in their lack of aesthetic sense and in their unseemly behavior. The following pages will consider how those who adopt the debased culture of superficiality manifest its shallowness in their lives.

The Superficiality in the Eyes

A person's eyes reflect his personality and the culture that he lives in. His expression reveals his true face, and is important in determining his spiritual state, level of culture, personality and character.

Deep devotion, submission and maturity are striking when seen in the eye of a person of sincere faith who fears for his state in the world to come. From the peaceful expression in his eyes and on his face, it can be seen that he has reached maturity and is free of worldly passions. From his look of intelligence and awareness, it is clearly understood that he has faith in Allah. The Prophet (saas) says the following in one of his hadiths:

The one who remembers death the most and the one who best gets prepared for the life after death; he is indeed the one who is the most wise and conscious. (Ibn Majah)

A Muslim with such awareness does not try to reflect anything unnatural in his eyes; on the contrary, his freedom of expression suggests that he can be trusted. His spirit shows how peaceful he is in the power of his faith. His expressions show a person of fine moral character and fear of Allah and who is determined to have nothing to do with ignorant culture. There is keenness and nobility in his expressions.

In contrast to such an individual, people under the influence of superficial culture wear expressions that betray all the ugliness of that culture. No matter how much they try to hide it, their eyes

always give them away. For example, a Muslim shows his excitement, pleasure and lively happiness, but these others frequently have a dull look in their eyes. These people may be lively and extroverted, good conversationalists. But, the empty lifelessness on their faces comes from their unawareness and inability to understand the reality of the Hereafter.

We are told in the Qur'an that such expressions come from the fact that these people do not keep Allah in their hearts—that is, from their unawareness:

Those are the people whose hearts, hearing and sight Allah has sealed up. They are the unaware. (Surat an-Nahl: 108)

This manner of expression in the eyes is formed under the influence of this debased culture. No matter how these people may try to assume a meaningful expression in their eyes, because they do not have faith, they cannot change their expressions into the look of nobility, grace and understanding that a faithful Muslim displays. They can only pretend to look this way. This culture is most often narrow-minded and far removed from religion; it makes impossible any true and admirable goodness in an individual. On the contrary, it turns the individual into a repulsive person that causes discomfort both with his looks and his demeanor. In the expressions in his eyes, there is no real meaning that would allow direct contact, or allow others to have mutual conversations or to evaluate a situation together.

To hide their own lack of wisdom, some people in this debased culture try to find something to mock about in every situation. This is the reason for the discomfiting look of mockery in their eyes. But by using ridicule instead of speaking honestly from the heart, by trying to elevate themselves by making others look ridiculous, shallow individuals actually humiliate themselves. Behind their looks there are most often weak individuals in no position to ridicule anyone and who lack even others' ability to comprehend issues deeply. Anyone who properly understands Allah's greatness would never wear an expression of mockery. Being always aware of his own helplessness in Allah's sight, he would never enter such a state of moral depravity. His intelligence and his conscience ensure that his eyes are always natural and sincere. There is always a wise, humane, warm, sincere and friendly expression in the eyes of a devout Muslim. Others see through his eyes that he is reliable and has a high moral character. Besides this, his eyes act as a veritable shield against superficiality. Someone who gazes at him with a shallow expression will never receive the response he expects.

The awareness, precision and clarity are striking in the eyes of a person who sees Allah's manifestations in everything and who praises Him. When you look into such a person's eyes, his admiration of Allah's creatures, his love and interest are obvious. But when you look at someone who does not regard his environment this way but who, on the contrary, thinks of human beings as independent of Allah (surely Allah is beyond that), forgetting that the world is under His control, you see his eyes reflecting emptiness and often tension. Because he does not love Allah in his heart as he ought to, the love he feels toward Allah's creatures is weak. His eyes give no indication that he understands what real love is. On the contrary, no matter how friendly you act toward such an individual, he will respond only insofar as his shallow understanding of love permits. This is because superficiality as a culture draws him into unawareness by preventing him from gathering together things

that would strengthen his love toward Allah and His creations. A person under this culture's influence has an extremely shallow, narrow mental make-up.

The unpleasant culture of superficiality is also influential in the way people give off-putting forms and meanings to their expressions. For example, people living within that culture adopt a squint as they engage in gossip, one of the unpleasing features of that culture. In a similar way, they open their eyes as wide as possible and exhibit an ugly appearance in order to express admiration or amazement. During private conversations with others with whom they share this same culture they constantly look to right and left. In addition to these, they also have sly ways of looking especially while prying into subjects which they know is actually not their business. This consists of looking out of the corner of the eyes or concealing the object of the interest by pretending to be looking elsewhere.

A wise person is able to watch himself and to identify and correct any improper behavior and body language. Such people are therefore immediately able to alter such behavior in themselves. Superficial people, on the other hand, lack the intelligence with which to perform such analysis and self-criticism. For example, even if the abnormality of the expressions just outlined above are described to them, they still fail to understand, because they see nothing wrong in them, and may even suggest that these are perfectly natural reactions. Their perspective is far too shallow to permit them to distinguish between superficiality and naturalness. Of course, when someone is surprised, his eyes may expand. When he is curious, he may show it in his face. But here we are referring unnatural reactions on the faces of shallow people and how they use this as a means to an end. They pretend to be surprised when they are not. They use furtive looks when they are needlessly curious. They scan the area around them when gossiping; they put on an inquisitive look when they are prying or looking for another's faults. None of these expressions is reasonable or humanly acceptable. On the contrary, they are the result of the deep unawareness and superficiality they live in. This type of expression is never seen in the eyes of a Muslim whose heart is attached to Allah and knows that He sees him and embraces him at every moment. When these other individuals look around with such expressions, they are not aware that Allah sees them or, as stated in the Qur'an, that He perceives their eyes:

Eyesight cannot perceive Him but He perceives eyesight. He is the All-Penetrating, the All-Aware. (Surat al-An'am: 103)

In another place in the Qur'an Allah says that, just as no concealed idea will remain hidden from Him, so no eye expression will remain hidden:

He knows the eyes' deceit and what people's breasts conceal. (Surah Ghafir: 19)

Those who share this debased culture gaze on at one another with an expression that creates an unspoken understanding among them. According to the time and the place, they look at one another with expressions that carry different meanings and nod and wink at one another. Sometimes these looks and signals are intended to ridicule someone or to secretly send a message among themselves appropriate to

such a debased culture. In the Qur'an, Allah says that the mockery that these people use, together with their other debased methods of communication are the very means used by evildoers:

Those who did evil used to laugh at those who believed. When they passed by them, they would wink at one another. (Surat al-Mutaffifin: 29-30)

In another verse, Allah warns people against such morality:

Woe to every scorner and mocker. (Surat al-Humaza: 1)

Anyone who has sincere faith in Allah and tries to please Him in everything he does will completely avoid these facial expressions. He will always keep his heart and his conscience pure. This superficial behavior, which is contrary to the religious morality and which Allah condemns in the Qur'an, may prevent a person from receiving the reward he expects in Allah's presence. Therefore, an individual must be aware of the perverse ways of thinking that cause superficiality and the facial expressions used in superficial culture. A person determined to be faithful to Allah must abandon this debased manner of behavior, repent of his own former attitudes and actions, and demonstrate a serious determination to live according to Muslim morality.

Allah says in the Qur'an that the renunciation and repenting of unseemly behavior are special characteristics belonging to Muslims:

[People who guard against evil are] those who, when they act indecently or wrong themselves, remember Allah and ask forgiveness for their bad actions [and who can forgive bad actions except Allah?] and do not knowingly persist in what they were doing. (Surah Al 'Imran: 135)

Conversation in a Culture of Superficiality

The conversations that people engage in, both in its content and tone of voice, also reflect their spiritual state.

Shallow people spend more time than necessary to make a point. Among themselves, they can speak for hours expanding on a topic that they could have dealt with in one sentence. For example, when some women in this culture are cooking together, they engage in endless conversation about how to do it, even though they know very well how. They endlessly describe the methods they themselves use and spend useless time criticizing the methods of others. Preparing a meal, they take much longer than is required because they waste time talking about other things on their minds. It does not disquiet their consciences to spend time talking for hours about useless topics. For example they can talk about their diets for hours.

In the same way, men in this culture can discuss football games or a particular make of car at great length. Surely, it would make much more sense to share real information with others that would be of some help to them. However, their habit is to go into needless irrelevant detail, drag out the topic and make it trivial. Since they do not have more important matters to occupy their minds with, they seize on such easy topics and happily spend much time discussing them. Although there are some very important matters for them to ponder, such as the life after death and important decisions they should make, it does not bother their consciences to talk day and night about more ordinary things.

In the Qur'an, Allah tells us that some people spend their time fussing about things of no use to them in the world to come:

. . . who play at frivolous games. (Surat at-Tur: 12)

We can see in this verse that Allah calls spending time on unnecessary pursuits a “frivolous game.” For those who live according to the Religion of Superficiality, the matters and shallow details they concern themselves with show themselves in every area of their lives. However, devoting more time than is necessary to a topic and discussing it in all its aspects is very boring for an intelligent person who fears Allah as he should and believes in the Hereafter. Those who don't dwell on details or give the impression that a simple matter is complex and intractable gain much—spiritually and morally—from not living in this culture. In the Qur'an, Allah reveals that He has given the prophets wisdom—in other words, a concise manner of speaking:

They are the ones to whom We gave the Book, wisdom and Prophethood . . . (Surat al-An'am: 89)

In another verse, Allah tells us that speaking with wisdom is a very great blessing and those to whom this wisdom has been given have received a great good:

He gives wisdom to whoever He wills and he who has been given wisdom has been given great good . . . (Surat al-Baqara: 269)

In the sight of Allah, it is good to keep conversations short but beneficial. In the Qur'an, Allah says that Muslims turn away from shallow, pointless conversations:

. . . those who turn away from worthless talk. (Surat al-Muminun: 3)

And the following verse points out that, with their noble behavior, they are far removed from such a shallow environment:

Those who do not bear false witness and who, when they pass by worthless talk, pass by with dignity. (Surat al-Furqan: 72)

Those who engage in shallow conversations see nothing wrong in using coarse words in the name of intimacy. In the conversations of those who live in the culture of superficiality, it is natural to raise their voices in a way that expresses their surprise or resentment, to humiliate those they are talking about by using a tone of voice and accent that underscores their mockery. However, anyone who realizes he will be held responsible for everything he has done in his lifetime that is not in accord with the Qur'an will try to speak and act so as not to be ashamed on the Day of Judgment. He will strictly avoid conversations that will debase him and put him on the same level as superficial people. But no one who has adopted superficiality as a culture has any of these worries. They ignore the fact that Allah sees them at all times and that they must give an account of their every moment. Therefore, they believe that they can speak however they like. However, Allah reveals in the Qur'an that every word a person utters is recorded and warns humans against falling into this kind of error:

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)

A person may forget the pointless conversations he had in the past, or even yesterday, but as revealed in the Qur'an:

“... My Lord does not misplace nor does He forget.” (Surah Ta Ha: 52)

A person may forget the things he has said but Allah, with His infinite knowledge, remembers every word that a human being has uttered.

