

Chapter 2 – Man as Individual

Man is God's creature just like any other created being. He is, indeed, a natural creation, for God fashioned Adam out of baked clay (15.al-Ĥijr:26, 28, 33; 6.al-An'ām:2; 7.al-A'rāf:12, etc.), which, when organized into a human being, produces an extract, *sulāla* (reproductive semen). When injected into the womb, this semen undergoes a creative process, described in 23.al-Mu'minūn:12-14 (cf. also 32.as-Sajdah:8, and elsewhere). But man is distinguished from the rest of natural creation by the fact that after fashioning him, God "breathed My own spirit" into him (15.al-Ĥijr:29; 38.Şād:72; 32.as-Sajdah:9, cf. also Chapter V). The Qur'ān does not appear to endorse the kind of doctrine of a radical mind-body dualism found in Greek philosophy, Christianity, or Hinduism; indeed, there is hardly a passage in the Qur'ān that says that man is composed of two separate, let alone disparate, substances, the body and the soul (even though later orthodox Islam, particularly after al-Ghazālī and largely through his influence, came to accept it). The term *nafs*, frequently employed by the Qur'ān and often translated as "soul," simply means "person" or "self," and such phrases as *al-nafs al-mutma'inna* and *al-nafs al-lawwāma* (usually translated as "the satisfied soul" and "the blaming soul") are best understood as states, aspects, dispositions, or tendencies of the human personality. These may well be regarded as "mental" (as distinguished from "physical") in nature, provided the "mind" is not construed as a separate substance.

When God intended to create Adam in order to establish "a vicegerent on earth," angels protested, saying, "Will You put there a being who will work mischief on the earth and shed blood, while we sing Your glories and exalt Your utter holiness?" God did not deny these allegations against man but replied, "I know what you do not know." He then brought about a competition in knowledge between angels and Adam, asking the former to "name things" (to describe their natures). When the angels could not do so, Adam could (2.al-Baqarah:30 ff.). This demonstrated that Adam possessed the capacity for creative knowledge that angels lacked, whereupon God asked all angels to prostrate themselves before him to honor him. All angels so acknowledged Adam's superiority in knowledge except one being whom the Qur'ān describes as one of the jinn (18.al-Kahf:50), who asserted his own superiority over Adam, disobeyed God's command to honor him, and became Satan. Satan therefore starts his career together with Adam; they are coevals, and the Qur'ān constantly speaks of Satan not so much as an anti God principle (although he is undoubtedly a rebel against God, and, indeed, personifies this rebellious nature) but rather as an anti-man force, perpetually trying to seduce man away from his natural "straight" path into deviant behaviour (see Chapter VII).

It is this deep-seated moral fact that constitutes the eternal challenge for man and renders his life an unceasing moral struggle. In this struggle, God is with man, *provided man makes the necessary effort*. Man is squarely charged with this effort because he is unique in the order of creation, having been endowed with free choice in order to fulfill his mission as God's vicegerent. It is this mission—the attempt to create a moral social order on earth—which the Qur'ān (33.al-Aĥzāb:72) describes as the "Trust." God had offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth but they refused to accept it, being frightened of the burden involved; it was accepted by man, whom the Qur'ān tenderly rebukes as "unfair to himself and foolhardy [*ẓalūm* and *jahūl*]" —for man "has certainly not yet fulfilled God's [primordial] command" (80. 'Abasa:23).

We shall presently essay the Qur'ān's analysis of the basic human weakness and its remedy but here it may be noted that although Satan "waylays man from all sides," his machinations fail against really virtuous persons. To be sure, no man is immune from the devil's temptations—not even the prophets (22.al-Ḥajj:52; 17.al-Isrā':53), nor yet the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) himself (7.al-A'rāf:200; 41.Fuṣṣilat:36)—yet it is within the reach of any true man of faith and will, let alone the prophets, to overcome them (15.al-Ḥijr:42; 17.al-Isrā':65; 16.an-Nahl:99). The reason is that such men, amidst all temptations, keep intact their "primordial nature [*fiṭra*] upon which God created man," which "cannot be [logically] altered [although it may be more or less temporarily disturbed]" (30.ar-Rūm:30). Indeed it is these men who are the cream of all creation, outstripping even the angels, whom they excel in both knowledge and virtue.