In the culture of superficiality, it is usual for people to try to get others to feel sorry for them, with the hope of getting some help. Shallow people like drawing attention to themselves, expecting that someone will take an interest in feeling sorry for them. Such people want to stir up a sense of pity by constantly relating the injustice of some situation they're in and how difficult conditions are. They take a strange pleasure from other people regarding them as wronged and wanting to help them. They have an incomprehensible desire to be looked after and protected by others. However, a noble individual takes no pleasure from being pitied. On the contrary, he wants to be seen as strong and resilient. In the Qur'an, Allah says that only deceitful people display such behavior. Because of their jealousy, for example, the brothers of the Prophet Yusuf (as) wanted to kill him and threw him into a well. Afterwards, as we are told in the Qur'an, they wanted to make their father, the Prophet Ya'qub (as), feel sorry for them:

That night they came back to their father in tears, saying, “Father, we went out to run a race and left Yusuf together with our things and then a wolf appeared and ate him up but you are never going to believe us now, not even though we really tell the truth.” (Surah Yusuf: 16-17)

And despite the fact that they openly lied, as if they would be blamed unjustly, they tried to present themselves as wronged. Yusuf (as) had a good moral character from childhood; he was a blessed individual praised by Allah. But his brothers undertook to murder him even though he was their brother.

To put it plainly, they were treacherous. But, with his insight, Ya‘qub (as) immediately understood the deceitfulness of his sons and told them that what they had done came from their lower selves:

... “It is merely that your lower selves have suggested something to you which you did . . . ”
(Surah Yusuf: 18)

Whether they are right or wrong, those who live in the debased culture of superficiality, want to make people pity them. They constantly talk about their anxieties, pain and difficulties. Feeling sorry for themselves, they explain how they came into such straits. They exemplify a person who has not committed himself to Allah. From the tearful helplessness with which they speak, it can be easily seen that they do not practice the moral teachings of the Qur’an. However, a person who knows that everything is under Allah’s control would never let himself speak in this shallow way, but would firmly demonstrate in his words that Allah is always with him. With the strength Allah gives him, he would openly say that he could do everything with His help. He would not want anyone to feel sorry for him, but to trust and respect him for his strong character.

The mental horizons of superficial people are limited to what they can say about the ordinary topics that belong to their culture. For this reason, they can have intimate discussions with those who share the same culture, but the areas of discussion they have with those who do not share their culture are very narrow. Their daily conversations with others who live in the same shallow world, and even the words they use, are almost always the same. When they start, their listeners can guess what they are going to talk about and even what words they’ll use. Because their horizons are limited, they cannot appreciate the good things that Allah has created or the events that occur in the world. Their abilities to find new subject matters, express their thoughts in a novel way, or to go beyond the clichés they have learned by rote, are so limited as to be almost non-existent. And unless someone tells them about it, they are incapable of understanding or even noticing their situation. Having departed from sincere faith and adopted the religion of superficiality, they have little intelligence, insight, understanding or wisdom.

Even though their abilities to think and to speak are limited, they think they are very important and intelligent. For this reason, they use a wording that generally praises themselves in any conversation. Unaware of the degrading position that their debased culture has put them in, they praise themselves in conversations, either openly or covertly. However, Muslims direct their praise only to Allah and say:

“ . . . Praise be to Allah Who has had no son and Who has no partner in His Kingdom and Who needs no one to protect Him from abasement . . . ” (Surat al-Isra’: 111)

An intelligent person with faith knows that Allah is the only Lord of everything in the universe. No matter how much his talents, beauty, intelligence and material possessions may seem to belong to him, he is always aware that their real Lord is Allah. He lives in humility, knowing that Allah can take back every blessing any time He wants to. He praises and exalts Allah as the Lord of all things. When he hears someone praising himself in a way that shows that he has no knowledge of these truths, he realizes

the extent of the unawareness into which this superficial culture has thrust people. He wants to wake these others out of their unawareness, to tell them of the existence of Allah and that He is the absolute Lord of everything.

In this regard, in the Qur'an, Allah gives the examples of two men. One of them is a Muslim who turns to Allah with all his heart; the other praises himself for the many possessions he thinks belong to him, and believes that they will remain his possessions forever:

Make an example for them of two men. To one of them We gave two gardens of grape-vines and surrounded them with date-palms, putting between them some cultivated land. Both gardens yielded their crops and did not suffer any loss, and We made a river flow right through the middle of them. He was a man of wealth and property and he said to his companion, debating with him, "I have more wealth than you and more people under me." He entered his garden and wronged himself by saying, "I do not think that this will ever end. I do not think the Hour will ever come. But if I should be sent back to my Lord, I will definitely get something better in return." His companion, with whom he was debating, said to him, "Do you then disbelieve in Him Who created you from dust, then from a drop of sperm, and then formed you as a man? He is, however, Allah, my Lord, and I will not associate anyone with my Lord. Why, when you entered your garden, did you not say, 'It is as Allah wills, there is no strength but in Allah?' Though you see me with less wealth and children than you possess, it may well be that my Lord will give me something better than your garden and send down on it a fireball from the sky so that morning finds it a shifting heap of dust or morning finds its water drained into the earth so that you cannot get at it." The fruits of his labor were completely destroyed and he woke up wringing his hands in grief, ruining everything that he had spent on it. It was a ruin with all its trellises fallen in. He said, "Oh, if only I had not associated anyone with my Lord!" There was no group to come to his aid, besides Allah, and he was not given any help. In that situation the only protection is from Allah, the Real. He gives the best reward and the best outcome. (Surat al-Kahf: 32-44)

As revealed in the verses, this man made the great error of praising himself instead of Allah. He did not consider that he might lose his possessions by some adversity sent by Allah, nor that when he died he would leave everything behind in this world and appear before Allah all alone. But he understood the reality of his situation when all the things described in these verses happened to him. Until that moment, he had no understanding of the nature of the life of this world. And, because of his shallow thinking, he was unable to conceive of Allah's power. When these things happened to him, he repented with the words, "Oh, if only I had..."

You can see how the culture of superficiality prevents people from interpreting things correctly, just like the owner of the garden in this story. It leads people to an unreal and empty sense of pride. An individual proud of his possessions feels the need to mention them to everyone, either openly or covertly. He always praises himself for his intelligence, talents, his new house or car, a successful project, his possessions or the school his children attend. He tries to vaunt himself by constantly mentioning all the good decisions he has made, sometimes openly and sometimes indirectly.

In this ignorant culture, such an individual enters a sort of contest with even his siblings and friends to determine who is wealthier, whose children are the most intelligent, whose were selected by the best schools, and endless other such things. When one party initiates such a contest, the other, in order not to be bettered, will open another subject that he thinks he is better at than his rival. In this way begins an endless contest of dissimulation and superficiality. Their conversations will affirm the intimacy of their relationship in artificial and exaggerated terms. On the other hand, however, they will use expressions to score points against, embarrass and humiliate each other and create discomfort by placing each other in difficult situations.

As previously stated, this perverse culture can sometimes be very cruel and heartless; even while people appear to be benign and peaceful, they choose subjects for conversation to make others uncomfortable and to promote themselves. All this exerts an influence only on those who share this culture. A Muslim who believes in Allah and trusts in Him could never share on the same level with people of this culture. He could never take this truth out of his mind:

Do you not see those who praise themselves for purity? No, Allah purifies whoever He wills . . . (Surat an-Nisa': 49)

Reactions of sadness and jealousy common to shallow personalities are never to be seen in a person of faith. For this reason, people of a shallow, debased culture can never make devout Muslims share in it; their shallow conversations would never obtain any response. Muslims believe that Allah owns every possession and is the Creator of everything; therefore, they learn from the way others praise themselves and exalt themselves in their conversations. Rather than being influenced by these things, such conversations produce a kind of repulsion in their hearts, because the only One worthy of praise is Allah, the Lord of the heavens, the Earth and all that lies in between:

. . . Sovereignty and praise belong to Him. He has power over all things. (Surat at-Taghabun: 1)

And say: "Praise be to Allah Who has had no son and Who has no partner in His Kingdom and Who needs no one to protect Him from abasement. . . " (Surat al-Isra': 111)

Any sincere Muslim knows that Allah has given all His blessings to human beings as a test:

Do not let their wealth and children impress you. Allah merely wants to punish them by them during their life in this world and for them to expire while they are unbelievers. (Surat at-Tawba: 55)

Another common attribute in these people's conversations is their lack of interest in world events, the cruelty and oppression directed toward Muslims and the difficulties suffered by the weak and helpless. Always occupied with the small world they have created for themselves, they never come face

to face with the many larger ones. Most often they are completely unaware of what is going in the world, the difficulties that occur because people do not live according to the moral values of the Qur'an, those conflicts and wars that are sparked because of the absence of religious morality and people forced to live in hunger and poverty. Because these events do not touch them personally, they do not care about them. When asked about such matters, they are clearly unaware of the issues and not concerned.

Their world is limited by issues such as what they will eat and drink, trips they will take, their families and careers. They don't wonder why other people suffer or what can be done about it; their consciences are unaffected by these things. The need to search for practical solutions that will end suffering does not cross their minds. They always leave such responsibility to others. Accepting that they themselves are superficial and shallow-minded, they see themselves as exempt from taking responsibility for such matters. It makes them not the least bit uncomfortable to waste time thinking about shallow subjects or conversing about them.

If someone starts exhorting them to be consciously human, they become irritated and fall silent. They want to talk about things that appeal to their lower selves; the subject matter of their conversations is particularly chosen to serve their own benefit. But for cruelty to cease in the world, Allah calls everyone with a conscience to wage an intellectual struggle. Allah tells us in the Qur'an about those who do not sense this responsibility:

What reason could you have for not fighting in the way of Allah—for those men, women and children who are oppressed and say, “Our Lord, take us out of this city whose inhabitants are wrongdoers! Give us a protector from You! Give us a helper from You!”? (Surat an-Nisa': 75)

Instead of focusing on vital issues, trying to discover a fundamental solution to problems, these people calculate their own gain. However, Allah tells us in the Qur'an that Muslims must cooperate with one another toward high ideals; they must urge everyone toward what is best for them and make them refrain from evil:

Let there be a community among you who call to the good, and enjoin the right, and forbid the wrong. They are the ones who have success. (Surah Al 'Imran: 104)

Clearly, those who adopt such ideals will bring benefit to others, both in what they do and in the things they speak about with one another.

Superficial culture emphasizes points with certain mouth movements and ways of using the voice. For example, a person may lower his voice in the course of a conversation, meaning that some special information not to be heard by everyone is about to be given to a selected confidant. Mostly women use this tone of voice when speaking about another or mocking someone. Similarly, they sometimes lower their voices at certain points in the conversation and roll their words in their mouths to prevent others from understanding what they are saying, and so that only the one to whom they're speaking will understand.

Generally in this culture all facial expressions are used for a negative purpose, distorting the natural lines of the face. When having a conversation full of resentment, for example, these people narrow their eyes and purse their lips. So the face takes on an unpleasant expression, and their words come out with an unnatural emphasis. In the same way, some carefully put on unnatural accents that they regard as modern, rolling their words in their mouths or lisp, making themselves hard to understand.

Gossip is widespread in this debased culture, especially among women. They talk about the most basic subjects, engaging in endless conversations filled with malice, dissension, jealousy and resentment about people. They never think of this truth that Allah has revealed in the Qur'an:

. . . Three men cannot confer together secretly without Him being the fourth of them, or five without Him being the sixth of them, or fewer than that or more without Him being with them wherever they are. Then He will inform them on the Day of Resurrection of what they did. Allah has knowledge of all things. (Surat al-Mujadala: 7)

In doing this they display a total lack of awareness. They can secretly say prejudiced things about others, clearly intended to show these people's weak points based mostly on slander and conjecture. Instead of being morally upright and thinking positively, these gossips take delight in sharing the ill-intentioned ideas from their malicious minds and are designed to stir up dissension. However while those people engage in unaware conversations, Allah witnesses them. He reveals in the Qur'an:

Or do they imagine that We do not hear their secrets and their private talk? On the contrary Our messengers are right there with them writing it down! (Surat az-Zukhruf: 80)

In the gossip spread among people with this moral character, what is said is not always clear. Sometimes they adopt a manner of speaking that lets someone unacquainted with the person in question believe that the words directed toward him are actually praise. However, this praise is actually hypocritical mockery, designed to deride the person being spoken of. But those who understand the same language also understand what is being said and about whom. This is because every word is insidiously chosen and the conversation is laced with subtle, satanic innuendo. In this way, they give their conversation the appearance of innocence and continue in their shallowness. However, in the Qur'an, Allah forbids His servants to engage in gossip:

You who believe! Avoid most suspicion. Indeed some suspicion is a crime. And do not spy and do not backbite one another. Would any of you like to eat his brother's dead flesh? No, you would hate it. And have fear of Allah. Allah is Ever-Returning, Most Merciful. (Surat al-Hujurat: 12)

It is described as a disgusting kind of behavior. We are also told that those who gossip must repent and ask forgiveness. In the Qur'an, Allah commands that people should fear Him, especially in

their private conversations. Those with faith should be careful about the subjects they speak about; they should choose topics that promote goodness and the fear of Allah:

You who believe! When you confer together secretly, do not do so in wrongdoing and enmity and disobedience to the messenger; rather confer together in goodness and fear of Allah. Have fear of Allah—Him to Whom you will be gathered. (Surat al-Mujadala: 9)

Shallow people often talk about their physical needs. These people often say they are hungry or thirsty, that they have a headache or they have not slept well. Of course, anyone can express his needs, but those of shallow characters speak of their needs just for the sake of talking, and to draw attention to themselves. A Muslim would never lower himself to speak of such matters. If he needs anything, he takes measures to supply it. His mind is not concerned with his own small needs, but is always filled with thoughts that exalt Allah and about performing useful deeds in this world that will be pleasing to Him. In the Qur'an, Allah describes Muslims in this way:

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

We see in this verse that Muslims are not concerned with the passions of their own lower selves. On the contrary, they regard every adversity, great or small, that occurs to them in the way of Allah as an opportunity to receive a reward. For this reason, they are not greedy but trust in Allah to supply their every need and therefore, avoid shallow conversations that make their needs the topic of discussion.

Shallow people give unnecessary explanations to everyone they meet, to justify their actions and make it appear that they never make mistakes. They bother their acquaintances by making them listen to long explanations. They go on at great length to explain what they have done and why, that they do not want their basic intentions to be misunderstood, and that the result of their actions was positive. These are all small, ordinary matters. A glass broken at home, the moving of a piece of furniture, a missing file at the office, a forgotten message; shallow people exaggerate other various and unimportant things into matters that need explaining. No matter how much they explain, there is arrogance behind it. They cannot accept making a simple mistake, being taken off-guard or overlooking a detail. Whenever such an event happens, they seek to defend their pride. They offer several excuses to show that anyone would do the same thing in the same circumstances. However, a person's failure to accept his faults is one of the greatest obstacles to his personal development and attaining a good moral character.

Someone who does not trust Allah is afraid to acknowledge his mistakes. He remains bemired in apprehension, thinking, *"If I make a mistake in such a simple matter, what will people think of me when it comes to important ones?"* It doesn't cross his mind to leave everything to Allah's will, to take refuge

in Him, to trust and rely on Him. If he thought about this, he would know that Allah knows everything, would be content, and would feel no need to offer explanations to anyone.

The alibis offered in this debased culture, which makes people forget Allah and give preference to human ideas, are not limited to mistakes and instances of thoughtlessness. People in this culture always feel the need to give alibis about reasonable, legitimate actions that ordinary people do in the course of a day. Similar apprehensions lie at the root of this too.

Because their spirit and personality are not mature, they are squeezed into their little world. They cannot be happy and content themselves, and cannot allow others to be so. They have abandoned the morality of the Islamic religion that Allah has been pleased to choose for mankind. Such anxiety and apprehension is the reward they receive in this world for their choosing to live in the miserable system of superficiality.

Their Sense of Humor and Enjoyment

Shallow people laugh at shallow things. Most of the things that amuse these people would not amuse anyone else removed from that shallowness. For example, human deficiencies are an important element of humor for people in this culture. These deficiencies must be overcome by using will and intelligence, and no sensible person would ever make these a matter of discussion. But for the shallow, they can be a source of rich entertainment. But no one wants to hear about people's shortcomings and, if they do so inadvertently, pretend that they did not. Superficial people, on the contrary, make a special joke of these weaknesses and laugh at them. This primitive sense of enjoyment can also be seen in some films and television programs.

Similarly, laughing at some people's physical imperfections has an important place in the entertainment of this shallow culture. When such people see a person who is shorter than normal, for example, they break out laughing. Because they are themselves unaware and shallow, they do not consider that their situation in life comes by the will of Allah and that He could test them with similar deficiencies. Besides, it never crosses their minds that their laughing at people can embarrass them.

In general, the jokes these people make are detracting, intended to exalt themselves, but belittle, criticize and humiliate someone else. The humor shown by Muslims who practice religious morality is intended primarily to amuse others. Were they to make a criticizing joke, its humor would only criticize themselves. Muslims have a highly developed sense of humanity and therefore attach importance to others' feelings. If they sense the slightest displeasure, they do not pursue the conversation. However, shallow people do not regulate their humor. They joke about matters that others are sensitive about and go too far. They do not consider that they are making others uncomfortable; and even if they did, they would not care, because shallow people do not have any sensitivity. They cannot grasp subtlety or keep details in their minds. They take no pleasure in showing their humanity.

Those who live in a shallow culture use mockery in their humor, which believers would never do. These people often use mockery to put someone else down and elevate themselves, to make themselves the center of attention. When they detect that another individual has said something wrong,

mispronounced a word, or is uninformed on a certain matter, they point this out with a humor intended to ridicule the other person. They use human mistakes and deficiencies for entertainment. In this way, they try to make themselves appear more intelligent, attractive, and knowledgeable and, in short, superior compared to others. But this is highly superficial. A person who practices the morality of the Qur'an would never think of making the imperfections of others a matter of humor. On the contrary, he would pretend not to notice such things so as not to embarrass the other. For example, if a shallow person saw someone trip while walking down the street, he might laugh, and not go to assist him, even if the person appeared to be injured or needed help. Instead of acting humanly, he might pretend that he was laughing too hard to speak. Besides, he would laugh while pointing out human deficiencies he could have pretended not to notice. For example, he gives nicknames that point out people's imperfections. However, in the Qur'an, Allah forbids giving people derisive or maliciously intended nicknames:

You who believe! People should not ridicule others who may be better than themselves; nor should any women ridicule other women who may be better than themselves. And do not find fault with one another or insult each other with derogatory nicknames . . . (Surat al-Hujurat: 11)

Those who are entertained by mocking humor do not consider that they are encompassed soul and body by an infinite Power. They can act in such a superficial manner because they do not realize that Allah could punish them at any time, that He could take their lives and bring them face to face with the angels of death. But a person who knows that he is in the presence of Allah could never mock another because of the respectful fear he feels in his heart. The humor based on mockery displayed so often by superficial people is an indication of their shallow thinking and lack of proper reverence for Allah.

Those who live in a superficial culture do not feel uncomfortable engaging in conversations that are not observant of the respect due to Allah, or religious and sacred concepts. Allah tells us how people of shallow character did this unseemly thing in the days of the Prophet (saas):

When an example is made of the son of Maryam your people laugh uproariously. They retort, "Who is better then, our deities or him?" They only say this to you for argument's sake. They are indeed a disputatious people. He is only a servant on whom We bestowed Our blessing and whom We made an example for the tribe of Israel. (Surat az-Zukhruf : 57-59)

People in every age have spoken in this unseemly way. Jokes against religion do not make people uncomfortable if they have a weak attachment to religion. Even if some people feel discomfort at such humor, it is not enough to make them withdraw from that environment. But the hearts of Muslims have been created to take pleasure in remembering Allah, to practice Islamic morality. For this reason, they immediately separate themselves from any environment dominated by an irreligious sense of humor. In the Qur'an, Allah commands those with faith to leave such environments:

It has been sent down to you in the Book that when you hear Allah's signs being rejected and mocked at by people, you must not sit with them till they start talking of other things. If you do you are just the same as them. Allah will gather all the hypocrites and unbelievers into Hell. (Surat an-Nisa': 140)

Places of superficial entertainment will awaken in a truly religious person the desire to protect and defend Islam. Such a person will never allow topics to enter conversation that are not respectful toward Allah and religion. Because of his love and respect for Allah and his attachment to Him, he remains on guard against ideas and suggestions opposed to religious values and will take no part in such conversation. In the Qur'an, Allah describes this noble quality that marks the Muslim character:

When they hear worthless talk they turn away from it and say, "We have our actions and you have your actions. Peace be upon you. We do not desire the company of the ignorant." (Surat al-Qasas: 55)

Shallow people often seem unaware while amusing themselves. For example, if they are watching a television program they like and someone nearby has a health problem, they will show no interest. They may even be irritated if asked for help, as if the person in distress has spoiled their entertainment. Because they are shallow and inhumane, they prefer entertainment to helping those in distress. And they continue sitting in front of the television without any pangs of conscience. However, their behavior prevents them from enjoying their entertainment as they expected. Their shallow sense of amusement is reflected in what they choose to laugh at. They will be amused for hours by a program that repeats the same old jokes and has nothing in it to give a person enjoyment.

Of course, the shallowness spoken of here does not lie in watching television or taking entertainment from it. These people's shallow culture develops in them an unaware sense of amusement that is far from human values. A Muslim who fears Allah and practices religious morality is always aware. Because he always acts with the intelligence given to him by his faith, he can quickly overcome all situations that confront him. He is aware even when it comes to entertainment. Allah is always in his heart and mind. Whether he listens to loud music, watching television, or playing games in a crowded, noisy environment, his conscience and attentiveness remain keen. For this reason, he takes great pleasure from his entertainment.

People like to watch a wise person laugh and being entertained. But the things shallow people laugh at and how they laugh is superficial. How shallow people laugh is not pleasant to the ear, and others do not enjoy listening to it.

It's very important to understand what superficiality is, from the point of view of its sense of humor and enjoyment. Of two people sharing the same entertainment, one may live by superficial culture, while the other may not—because superficiality is a philosophy, not limited to just a few ways of behaving and speaking. A person may laugh spontaneously, but his intelligence and depth of understanding make him different from superficial people. For this reason, a shallow sense of entertainment or shallow laughter should not be misunderstood. Natural laughter arising from intimacy

is not shallow; natural enjoyment is good in itself. Avoiding superficiality does not restrict this naturalness. But superficiality does not come from naturalness and intimacy; but from a closed conscience, from not being aware of the negative effect of jokes and laughter, from being immoderate and going to extremes.

Some people think that avoiding superficiality implies a false seriousness with cold, artificial smiles. One person in a rich society may laugh in an affected manner, while another in an uneducated circle may have a vulgar laughter. But, in the essence, both are superficial. No matter what a person's culture, there is only one solution to superficiality: A person must attach himself to Allah and practice the moral teachings of the Qur'an. Allah says in the Qur'an:

. . . But all honor belongs to Allah and to His messenger and the believers . . . (Surat al-Munafiqun: 8)

The Way They Interpret Events

Those who are glad to live in a superficial culture have a very shallow way of interpreting events that happen in their own environment and in the world. Their narrow-minded way of looking at things conceives of events within a narrow frame of reference. Therefore, they can never free themselves from their superficiality.