It is these men who fully realize that man "has not been created in sport" but has a serious task (23.al-Mu'minūn:115) and is answerable for his success or failure, for both God and man have taken a grave risk in this vital affair, the vicegerency of man. The bane of humanity so far is that most men refuse to "look beyond [*al-āqiba*]," "do not lay any store by for the morrow," i.e., do not contribute to—and do not even understand or attempt to understand—the long-range moral goals of the human endeavour. They are content to live their lives from day to day, indeed, from hour to hour: "they are like cattle, indeed, worse" (7.al-A'rāf:179); "they have hearts but cannot understand, they have eyes but cannot see, they have ears but cannot hear" (7.al-A'rāf:179, and elsewhere). Their primordial nature has been distorted almost beyond recognition; they became "Satan's brothers" (17.al-Isrā':27) after God had breathed His own spirit into Adam (15.al-Ḥijr:29; 32.as-Sajdah:9; 38.Ṣād:72; cf. 95.at-Teen:4-6). "We created man with the best constitution, but then We sent him down to the lowest state of the low, except those who believe and do good works" (95.at-Teen:5). The Qur'ān does not hold to original sin as such but states that Adam and Eve were forgiven their sin after he had received his Lord's Words (2.al-Baqarah:37).

From here arise a whole series of Qur'ānic verses that speak of "God's sealing up the hearts of men, putting blinds on their eyes, casting chains up to their chins, so that they cannot look down and ponder." The Qur'ān does not hold that God arbitrarily seals people's hearts, but usually says that God does so because of the actions of men themselves ("because of their initial infidelity" [6.al-An'ām:110; 2.al-Baqarah:88]; "because of their transgression" [2.al-Baqarah:59; 6.al-An'ām:49], and similar phrases abound in the Qur'ān). Indeed, "We turn man whichever way he wants in turn" (4.an-Nisā':115), and, "God does not change the situation of a people until they change it themselves" (13.ar-Ra'd:11; 8.al-Anfāl:53), i.e., unless men take the initiative. The Qur'ān states repeatedly that every man and woman individually and every people collectively are alone responsible for what they do—a doctrine that underlies the Qur'ānic rejection of redemption. In 29.al-'Ankabūt:12 we are told that rich and strong Meccan pagans asked the followers of Muḥammad (PBUH) "to follow our way and [if necessary] we shall bear the burden of your sins," and the Qur'ān adds the former will never bear the latter's burden—although they shall bear manifold burdens of their own!

The idea behind verses about the sealing of hearts appears to be the psychological law that if a person once does a good or an evil deed, his chances of repeating that kind of action increase and of doing its opposite proportionately decrease. With constant repetition of an evil or of a good action, it becomes almost impossible for a person to do the opposite, or even to think of it, so much so that while men's hearts

become "sealed" and their eyes "blinded" if they do evil, their doing good produces such a state of mind that the devil himself can have no sway over it. Nevertheless, actions which create a psychological habit, however strong their influence may be, must not be construed as absolute determinants, for there is no "point of no return" for human behavior: genuine repentance (*tauba*) can turn an apparently wholly evil man into a paragon of virtue; on the other hand, although this is much more rare, an apparent paragon of virtue (even a prophet!) can turn into a near devil enmeshed in carnal pleasures:

Recite to them [O Muhammad!] the news of him whom We had given our signs, but he abandoned them and the devil pursued him so that he became one of the deviants; if We had willed. We would have exalted him through those signs, but he gravitated down to the earth and followed his own desires. (7.al-A'rāf:175-176)

To hold that the Qur'ān believes in an absolute determinism of human behavior, denying free choice on man's part, is not only to deny almost the entire content of the Qur'ān, but to undercut its very basis: the Qur'ān by its own claim is an invitation to man to come to the right path (*hudan lil-nās*).

This picture is quite complex, however, and needs to be clarified. The Qur'ān, it is true, often speaks as though man consciously chooses for himself right or wrong ways and follows them, and God only passes judgment upon his actions (e.g., 53.an-Najm:39-40; 76.al-Insān:3; 90.al-Balad:10 ff.; 91.ash-Shams:7-10). But the Qur'ān states even more often that when man takes a direction, God entrenches him in it: "So, for him who gives [of his wealth], guards against evil, and confirms goodness, We make good easy for him, but for him who is niggardly, thinks he is self-sufficient, and gives the lie to goodness, We make evil easy for him" (92.al-Layl:5-10)—and for this we have above provided a psychological explanation.