Superficial people interpret every event within their own parameters. For example, when a major war breaks out in another country, their most important concern is whether it will affect them. They worry about whether the war will change their lives, upset their present circumstances and influence the money markets.

Of course, it's reasonable for any individual to take measures to protect himself and his family. But it's not reasonable to limit his sense of responsibility to his own close circle. Someone who thinks like this cares only about his own personal well-being. As the old saying has it, "May the snake that doesn't bite me live a thousand years." He hides behind a false logic: It's as if helping those who live a difficult life and struggle to survive is irrelevant or beyond his capacity.

A person with this mindset doesn't consider that, if a war breaks out, women, children and elderly living in a country could find themselves in difficult straits. A person who is not interested in finding out why this situation has arisen or what he can do to remedy it will do everything he can to protect himself.

Such an individual lacks sufficient awareness to see the chaos that absence of the fear of Allah inflicts on the world. He does not strive, beginning with himself, to make the morality of the Qur'an prevail in people's lives. He wants only the welfare of himself and his family. For him, it's enough if he can supply his own needs and live without anxiety and difficulty. He's not very concerned about the conditions that others live in.

However, someone with a keen sense of moral awareness looks at the general course of world events and—even if he is not in the kind of situation described above—will immediately know that the world needs a morality based on the fear of Allah. He knows that any society composed of insensitive,

selfish and heartless individuals who do not care about others will draw everyone into a frightening world of no religion. He sees that in societies that do not practice the morality that pleases Allah, deep wounds are opened, and that the only way to heal them is to ensure the dominance of religious morality. Then he will strive to establish this high morality and become the means whereby others may come to it.

Allah tells us about such people in the Qur'an:

Then when they forgot what they had been reminded of, We rescued those who had forbidden the evil . . . (Surat al-A'raf: 165)

Those who repent, those who worship, those who praise, those who fast, those who bow, those who prostrate, those who command the right, those who forbid the wrong, those who preserve the limits of Allah: give good news to the believers. (Surat at-Tawba: 112)

Would that there had been more people with a vestige of good among the generations of those who came before you, who forbade corruption in the earth, other than the few among them whom We saved . . . (Surah Hud: 116)

One of the characteristics of superficial people most frequently noticed is that they constantly make negative comments. Most often, they overlook the positive side of issues; they anticipate that events will turn out badly and tend to draw the conclusion that they have suffered some injustice. Even when someone says something pleasant to these people, they immediately become emotional and tearful. The main reason why is that they don't understand the essence of religion. A person who's lived his life according to the Qur'an knows that he should never be influenced by negative thoughts and should never lose hope. Allah tells us this in the Qur'an:

. . . Do not despair of solace from Allah. No one despairs of solace from Allah except for people who are unbelievers. (Surah Yusuf: 87)

Despair and pessimism take spiritual and material strength away from weak personalities who live in a culture of superficiality. They ruin their mood and make them unhappy and joyless. These people see things negatively and are surprised at the comments of believers, who always see the good in everything that happens and the reason for it. They never understand that events they interpret as disasters are completely under Allah's control. This lack of understanding is strongly reflected in the pessimism and negativity evident in their conversations. Their warped outlook and negative comments give those who share the same culture an anxious and hopeless sense of oppression. They never mention the peace, security, comfort, happiness and beauty that Islamic morality brings. They never speak of the good works and service that Muslims do, the ease of living according to Islamic morality or the contentment that Allah gives to believers. Their comments are almost completely dominated by complaints and the feeling that there is no solution.

Believers would never allow such comments in their environment. If a person comes up against difficulties, they know that Allah has created them and that, as in every situation, these difficulties will finally turn out for this person's good. No difficulty cannot be surmounted with Allah's help. Believers know this and are always optimistic in everything. Therefore, they never make negative comments, but see everything that happens to them as good. They never worry about the outcome and they do not give way to apprehension. In the Qur'an, Allah tells us about the fine behavior of the Companions of the Prophet (saas) in a time of difficulty:

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

Even if they do not know about something, superficial people need to comment about it. They never say they don't know about a given subject. On the contrary, they make conjectures about topics they know nothing about, people they don't know and things they've never experienced. They don't think in terms of the morality of the Qur'an and so, have no problem pretending to know something they actually know nothing about. Their egos find it hard to admit they do not know something, lest their image be ruined in the eyes of others. However, in the Qur'an, Allah tells us that those who make false explanations based on guesses and conjecture are unaware:

Death to the conjecturers: those who flounder in a glut of ignorance. (Surat adh-Dhariyat: 10-11)

Elsewhere, Allah commands people not to argue about matters they know nothing about:

[Say,] "You are people arguing about something of which you have no knowledge. Why do you argue about something of which you have no knowledge? Allah knows; you do not know." (Surah Al 'Imran: 66)

It is senseless to act as if one knew everything. No matter how much a person knows, there are certainly things he does not. But Almighty Allah, with His infinite knowledge and intelligence, knows everything. So, even if a person knows about many things, we must not forget that:

. . . Over everyone with knowledge is a Knower. (Surah Yusuf: 76)

Allah tells us in the Qur'an that, no matter how knowledgeable a person may be, this is not a reason to become filled with pride; to be humble is more important.

Someone who truly fears Allah will refrain from saying anything or passing on information whose truth he's unsure about. He will assert nothing based on guesses or conjecture and hesitate to make any

comment about it, but will certainly not hesitate to say he does not know. This is because he will be held responsible:

Do not pursue what you have no knowledge of. Hearing, sight and hearts will all be questioned. (Surat al-Isra': 36)

Another characteristic of superficial people is that they exaggerate in order to draw attention to themselves. To achieve their basic goal of getting people to like them, listen to what they say, and make them laugh, these people do not hesitate to give exaggerated accounts of interesting matters whose truth is suspect. They have no hesitation in entering a serious discussion with argumentative words. In their desire to be noticed, they may tell lies to alter the truth in order to satisfy that desire.

The purpose of these shallow individuals is not to show a moral character pleasing to Allah, but to make themselves seem more important. They want to gain the favor of others and so, do not care that what they say is totally based on lies. They present their exaggerations as harmless, innocent conversation. But as revealed in the Qur'an:

. . . have done with telling lies. (Surat al-Hajj: 30)

Lies, whether great or small, harmless or otherwise, must therefore be avoided.

An intelligent person who takes pleasure in his good moral character can notice false exaggeration in the conversation of another. This individual, in order not to let that person descend to the same level as liars, will urge him to correct his exaggerations. And he carefully avoids falling into such a situation himself.

They Display a Different Character in Different Situations

The lives and religious interest of superficial people are usually not sincere. What they do is often different from what they say. They claim they are religious, but in difficult situations the weakness of their faith is immediately evident. For example, when they feel healthy, they are energetic and joyful. But let their health fail even a little, and their joy can suddenly disappear. They can forget the prayers they made to Allah. They begin to ask themselves why Allah gave them their illness, even go so far as to think that they do not deserve such a thing. In this way, they show lack of gratitude for their blessings and their lack of trust in Allah. However, bouts of illness are often important times in which Allah tests His servants, trying their patience and attachment to Him. Those who continue to be patient and thank Allah in times of difficulty are faithful servants with deep faith.

The attitude a person displays in times of difficulty, when he risks losing his possessions or his life, depends on his understanding. One who seems balanced and moderate in a content problem-free environment may grumble and complain bitterly in a moment of danger and send out negative messages

to friends and acquaintances. He behaves this way because he has a superficial way of thinking. The danger is that such a person may exhibit an attitude quite divorced from religion under different terms and conditions. For example, when in difficulty he may lie, feel sorry for himself and weep, forgetting the fact of destiny and his trust in Allah, and fall into deep despair. He may also display an angry, aggressive attitude, because those who live superficially think that growing angry, becoming emotional and showing distress are natural reactions, which they do not hesitate to display spontaneously.

However, several examples are given in the Qur'an to warn us that these sudden reactions are wrong and should be avoided. Allah says that Muslims are “**. . . those who control their rage and pardon other people**” (Surah Al 'Imran: 134).

In another verse, He says:

. . . Do not despair of solace from Allah. No one despairs of solace from Allah except for people who are unbelievers. (Surah Yusuf: 87)

These individuals focus their lives on others, trying always to please them and win their favor. Of course, they do not hope to please them or behave morally toward others in an effort to win Allah's favor. What is meant here is that they adapt themselves to the persons they are with and, they can easily resort to every sort of shallowness and lack of moral standards to gain their appreciation.

Although they know it is not right, such people may falsify documents and tell lies according to the situation just in order to earn their boss's appreciation. They may be quite passive in the presence of a high-level manager, but arrogant, peevish and tyrannical toward those working under them. The right thing is to behave conscientiously and in a balanced way, and not influenced by other people or their positions. To adopt the same manner of conversation as an insincere and artificial person, to be arrogant in the presence of the arrogant and to fall under their influence—in other words, to adapt oneself to every kind of character and allow oneself to be influenced by them—is the height of superficiality.

Those with such a character are very easily influenced by what others might think about them, positive or negative. If someone says anything against them, they become upset and sometimes enter a depression that lasts for days. And every compliment or bit of praise makes them overly enthusiastic. Forgetting that Allah sees them everywhere and at all times, they adjust their lives totally to others. They act differently when they are at home and at work, on the street, in their summer houses or on vacation; they change according to the situations and environments they are in. Their personalities are weak; therefore, they always fall under the influence of others and compromise their own values.

Among these people may be those who tend to practice religious morality, but whose faith is weak. They usually say their prayers and fast, but when on vacation, they adapt themselves to that environment and postpone their prayers. In their style of clothing, behavior and preferred kinds of entertainment, they resemble very much those who are far removed from religious morality. When a large group of non-religious people gather, it is easy for those in whose heart faith has not established itself to conform to the group. These people in such an environment, shopping and amusing themselves, forget the infinite power of Allah.

Their minds become caught up with details about where to have dinner, or what to wear on a certain evening. It's certainly no error that these people go on vacation to amuse themselves. Their error lies in their debasing themselves by conforming to the majority in different environments. In so doing, they enter a spiritual state far removed from the moral teachings of the Qur'an. But Allah tells us clearly in the Qur'an that conforming to the majority is a mistake:

If you obeyed most of those on Earth, they would misguide you from Allah's way . . . (Surat al-An'am: 116)

Conforming to the masses is frequently seen in people of superficial character. But Muslims, no matter where and when they are, keep Allah in their hearts and in their conversations. Since their only purpose in life is to win Allah's favor, mercy and to attain Paradise, they act toward attaining this one goal at every moment. They may take a trip, go on vacation or otherwise amuse themselves at the appropriate time. But in doing so, they are always submissive to Allah:

. . . Say: "My prayer and my rites, my living and my dying, are for Allah alone, the Lord of all the worlds." (Surat al-An'am: 162)

Even if they happen to be the only one in a crowd who acts according to religious morality, still they never waver. On the contrary, they are more attentive and avoid doing anything they think would displease Allah. Under no condition do they let their passions lead them away from practicing religious morality or remembering Allah and the world to come:

[Believers are] not distracted by trade or commerce from the remembrance of Allah and the establishment of prayer and the giving of alms; fearing a day when all hearts and eyes will be in turmoil. (Surat an-Nur: 37)

In the time of the Prophet (saas), there were people of shallow character who conformed to the situation they were in. Allah gives us an example of such people and their perverse behavior in the Qur'an:

But when they see a chance of trade or entertainment, they scatter off to it and leave you standing there. Say: "What is with Allah is better than trade or entertainment. Allah is the Best of Providers." (Surat al-Jumu'a: 11)

These people had the honor of being in the presence of the blessed Prophet (saas), loved and chosen by Allah. But they were superficial individuals who did not think deeply and who were unaware that this was a great blessing.