But how or why does a human take a certain road? How does he attune himself to God or turn away from Him? It appears that man does not require much effort to be petty, self-seeking, submerged in his day-to-day life, and a slave of his desires, not because this is "natural" to him—for his real nature is to be exalted—but because "gravitating down to the earth," as we have quoted the Qur'ānic language, is much easier than ascending to the heights of purity. Therefore, God's role, His succor, and His support in the latter case are very crucial: no man can say "I am going to be a good person" and automatically become one. He has to struggle, and in this struggle God is his willing partner. Yet, God may not be taken for granted as though His partnership were automatic; this has to do with both the quality and the quantity of the struggle and it can be described almost literally as God's mercy. In Muḥammad's (PBUH) own case, the Qur'ān makes it clear (28.al-Qaṣaṣ:86)—despite his travail in the cave of Hirā'—that "You were not expecting that The Book will be sent down upon you, except that it is a mercy from your Lord" and sometimes even threatens him with the possible cessation Of Revelation (17.al-Isrā':86): "If We willed, We would take away the Revelation from you and in that case you shall not find any support against Us, but it is a mercy from your Lord" (for a fuller elaboration, see Chapter V). When man "gravitates down to the earth," his conscience becomes dull and he cannot effectively listen to the voice of his true, higher nature "[as though] these people are being called from a distant place" (41.Fuṣṣilat:44). Further, a man not only cannot listen, but is irritated by being constantly reminded of the truth; this irritation, when accompanied by false honor and pride personal, family, national, and historical—changes into positive resistance and rejection of truth—what the Qur'ān

terms *kufir*, practically equating it with this special kind of pride. Just as ascending to virtue means God's active cooperation and help, *kufir* means positive desertion by God.

It is in this context that the Qur'ān throws God's indispensability for man into bold relief. Just as God's "remembrance" and presence means the meaningfulness and purposefulness of life, the removal of God from human consciousness means the removal of meaning and purpose from human life: "Do not be like those who forgot God and [eventually] He caused them to forget themselves—these are the unrighteous ones" (59.al-Ḥashr:19). This is as true of the collective life of peoples (as we shall see in the next chapter) as it is of individual life. God's "remembrance" ensures the cementing of personality where all details of life and particulars of human activity are properly integrated and synthesized; "forgetting" God, on the other hand, means fragmented existence, "secularized" life, an unintegrated and eventually disintegrated personality, and enmeshment in the details at the cost of the whole. This is precisely Muḥammad Iqbāl's distinction between Godliness and un-Godliness.

The sign of a *kāfir* is that he is lost in the horizons;
The sign of a *mu'min* is that the horizons are lost in him.

Further in connection with the role of God vis-à-vis man in the Qur'ān, it should be borne in mind (and we shall expand upon this in Chapter IV) that the Qur'ān speaks of identical phenomena as being caused by God and by nature; these are not two different or duplicate or disparate causalities but are the same. Yet the meaning is different. When the Qur'ān employs the language of nature, it is giving an account; in using the religious idiom in terms of God's causation—which is far more frequent—it is giving the rationale or the meaning of an event. Thus, rains are caused by clouds and winds but they are brought on by God in order to sustain the earth.

Everything caused by natural processes is done by God. Thus, when Muḥammad (PBUH) was asked (as happened frequently) why God had chosen him rather than "another big person in the two cities," the answer is sometimes, "Do these people apportion the mercy of your Lord?" (43.az-Zukhruf:32); at other times, "God knows best where to place His messengership" (6.al-An'ām:124), i.e., God does not appoint or elect people arbitrarily as His prophets. Here is a typical example of natural political processes being represented as God's will (we shall give further examples of this, including the case in reverse, in the next chapter):

When We wish to destroy a city [or a civilization—the term *qarya* in this context can mean a town like the prophet Shu'aib's or a civilization like the Pharaoh's] *We command* its wealthy ones so they indulge in unrighteousness, and when it is ripe for harvesting [literally: "when the judgment upon it has matured," but the Qur'ān—11.Hūd:100 and elsewhere—actually uses the metaphor of "harvesting a people"], We destroy it. (17.al-Isrā':16)