For the sake of business or entertainment, they would leave Allah's chosen servant standing alone. Because of their shallow minds, they saw nothing wrong with their behavior. This is because

shallow individuals do not appreciate good people and high values, cannot grasp the subtleties of religious morality or the value of an enlightened person of deep faith like the Prophet Muhammad (saas), who was attached to Allah and honored by Him. Whenever they saw a matter that might represent even a simple advantage, they immediately headed in that direction and departed from the side of the Prophet (saas).

People of shallow character are very much influenced by happenings. For this reason, most of them do not live in a balanced spiritual state. They are buoyed up by events they consider positive, but quickly become upset, for example, if they become ill, lose some possessions, receive bad news or hear a word that they do not want during the course of a conversation. They ignore that Allah is in control of everything and fall apart because of their lack of trust in Him. Allah points out this tendency of the human lower self:

Truly man was created headstrong—desperate when bad things happen. (Surat al-Ma‘arij: 19-20)

These people may appear dignified at other times, but such incidents unexpectedly reveal their true characters. For example, someone who earlier presented himself as calm and composed may have a fit of temper when his interests are challenged. Some things may make him angry, make him lose control of himself and weep. Because he forgets about Allah and the fact of destiny—or chooses to ignore them—he falls into melancholy.

When he has an unsuccessful venture in his work or loses something of value, he may become dispirited. However, it is important to remember that whatever happens for a person, be it sickness or injury, is his destiny and takes place according to Allah’s will. When this person considers the role a virus played in an illness, or that of a bad driver in an accident, his forgetfulness of Allah and untrusting behavior show the weakness of his faith. Of course, Allah has created many tests for human beings, but all are under His control. A person becomes ill or injured because this was his destiny. Similarly, it was fated for the driver to have that accident; this was the will of Allah. That a person ignores this truth and assumes a sad expression shows that he is associating His creation with Allah. It is a sin to think that there is no good purpose in calamities and illnesses, that illnesses are simply caused by germs and ignore the fact that germs and viruses were created by Allah as means to His ends. The behavior caused by such ideas will be highly superficial and far from the high moral quality that religion bestows.

In the Qur’an, Allah warns people of faith against such shallow and superficial thinking and reminds them that it can endanger their lives in the next world:

Among the people there is one who worships Allah right on the edge. If good befalls him, he is content with it, but if a trial befalls him, he reverts to his former ways, losing both this world and the Hereafter. That is indeed sheer loss. (Surat al-Hajj: 11)

This tendency can be present in the hearts of those who have not yet come to faith. These people are careful to practice religious morality when they are surrounded with blessings and their situation and

environment are just as they wish. Under such circumstances, they eagerly perform their required acts of worship. But when the situation changes, when Allah takes away some of their blessings as a test, these people behave differently. Heaviness replaces their former eagerness. Some of them may even fall into perverse thinking:

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

However, this is the nadir of shallowness. To be positive when conditions are good, and to become ungrateful when the situation changes, is behavior that should be avoided. Similarly, to disregard Allah, grumble and complain and become depressed in times of difficulty, reflects the same shallow way of thinking. In everything that happens, Muslims put their trust in Allah. To have a fine moral character and be patient, moderate, intelligent, perceptive, resourceful, sensible, balanced, forgiving, compassionate, and loving brings the deep joy of faith. When a believer sees these good qualities in himself, he is very happy; and it is yet another pleasure when he senses the joy of faith that other believers have taken from him.

Their Understanding of Friendship

Friendship is based on mutual intimacy. But a shallow person can perceive sincerity and intimacy as not requiring the use of reason. His smiles, conversations, behavior and expressions reflect a shallow mind, and he displays even more shallowness in the name of intimacy. He can easily do something shallow in the presence of one he regards as an intimate friend, but would avoid doing the same in someone else's presence. For example, he'll talk to his friend about private and confidential matters. Or he talks about illness or physical weaknesses, whose mention does no good at all. Instead of choosing easy solutions, he describes his ailments at great length. He always tells others that he is hungry, thirsty, sleepy or exhausted by the heat. He relates in great detail how his head ached all night, how much medicine he took but to no avail, how tired he is from lack of sleep, that he got a chill from an open window, and countless similar unnecessary things. All this he does in the name of intimacy; but this is merely superficiality.

Contrary to what such people think, a person receives no comfort from not using his will or intellect. When superficial people act without thinking, they imagine that this will put themselves at ease and present an image of friendship to those around them. However, the opposite is true. When a person uses his intellect consciously, he makes himself comfortable as well as those around him. Otherwise, all conversation and activity would be very shallow and repellent. If a person acts intelligently and thinks subtly, to that extent will his friendships be sound and valuable. The prophets and Muslims who practice the moral teachings of the Qur'an are the best example of this. Because they try to win Allah's favor at every moment, their conversations and actions are all designed toward this end. When there is an illness,

for example, they take appropriate medical treatment and see a doctor to learn what the trouble is. But most importantly, they remember that these things will be effective only if Allah permits, and they pray to Him for healing. They do not make unnecessary conversation about their illness to a friend, relative, or anyone else. They do not constantly talk about their ailment. The Prophet Ayyub (as) is an example for Muslims. When he was seriously ill, he turned only toward Allah:

And Ayyub when he called out to his Lord, “Great harm has afflicted me and You are the Most Merciful of the merciful.” We responded to him and removed from him the harm which was afflicting him . . . (Surat al-Anbiya’: 83-84)

This is the basic way in which Muslims think. It stems from their knowing that Allah is in control of everything and that they expect good things only from Him.

In a superficial understanding of friendship, “pouring out grievances” occupy an important place. According to this way of understanding, being someone else’s friend means being able to have such a talk with that someone whenever one wants to. Such conversation in whisper tones in doorways, around the kitchen and in a corner of the office is a completely shallow habit. In this one wants a confidant to tell little things to, rather than a true Muslim friendship. Far from being of any use, the confidant listens to the shallow problems and takes pleasure in sharing the same spiritual state. In the Qur’an, Allah draws attention to the superficiality of those who do not practice religious morality:

There is no good in much of their secret talk, except in the case of those who enjoin charity, or what is right, or putting things right between people . . . (Surat an-Nisa’: 114)

Allah says that the secret conversations these people have most often result in no good. Those with a shallow idea of friendship take every opportunity when alone together to gossip, and in many ways urge each other on to unseemly moral behavior. Because their world is small, they take a common pleasure in gossiping. However, as stated earlier, Allah tells us in the Qur’an that gossiping is a disgusting activity.

. . . Avoid most suspicion. Indeed some suspicion is a crime. And do not spy and do not backbite one another. Would any of you like to eat his brother’s dead flesh? No, you would hate it. And have fear of Allah . . . (Surat al-Hujurat: 12)

Because these kinds of friends have the same way of thinking, they also share a common superficial culture. Even in a crowded environment, these people will recognize one another and seek one another out. Although their lifestyles may not be the same, when they spend time together, they are more comfortable than they would be with someone else. But this ease does not arise from intimacy, love, respect or trust; it is a freedom that results from living the same superficiality and understanding the same language. When these same people see another with a higher morality, they know that such an

individual could not live in their debased culture. For this reason, they always choose as their closest friends those who share the same morality.

When they cannot act freely in the presence of others with a high standard of morality, they sit back in silence. Because they cannot display the shallow behavior of their debased culture, they withdraw mentally and physically. They carry on hesitant and artificial conversations and appear very hard-pressed not to reveal themselves as they really are.

Instead of being altruistic toward their friends, they are actually selfish, proud and arrogant. Such a person always expects love, friendship, tolerance and self-sacrifice from others, but he can never obtain any of these. He does not think to do favors for anyone else, but expects others to do something for him. For example, he wants others to be tolerant with him, but he is intolerant of the least thing. He wants very much to be loved, but his character is not lovable, nor can he love another person in any real sense. Besides, if someone else feels love and respect for him and does him some favors, he cannot respond in the due manner because of his shallow character. He will abuse this good treatment at every opportunity. Because he thinks he deserves the love and goodness offered to him, he grows arrogant and self-satisfied. It is too much for him when he receives respect from someone—respect he has never had before and that he does not deserve. And such a person has no sense of loyalty. A word of advice that goes against his ego may suddenly make him irritated and aggressive.

These people do not truly value one another, and their friendships are not long-lived because they are not based on love and respect. They often take offense, sulk and become upset as a way of making a protest. No matter how normal such behavior may seem to people in an ignorant society, it is brought about by the false religion of superficiality and has no place in the morality of the Qur'an. In the Muslim understanding of friendship, there is no room for this kind of ignorant, primitive tactics. Those with faith can speak to one another about every matter in a tolerant and understanding environment and can resolve issues by reference to the Qur'an.

Some people perpetuate this lack of understanding and reproachful attitude for months or even years. It arises from their shallow way of thinking. These people do not fear Allah as they ought and so they struggle with small matters, thinking that they are actually disasters. If a friend of such a person meets with another mutual friend without informing this person and do not invite him, he will quickly become upset and even end the friendship. Such people focus their entire attention on unimportant issues that arise in their small worlds; and yet while they are doing this, death is fast approaching. Such people live in their superficiality with no preparations for the world to come. They completely ignore the fact that one day they will die, be buried and give an account in the next life.

Muslims are individuals with common goals and values, who love Allah, work to win His favor, mercy and to attain Paradise. They have faith in Allah, obey Him, and practice the morality of the Qur'an. This makes their love strong and it takes deep root among them. As a corollary of this sense of love and respect, they form strong bonds of friendship among themselves. Both sides are extremely content in this friendship. They practice the morality of the Qur'an in everything they do and, as a result, their actions and conversations are always natural and good. The warmth of Islamic morality radiates from their friendship. They perform acts of self-sacrifice for one another. We are told in the Qur'an that such people always put their friends' wants before their own, and they **“. . . prefer them to themselves**

even if they themselves are needy . . .” (Surat al-Hashr: 9). They always act with gentleness and compassion in accord with the command of Allah to **“ . . . take the believers under your wing”** (Surat al-Hijr: 88). Because they love other Muslims and honor them for the sake of their faith and morality, they act with consideration and avoid doing anything that their friends would not like or that would make them uncomfortable. In the Qur’an, Allah tells Muslims that this bond among them goes beyond friendship:

The believers are brothers . . . (Surat al-Hujurat: 10)

In another verse, Allah reminds us that this friendship among Muslims is a blessing from Him:

. . . Remember Allah’s blessing to you when you were enemies and He joined your hearts together so that you became brothers by His blessing . . . (Surah Al ‘Imran: 103)

This strong bond among Muslims is a blessing given by Allah as a reward for their faith. It is not possible for anyone to have this friendship and intimacy if they do not practice the moral precepts of the Qur’an. Allah reveals this truth in the Qur’an:

And [it is He Who] unified their hearts. Even if you had spent everything on the Earth, you could not have unified their hearts. But Allah has unified them . . . (Surat al-Anfal: 63)

They Take no Pleasure in Goodness or Beauty

Those who believe in Allah and in the life to come know that He is the reason for the existence of everything they see around them. Someone with this knowledge looks around and is aware every moment of the countless beautiful things that Allah creates for human beings. Such a person takes deep pleasure from the artistry in the things that Allah has created. For this reason, a Muslim always wants to be surrounded by beauty. His spirit always tends toward what is purer and more beautiful. He likes renovation and change in these things. When he enters a certain environment, he immediately notices any alterations made to it. In the same way, he notices lack of symmetry, and changes that have been done without any understanding of purity. He immediately feels a desire to rearrange it and make it beautiful. In return for this genuineness, Allah bestows a great sensitivity on his spirit.

In the Qur’an, Allah promises a Muslim living with this way of thinking a life in Paradise filled with infinite beauty and artistry:

Their Lord gives them the good news of His mercy and good pleasure and Gardens where they will enjoy everlasting delight. (Surat at-Tawba: 21)

But someone who lives in an ignorant culture cannot appreciate the blessings surrounding him. For example, if a delicate handmade artwork were shown to such a person, he would not recognize its value. He could not appreciate the talent of the artist who made it, the work it took or the meticulous and attentive artistry that went into it. He would not have in his spirit anything approaching the ability to observe, enjoy and appreciate the delicacy of its workmanship.

Because of the effects of superficial culture on his mind, he has become unable to appreciate beauty in what he sees. But this state is like a dangerous illness that can blind the human spirit. Under this culture's degenerating influence, a person who cannot appreciate beauty has damaged with his own hands the wonderful blessing that Allah has given him. Finally, this person's life falls into the state Allah describes in the Qur'an:

On the Day when those who disbelieved are exposed to the Fire: "You dissipated the good things you had in your worldly life and enjoyed yourself in it . . ." (Surat al-Ahqaf: 20)

However, the human spirit has been created to take pleasure in every sort of spiritual and material beauty. It is disposed to appreciate beauty. But a person accustomed to his own superficiality and lives without improving on what is good and beautiful in his character, blinds his spirit. He becomes unable to notice beautiful things before his eyes and the wonderful artistry, harmony and symmetry in the things Allah has created. Caring only about his own survival, he chooses goals that are debased and unworthy of the purpose of human life. If he sits down before a fine meal, he will have no awareness of the effort that went into preparing it and no ability to understand its subtle, aesthetic touches. He will never understand that its careful preparation is a wonderful blessing and gift from Allah. In such a situation, he will engage in superficiality regarding that meal.

Also, some people with this mindset attach no importance to the cleanliness of their bodies or their environment. As Allah says in the Qur'an, they live in filth because they do not use their intellect:

. . . He casts uncleanness on those who do not use their intellect. (Surah Yunus: 100)

For example, they take no real pleasure from wearing clean clothes or living in a clean environment. They appear to attach importance to these things in places where other people can see them. Apart from this, they do not care anything about cleanliness or what it entails. All this is proof that shows that they do not possess the personal dignity that is the mark of people with faith.

People who share the culture of superficiality attach no importance to aesthetics, eye-pleasing order or, more importantly, good moral character. That they care nothing for aesthetics or beauty can easily be seen from the way they pay no attention to these things. However, an individual whose personality is formed by the morality of the Qur'an and who knows that Allah is aware of all he does, always wants to look his best in Allah's sight. Allah says that He has created human beings best among all other creatures:

We created man in the finest mould. (Surat at-Tin: 4)

For this reason, in everything they do throughout their whole lives human beings should emphasize this blessing of Allah and act so as not to weaken their human aspects. Besides, Allah tells us in the Qur'an that He will lower the state of those who do not use their good qualities and behave according to the creation that makes them superior to other creatures. We can see from the following verse that only those who show their faith in the works they do will not be put into this lowly state:

Then We reduced him to the lowest of the low, except for those who believe and do right actions . . . (Surat at-Tin: 5-6)

Those who can appreciate Allah's wonderful creative artistry, beauty and goodness in what they see are ones whose spirits take pleasure from these things and deepen their perceptions. In the Qur'an, Allah describes the moral excellence of a Muslim:

[People with intelligence are] those who remember Allah, standing, sitting and lying on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the Earth: "Our Lord, You have not created this for nothing. Glory be to You! So safeguard us from the punishment of the Fire." (Surah Al 'Imran: 191)

This depth is impossible to attain in a superficial culture. But a person attached to Allah in sincere faith has this depth when standing, sitting or lying. A person with a Muslim morality thinks of Allah at every moment; in his mind he senses the greatness of Allah the Creator in everything he sees. This keeps a person with faith in a spiritual state by which he can appreciate everything he sees. He knows that everything is Allah's creation and can perceive the goodness and the subtlety in it.

They Talk About the Positive Things They Have Done

People of shallow character want everyone to know all the good things they have done, and do these things where everyone can plainly see them. For example, when they give money to a poor person, they do it openly. Later, they draw attention to what they have done in a covert way or talk openly about it. You can hear them say things like, "I gave him that," or "I bought what he is wearing. I cleaned it," "I prepared that file," "I gave him that idea," "If I hadn't reminded him, he would have forgotten," "I dropped him off in my car," "I looked after him when he was sick . . ." Superficiality drives a person to behave like this. People of shallow character use these kinds of things to praise themselves and make themselves look good in the eyes of others. If the praise of Allah was in their hearts and minds, they would not lower themselves to seek others' appreciation and praise. But because they do not try to win Allah's favor and the rewards in the Afterlife are far from their minds, they are more inclined to seek the appreciation and gratitude of others as an easy gain.

These people can even cite the material or spiritual help they have given to the recipients themselves. Because they cannot conceive of subtlety of religious morality, they do not see this as superficiality. However, in the Qur'an, Allah tells His servants to avoid such behavior:

You who believe! Do not nullify your charity by demands for gratitude or insulting words, like him who spends his wealth, showing off to people and not believing in Allah and the Last Day. His likeness is that of a smooth rock coated with soil, which, when heavy rain falls on it, is left stripped bare. They have no power over anything they have earned . . . (Surat al-Baqara: 264)

He reminds them that if they make another person feel obliged to them they will render their alms ineffective. In another verse Allah says:

Correct and courteous words accompanied by forgiveness are better than charity followed by insulting words. Allah is Rich Beyond Need . . . (Surat al-Baqara: 263)

With their good works and exemplary behavior, Muslims who practice religious morality seek only to win Allah's favor. They look with unalloyed intentions toward Paradise and do so not expecting any material or spiritual return from anyone. In this sense, they place no importance on the appreciation or gratitude of others. Since they have no desire to win the others' praise, they behave in a dignified and sincere manner. They never try to let others know the good they have done, and so never mention them. They never make another person feel obliged, and expect no thanks, praise or compliments. Allah tells us in the Qur'an that they expect their reward only from Him:

. . . [Hud said:] "My wage is the responsibility of Him Who brought me into being . . ."
(Surah Hud: 51)

As Allah points out in the Qur'an, they prefer to do good deeds in secret:

If you make your charity public, that is good. But if you conceal it and give it to the poor, that is better for you, and We will erase some of your bad actions from you. Allah is aware of what you do. (Surat al-Baqara: 271)

In another verse, Allah explains a Muslim's basic goal:

. . . Whatever good you give away is to your own benefit, when you give desiring only the Face of Allah . . . (Surat al-Baqara: 272)

Shallow People are Easily Angered

Anger and tension usually arise from conflicts of interest. When some individuals of shallow character think that their material circumstances are endangered, they can become irritated in a moment. Anger can suddenly make a calm, peaceful or humorous person unrecognizable; it can make him hard and heartless. But for this to happen, the individual must have a weak will and conscience, be unmindful of Allah and be unable to control his lower self.

These people have countless ways to make their anger felt. When someone asks them a question, they are silent for a while before answering. They use innuendo in their conversations; they constantly complain and cause discord. They do not laugh when it is appropriate; they sulk; they do not join in conversations; they slam doors and throw things on the floor. These are only a few of their displays of anger and innuendo, all coming from shallowness. And none of this has any place in religious morality, because everything that happens to a person happens under Allah's control. Every minute and second of our lives is under His sovereignty. For this reason, there is no situation in which a person should lose himself and become caught up in anger. When a valuable antique is broken, a purse is lost, an important document is thrown into the trash, an accident happens, a false or hurtful word is uttered—all such things that are a part of life may be considered adverse. But they are part of the destiny that Allah has created for everyone. In His infinite wisdom, our Lord has created these things for the good of His faithful servants.

Think of a person who sprains his ankle, misses an important appointment, is fired from his job or is the subject of unfounded gossip. Or someone who fails a university entrance examination after years of constant preparation. Before they become angry, these people should consider that none of these occurrences happened by chance. For a devout Muslim, all of these things are the means to good and were all created for a purpose.

Shallow people frequently forget about the fact of destiny; they do not consider that any adversity that happens to them is under Allah's control, and they become caught up in anger. But believers control their anger. They trust in Allah and ask for good to come out of their negative experience. They keep in mind that Allah directed the other person who may have caused such an adversity. They know that being overcome with anger, tension, hurtful words and irritability are marks of a person with a shallow mind. In the Qur'an, Allah reveals:

[People who guard against evil are] those who give in times of both ease and hardship, those who control their rage and pardon other people—Allah loves the good-doers. (Surah Al 'Imran: 134)

Greed is an Essential Part of the Shallow Character

People of shallow character have a strong attachment to the values of this world and so live divorced from religious morality. What drives a person into superficiality are things like arrogance,

jealousy, ambition, impatience, and anger, at the bottom of which lie the passions and desires of the lower self. As with all of the above, the passions and desires of the lower self also lie at the root of greed. The lower self is like an enemy placed inside a person. In the Qur'an, Allah tells us the following:

[Yusuf said:] “I do not say my self was free from blame. The self indeed commands to evil acts—except for those my Lord has mercy on . . .” (Surah Yusuf: 53)

A person must use his intelligence and conscience against his lower self, because, if he puts aside his fine human values and yields to it, he will be greatly deceived by going after worldly gain. Allah shows us the superficial tendencies of those who follow their lower selves and distance themselves from the Qur'an:

If We had wanted to, We would have raised him up by them. But he gravitated towards the earth and pursued his whims and base desires . . . (Surat al-A'raf: 176)

In another verse, He says that behavior that falls outside the practice of religious morality is degrading:

. . . Some of them are righteous and some are other than that . . . (Surat al-A'raf: 168)

If they used their consciences, they would live respectable and honorable lives, but they show this tendency toward degrading behavior. So, greed is one of the aspects that reflect this superficial and degraded morality.

Greed is a concept that weakens and degrades a person, and can cause great harm. Because of ambition, a person with this kind of morality can abandon valuable things he owns to pursue things of no value. Although he can desire and work toward gaining Allah's favor and mercy and attaining the infinite blessings of Paradise, he desires the transient and decaying benefits of this world. Because his lower self is full of avarice, he cannot see the future, only the present moment. As revealed in the Qur'an, he puts the next world out of his mind:

These people love this fleeting world and have put the thought of a Momentous Day behind their backs. (Surat al-Insan: 27)

Wealth, possessions, ambition and desire for gain drive this person into superficiality and always degrade him. But ambition and greedy desire for worldly possessions is a deception. In order not to fall into this state, a person must not pursue his passions and the desires of his lower self.

In the Qur'an, Allah reveals:

. . . You desire the goods of this world, whereas Allah desires the Hereafter . . . (Surat al-Anfal: 67)

In another verse, He describes that, compared to the desire for wealth and possessions, “. . . **Allah’s reward is better for those who believe and act rightly. But only the steadfast will obtain it . . .**” (Surat al-Qasas: 80). When a person becomes ambitious, he is open to making mistakes and behaving wrongly; soon he is far removed from many truths and beautiful things. He compromises values he believes in to have a bit more to eat or more things to wear, a higher standard of living or a higher position. However, these things are all transient, all unimportant. A person can be filled with a single meal; he can wear the same shirt for years. No matter how big his house is, he can only be in one room at a time. No matter what the circumstances of his life, a person should be dignified and never countenance such superficiality. If he is going through a difficult time, he should work hard, trust in Allah and never be greedy for anything, large or small. He should ask for what he needs only from Allah. In the Qur’an, Allah reveals:

There is nothing wrong in seeking bounty from your Lord . . . (Surat al-Baqara: 198)

We are told in this verse that a human can ask all sorts of things from Allah. Allah gives sustenance to every living being on Earth and in the heavens; He is our Creator. He gives good things to His faithful servants along with the good news that He will answer their prayers. He says:

. . . If you fear impoverishment, Allah will enrich you from His bounty if He wills . . . (Surat at-Tawba: 28)

By Allah’s grace, Muslims have a noble spirit. For this reason, they expect every kind of blessing and assistance from Him:

You alone we ask for help. Guide us on the Straight Path, the Path of those You have blessed. (Surat al-Fatiha: 4-6)

They are dignified, so that even if they are in need, they will not let other people know. Allah draws attention to the worthiness of such fine morality:

[Alms are] for the poor who are held back in the way of Allah, unable to travel in the land. The ignorant consider them rich because of their reticence. You will know them by their mark. They do not ask from people insistently . . . (Surat al-Baqara: 273)

They give food, despite their love for it, to the poor and orphans and captives. “We feed you only out of desire for the Face of Allah. We do not want any repayment from you or any thanks. Truly We fear from our Lord a glowering, calamitous Day.” (Surat al-Insan: 8-10)

Those who were already settled in the abode, and in faith, before they came, love those who have migrated to them and do not find in their hearts any need for what they have been given and prefer them to themselves even if they themselves are needy . . . (Surat al-Hashr: 9)

We are told in the last verse above that, even if they are in need, believers prefer to give rather than receive.

Muslims take great pleasure in this honorable and generous behavior, which is just the opposite of greed. Greedy people grab their blessings, and it never occurs to them to give thanks for them. For this reason they cannot take pleasure from anything they possess. They always want more. Even if they do not need anything, still their ambition is to possess more. They are greedy even about little things. Allah tells us about this in the Qur'an and points out that these people are insistent in their refusal to practice religious morality:

Leave the person I created on his own to Me alone, him to whom I have given great wealth and sons who stay with him, and whose way I have smoothed. Then he wants Me to add yet more! No indeed! He is obdurate about Our signs. (Surat al-Muddaththir: 11-16)

They are close-fisted and resist spending what they have, though they have very different expectations from other people. In the Qur'an, Allah reveals the falsity which comes from their greediness:

Woe to the stinters! Those who, when they take a measure from people, exact full measure, but when they give them a measure or weight, hand over less than is due. (Surat al-Mutaffifin: 1-3)

However, this is a kind of superficiality that does not please Allah; He describes it in the Qur'an and warns people against it, reminding them that the blessings He will give are much better:

Do not direct your eyes longingly to what We have given certain of them to enjoy, the flower of the life of this world, so that We can test them by it. Your Lord's provision is better and longer lasting. (Surah Ta Ha: 131)

The idea of greediness is not limited only to material things. This moral perversity may show itself in many ways, including an answer given to a question or a word uttered. A superficial person, in his own words, "gives as good as he gets" and is eager to have the last word in an argument. Some individuals take every opportunity to pepper their conversations with foreign words to indicate that they know another language. Instead of speaking plainly and simply, they pretend not to remember the word in their own language for what they want to express. In order to show off, they demean themselves by using foreign expressions. This superficiality also lies at the root of conversations that mention brand names, car models and vacation homes. However, addiction to the things of this transient world brings

shame upon people. Those who lower themselves to this level of superficiality must realize how far they have fallen. Such people must remember that everything they own belongs to this world that will pass away in the twinkling of an eye and that in death, all of it will be left behind.

The desire to seize the least opportunity to get the upper hand is also a part of this debased morality. Amazingly, people with this greedy way of thinking regard small things as gains. For example, a shallow person is made happy when he gets a better seat in the theater or attends a company dinner without paying. Similarly, little things he has cheated others out of give him unexpected excitement. People who try to get to the table first to take advantage of a buffet or try to take the plate with the most food on it share the same superficiality. Most of them are greedy for a plateful of food even though they do not actually need it.

Greed has nothing to do with whether a person's material means are great or small; everything to do with the fact that they have a shallow spirit divorced from religious morality. Just as many honorable people of limited resources do not reveal their needs to anyone, so many wealthy people are tight-fisted and greedy for the smallest things. For example, a famous rich person goes to a small town for some reason. Whatever modest store he enters, he does not leave without receiving a gift, even if a small one. The shopkeeper who gave the gift was probably not very well-off. If this individual wandering through the town does not pay for a meal in a small restaurant, he regards it as a gain. He is actually greedy for the possessions of needy people.

From this example, we can see that superficial people may be greedy for receiving gifts from friends and acquaintances. Such a person always reminds them of New Year's, birthdays, and anniversaries. In order to receive gifts, he jokes with his friends, but his so-called jokes contain certain implications that force the other person to buy a gift for him. Together with this, he constantly mentions that he likes a certain object and wishes that he had something just like it, expecting that the others will give him one as a present. In this way, he is greedy for the smallest things and regards it as gain if he secures them.

We must remember that there is no direct connection between superficiality and education, culture, wealth or poverty. In fact, it is a matter of religious morality and conscience. Only Muslims who use their conscience, seek Allah's favor and look forward to the next life are tranquil and content. They avoid things contrary to religious morality such as ambition, greed and exploiting other people, because they do not look for the transient benefits of the moment, but for the endless life of Paradise.

The Prophet Muhammad (saas) warned people with faith against greed in his hadiths. He says, *"Do not be avaricious. Avarice is poverty itself"* (At-Tabarani). In another hadith, he says that avoiding greed makes a believer honorable *"... The honor of the believer lies in his not casting his eyes on the possessions of others"* (al-Hakim). And in another hadith, the Prophet (saas) points out the difference between being ambitious and not being ambitious for the things of this world:

"Whosever's desire and objective is the world, Allah will narrow that person's affairs in his disfavor, will make his poverty between his two eyes [in other words, he will suffer troubles for the sake of obtaining the things of this world] and nothing from the world [blessings and goods] but what is written for him [in his destiny] will come to him. Whosever's desire and objective is the Hereafter, Allah

will make good his fragmented affairs, locate wealth in his heart and the world [its blessings and goods] will submit to him.” (Sunan Ibn Majah)

And Bediuzzaman Said Nursi reminds us in one of his reflections that someone who has earthly desires may be deprived of them:

“Greed is the cause of deprivation; submission and contentment, on the other hand, are a vehicle for mercy.” (Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, Risale-i Nur Collection, The Letters, p. 271.)

They are Curious

Those who live in the debased culture of superficiality use various tactics to find out what they want to know. They are curious about things that do not concern them and try to find out about things of no advantage to them. For example, Person No. 1 was not invited to a gathering of friends the evening before. In order to find out whether Person No. 2—someone he had a disagreement with—was invited, he tells Person No. 3 that he tried all night to call Person No. 2, but without success, and that he was concerned. So Person No. 3, not knowing the real reason for the question, says that Person No. 2 was at last night’s gathering and that is why he could not be reached. With his sneaky questioning, Person No. 1 makes a display of good will to Person No. 3 without making him aware of his curiosity and jealousy.

Besides this tactic of covert questioning, those who live in a superficial culture constantly ask questions to satisfy their curiosity. They insert into their conversations basic questions such as “Who said what?”, “Where did he go?”, “What did he wear?” and “Where did he come from?” They want to find out things whether or not it concerns them. Or they use people of similar character to themselves as tools to find out what they are curious about, then engage in long gossip conversations about the matter. They live in this culture without realizing how curiosity degrades them and the appearance of superficiality it gives them. They look at the small and insignificant and exaggerate these things in their minds. Instead of thinking about the moment-by-moment approach of death and the endless life that comes after, they speak about these insignificant things and waste their time tiring their brains.

However, if there is anything a person who trusts in Allah needs to know, Allah will assuredly make sure he will receive this knowledge and learn what he needs to know in various ways. For this reason, he never becomes anxious or curious. He knows that things will turn out for the best, and that if he seeks Allah’s favor, He will surely protect him and give him the knowledge and whatever other things he needs. A Muslim never forgets Allah’s absolute authority over everything. No matter how curious he may be, he’s aware that he’ll never learn anything that Allah does not give him permission to know. He thinks that even if he placates his curiosity using some of the tactics described above, in the process his conscience will not leave him at ease, and that he will always have the discomfort of having deceived or abused others. He knows that if he deliberately asks a sneaky question, Allah will see him at that moment, and at every moment he tries to assuage his curiosity by using falsehood and deceit. He knows that Allah is beside him and that he will receive the reward for what he does. He knows placating even a small and insignificant curiosity will bring him anxiety and pangs of conscience, and he would never risk this.

He fears Allah and respects His precepts. For this reason, he will never pursue anything so superficial. He would not even allow empty, insignificant conversations to be held in his presence whose purpose was to placate curiosity. The Prophet (saas) gives this advice in hadiths:

“Let he who believes in Allah and the Hereafter either speak auspiciously or else remain silent.” (Tirmidhi hadiths)

In another hadith, he says:

“A person’s abandoning useless, empty words is the foremost of the beauties of Islam.” (Tirmidhi hadiths)

So a Muslim who experiences this beauty would never yield to vain curiosity. Even if he wanted to learn about a matter, he would rein himself in. To fall into such a situation otherwise would be unbecoming. Everyone may try to deceive others and use covert tactics to learn from them what they want to know. But the important thing is whether the person doing this can find room for such behavior in his moral make-up. Can he reconcile this insincere, curious personality with his own moral understanding? If he is prepared to do this just to obtain a piece of information, in the knowledge that Allah sees him and knows what he is doing, it is a sign that his fear of Allah is not strong.

However, that a person wants to learn something useful that will supply his needs and make life easier has nothing to do with curiosity. This is Muslim way of behavior proper to those who believe in Allah.

As explained above in detail, the kind of questioning designed to fulfill a person’s egotistical desires and put his curiosity to rest is totally different from the Muslim understanding. It is an activity that comes from superficiality and is proper to those individuals who have lost, to a certain degree, the sensitivity that faith imparts.

They are Overly Refined

Those whose way of thinking is not superficial behave with natural grace. Such people feel no need to use artificiality in their conversations, actions or expressions. For superficial people, however, acting in an overly refined manner comes at the head of their list of artificial tactics. By “overly refined,” we do not mean being mannerly, considerate or polite; but the attempt of shallow characters to present themselves as other than they are, to make others like them. Being overly refined is a tactic a person uses to conceal his real personality, shallow behavior and way of life from others.

This individual knows that he is shallow, and that among some people around him he can live fearlessly in this shallowness. He knows he needn’t act in a refined way among those with whom he shares this low culture; he can even act in quite vulgarly with them. But he feels an intense need to act in a refined manner with those who are not like him, in whose eyes he fears to be humiliated if they detect his shallowness.

Attempts to act refined is a tactic that exalts human beings more than necessary. It is seen in people with weak personalities and shows those who act this way to be ignorant and shallow. For example, anyone who behaves naturally says what he wants to, simply and directly. If he wants

something, he states it clearly. But a shallow person, in his attempt to be refined, cannot say what he wants to. He goes off the track and goes on at great length. Especially when he wants something from someone, he is easily embarrassed and acts unnaturally. This overly refined manner is seen not only in his manner and conversation, but also in the way he sits, stands, eats, holds things and in many other ways. Everyone who sees him knows that such a person cannot live that way for 24 hours a day, because such behavior is so obviously unnatural.

Overly refined behavior may also stem from formality and remoteness. If a person speaks always in a refined manner with someone else, it's a sign that he is not that person's friend; but that they remain strangers. These people do not feel the need to be so refined with their families or close friends. They trust these people and so can act comfortably with them, showing their natural side. On the other hand, those with whom they feel they must strike a refined pose are people from whom they want to hide their real personalities. Unlike what some may think, those who act in a refined manner do not act that way out of respect for others, but on the contrary, out of a lack of sincerity.

Instead of hiding their shallow character by acting in an overly refined manner, those people should abandon and be saved from superficiality. Only this way will their behavior become normal again and of a high quality. This is possible by living fully according to the morality of the Qur'an.

THE IDEAL OF SOME SUPERFICIAL PEOPLE IS SIMPLY TO LIVE

Some people had many ideals in their youth. But they grow up, and by the time they have reached maturity, have achieved certain goals: They have finished school, established a career, married and had children. And, when they have no goals or expectations left to achieve, they lose their *joie de vivre*. Now they spend their time according to their situation and culture. Some sit in cafes, others by the sea; some wander around bazaars, others walk in parks. Others doze off at home, or watch television. One day is the same as the day before; each of these people is waiting for death.

When such a person opens his eyes in the morning, he thinks that this day is no different from any other. But he does not complain, as one might expect, because his goal every day is to live for another day before he dies. This state of mind is the reason for these people's quick spiritual and physical decay. Those who retire at 55 or 60 years of age are actually not very old. But their point of view is that everything good has gone away; for which reason they feel and look much older than they are. Some others of the same age look at the world in the opposite way; they are industrious and have not lost their eagerness and excitement. By comparison, they are stronger, more joyful and energetic. In the Qur'an there are verses that point out the benefit of being industrious and not wasting time doing nothing. For example:

So when you have finished, work on, and make your Lord your goal! (Surat al-Inshirah: 7-8)

That some people in superficial culture expect just to live can be seen not only among the aged and retired, but also in every segment and age group. This point of view is found partly among those who have married and had children, made a career for themselves but have no further hope of advancement. Some people go to work in the morning, come back at night, watch television and eat dinner, with nothing to achieve before they go to bed. Like some elderly people, they only want to get through that day.

It's not easy for such people to have a change or something new in their lives. They have no noble thoughts about developing themselves or benefiting their community. Such thoughts and behavior would bring change and upset the order of their lives, which is not in their best interests. They do not want anyone to interfere with the shallow, monotonous little worlds they have established for themselves.

Some who choose to live in a superficial culture rather than practice religious morality pass their days without setting themselves any goal; they are actually waiting for death. Some of them can sit in their pajamas all day before a window with the curtains wide open. Such superficial people have no goals left in their lives; their aim is *just to live*. They do not ask themselves what their purpose in life is. Their belief in the next world is weak, and their life far removed from religious morality. They have no goals, such as winning Allah's mercy and favor, doing good works to please Him, or prevailing in a contest of merit with other moral and conscientious believers. For this reason, they have come to this

point in life and have set a most degrading and superficial ideal for themselves. They even leave their worldly ideals to one side and, in the spiritual void into which they have fallen, they abandon all their will and desires, all their work, efforts and productivity. Now they are engaged only in prolonging their lives.

Not all of them, however, have severed their connections with the world. One who goes back and forth to work every day can be in a similar monotonous void and aim only at getting through the day. Those far removed from the purposes of creation, whether or not they work and whether young or old, rich or poor, men or women, all have made this their basic goal: just to live.

But when death comes to them, their awareness becomes unclouded and they want to return to their earthly lives to do good works. These people have spent their whole lives carefree without thinking and perhaps, only the day before, they were merely trying to kill time. Ignoring the purposes of creation, they spent their lives far from Allah's service. Their only goals were to eat, sleep and look after their daily affairs.

But this is the end that these people will meet in their eternal lives:

So leave them in their glut of ignorance for a while. Do they imagine that, in the wealth and children We are hastening to them with good things? No indeed, but they have no awareness! (Surat al- Muminun: 54-56)

. . . You will see the wrongdoers saying, when they see the punishment, "Is there no way back?" You will see them as they are exposed to it, abject in their abasement, glancing around them furtively. Those who believe will say, "Truly the losers are those who lose themselves and their families on the Day of Resurrection." The wrongdoers are in an everlasting punishment. (Surat as-Shura: 44-45)

They will say, "Our Lord, our miserable destiny overpowered us. We were misguided people. Our Lord, remove us from it! Then if we revert again, we will definitely be wrongdoers." He will say, "Slink away into it and do not speak to Me. There was a group of My servants who said, 'Our Lord, we believe, so forgive us and have mercy on us. You are the Best of the Merciful.' But you made a mockery of them so that they made you forget to remember Me while you were laughing at them. Today I have rewarded them for being steadfast. They are the ones who are victorious." (Surat al- Muminun: 106-111)

On the Day when the Spirit and the angels stand in ranks, no one will speak, except for him who is authorized by the All-Merciful and says what is right. That will be the True Day. So whoever wills should take the way back to his Lord. We have warned you of an imminent punishment on the Day when a man will see what he has done, and the unbelievers will say, "Oh, if only I were dust!" (Surat an-Naba': 38-40)

But as for him who is given his Book behind his back, he will cry out for destruction but will be roasted in a Searing Blaze. He used to be joyful in his family. He thought that he was never going to return. But in fact his Lord was always watching him! (Surat al-Inshiqaq: 10-15)

Woe to every scorner and mocker who has amassed wealth and hoarded it! He thinks his wealth will make him live for ever. No indeed! He will be flung into the Shatterer. And what will convey to you what the Shatterer is? The kindled Fire of Allah reaching right into the heart. It is sealed in above them in towering columns. (Surat al-Humaza: 1-9)

Say: "Shall I inform you of the greatest losers in their actions?" People whose efforts in the life of this world are misguided while they suppose that they are doing good." Those are the people who reject their Lord's signs and the meeting with Him. Their actions will come to nothing and, on the Day of Resurrection, We will not assign them any weight. (Surat al-Kahf: 103-105)

CONCLUSION: HOW CAN A SINCERE PERSON ESCAPE SUPERFICIALITY?

In the behavior and conversations characteristic of superficiality, there is a basic problem of mind and spirit. For this reason, the best way to escape superficiality is not to address and correct these individual kinds of behavior one by one—because if a person encountered a situation he had not addressed before, he would revert to superficial behavior. And problems would arise in theory and practice, because a person's thoughts and point of view are reflected in his behavior. He finds it difficult to do something he regards as unreasonable or unnecessary. However, the solution to superficiality is not the lengthy, difficult or complicated process it is thought to be. In fact, it is very easy.

The solution is to fear Allah and practice the morality of the Qur'an. Everyone who has faith in Allah and lives his life totally according to the Qur'an will be saved from superficiality. If he fears Allah as he should and behaves always and everywhere according to his conscience, he will be kept from doing superficial things. Such a person gives up following his lower self and, as Allah points out in the Qur'an, he will try to cleanse his self from wickedness:

He who purifies it has succeeded, he who covers it up has failed. (Surat ash-Shams: 9-10)

Not following the superficiality of the lower self is an important matter for a person who wants to escape from this kind of character. It is possible only by practicing the precepts of the Qur'an. The lower self is the source of deceit and wickedness and leads people to pursue empty and harmful things; in short, it is the source of much falsehood and superficiality. From it spring selfishness, pride, ambition, greed, anger and all kinds of wickedness in thought and deed. In order not to fall into superficiality and suffer harm in this world and the next, one must not follow one's lower self. In the Qur'an, Allah tells us about some advice that the Prophet Musa (as) gave to his people:

“ . . . You wronged yourselves by adopting the calf so turn towards your Maker and kill your own selves. That is the best thing for you in your Maker's sight . . . ” (Surat al-Baqara: 54)

Those who purify their selves gain understanding and maturity and distance themselves from everything superficial. Allah tells us that human beings can gain honor only by obeying the Qur'an:

. . . We have given them their *dhikr* [that by which one is remembered, i.e., with praise], but they have turned away from it. (Surat al-Muminun: 71)

For this reason, Muslims who fully apply the verses of the Qur'an are noble, honorable and respectable individuals. Allah tells us that they have the highest moral character:

**Do not give up and do not be downhearted. You shall be uppermost if you are believers.
(Surah Al ‘Imran: 139)**

This is a very important matter for those who have faith; they must ponder it well and not think that the debased culture of superficiality is limited to certain areas. For example, it is typically superficial to show a different character in different situations and to act mainly to please others. Lying about an ordinary daily matter thinking it to be insignificant, not doing as much as one could to spread religious morality, noticing where an act of generosity is needed but having no desire to do it, not saying something positive when the opportunity presents itself, attempting to justify one’s ego, speaking sarcastically to others, behaving immodestly . . . All these are examples of superficial behavior. Contrary to what one might think, there is no great or small superficiality. In order to escape it, a person must have the absolutely honest intention to practice religious morality and give up deceiving himself with various excuses. In the Qur’an, Allah promises this salvation and other good things to His servants:

By it, Allah guides those who follow what pleases Him to the ways of peace. He will bring them from the darkness to the light by His permission . . . (Surat al-Ma’ida: 16)

The way to escape superficiality is to practice the morality of the Qur’an—the only kind of morality that fits human nature. A person who has decided to submit his heart and spirit totally to Allah, who intends to live in a way pleasing to Him and to purify himself from any trace of superficiality, can easily escape this culture. It is not important that a person may have adopted and practiced debased culture in the past; the important thing is that person’s final state and his final decision to win Allah’s favor:

. . . Allah has pardoned all that took place in the past; but if anyone does it again Allah will take revenge on him. Allah is Almighty, Exactor of Revenge. (Surat al-Ma’ida: 95)

Say to those who disbelieve that if they stop, they will be forgiven what is past; but if they return to it, they have the pattern of previous peoples in the past. (Surat al-Anfal: 38)

. . . except for what may have already taken place. That is an indecent act, a loathsome thing and an evil path. (Surat an-Nisa’: 22)

When we think of a *superficial person* as understood by most people, generally we imagine an individual ignorant of the rules of etiquette; one who is uneducated, uninformed, immoderate and who often does not know how to behave in certain situations. But what this book dwells on is not the kind of superficiality as generally understood; it discusses, in terms of religious morality, how superficiality can become a spiritual state. The superficiality examined here is a great danger that, unless Allah wills otherwise, can draw a person into Hell.

Superficiality infects a person's behavior and thinking when he does not expand his spirit according to the moral teaching of the Qur'an and is unwilling to draw closer to Allah and seek His favor. It should be remembered that those who live debased by superficiality are still responsible for their lives. Such people who live far from the Qur'an and the subtleties of its moral teaching, pursuing superficial ideals, do not consider that they will be held accountable for their lives. And when they see the angels of death coming to take their souls, they will awaken up to the profound error that they have been living. But this awakening comes too late. This is because the purpose of human creation is for them to live their lives practicing a morality that is pleasing to Allah, and the worst possible time for them to realize that purpose is at the moment of death, when this life is about to be left behind.