Last, but not least in significance, it must be constantly remembered that the Qur'ān is not just descriptive but is primarily prescriptive. Both the content of its message and the power of the form in which it is conveyed are designed not so much to "inform" men in any ordinary sense of the word as to change their character. The psychological impact and the moral import of its statements, therefore, have a primary role. Phrases like "God has sealed their hearts, blinded their eyes, deafened them to

truth” in the Qur’ān do have a *descriptive* meaning in terms of the psychological processes described earlier; but even more primarily in such contexts, they have a definite psychological *intention*: to change the ways of men in the right direction. Thus, all our clarifications and interpretations of such usages in the Qur’ān—psychological (in the sense of both a process and an intended effect), factual, and moral—operate jointly and must be properly understood and assigned proportionate roles.

There is no doubt that in the later Medieval period, a strong pre-determinism was widespread in Muslim societies (although many Western accounts of it are confused about both its nature and consequently its strength); but this was due not to the Qur’ānic teaching but to a host of other factors. Prominent among these were the overwhelming success of the Ash’arite school of theology (which reduced man to impotence in the interests of saving the omnipotence of God, but whose influence upon Muslims was more formal than real), the broad spread (particularly after the sixteenth century) of doctrines of pantheistic Sufism, and, above all, strong fatalistic doctrines in the world-views of certain highly sophisticated peoples, particularly the Iranians. Under the impact of these influences, the Qur’ānic idea of *qadar* (or *taqdīr*) was interpreted as divine predetermination of everything, including human actions.

That this is a grossly simplistic misrepresentation (which in turn, influenced many Western views of Islam) of the Qur’ānic doctrine of *qadar* is obvious. The term *qadar* actually means "to measure out" and the idea is that while God alone is absolutely infinite, everything else bears the creaturely hallmark of "being measured," i.e., having a finite sum of potentialities—even though the range of these potentialities may be very great, as in the case of man. The Qur’ān is not speaking of the actualization of potentialities but of potentialities per se. According to the Qur’ān, when God creates a thing (*khalq*). He at the same time puts into it its nature, its potentialities, and the laws of its behavior (*amr*, "command," or *hidaya*, "guidance") whereby it falls into a pattern and becomes a factor in the "cosmos."

Since everything in the universe does behave in accordance with its ingrained laws—automatically obeys the "command" of God—the whole universe is therefore *muslim*, surrendering to the Will of God. Man is the only exception to this universal law, for he is the only being endowed with a free choice of obeying or disobeying the Command of God. Just as it is "written into" every other creature, this Command is written upon man's heart:

[I swear] by man's personality and that whereby it has been formed, God has engraved into it its evil and its good [whereby it can guard itself against moral peril]. He who makes his personality pure, shall be successful, while he who corrupts it shall be in the loss. (91.ash-Shams:7-10)

The only difference is that while every other creature follows its nature automatically, man *ought* to follow his nature; this transformation of the *is* into *ought* is both the unique privilege and the unique risk of man. This is why it is so important for man to hearken and hearken well to his nature, despite the intrigues of Satan.

This is also the meaning of the "primordial covenant" that God elicited from all men:

And when your Lord extracted from the children of Adam—from their spinal cord—their entire progeny and made them witness upon themselves, saying, Am I not your

Lord? and they replied, No doubt, You are, we bear witness, [The Lord did this] lest you say on the Day of Judgment, We were quite unaware of this, or lest you should say [by way of excuse for your sins], All that happened was that our forefathers had committed *shirk* [worship of false gods] before us and we as the generations following upon them [were already conditioned by them]—are You, then, going to make us suffer for what those [earlier] falsifiers of truth had done? (7.al-A‘rāf:172-173)

The point is that every person and every people have continuously to search their own consciences, and, because of this engraving upon their heart, which represents the Primordial Covenant, none may take refuge in the excuse that they had been preconditioned by their "hereditary memory," by the set ways of "our forefathers." The primary task of the prophets is to awaken man's conscience so that he can decipher the primordial writing on his heart more clearly and with greater conviction. The Qur’ān, therefore, says with perfect logic that God took a specially strong covenant from prophets: "And when God took the covenant from the prophets—from you [O Muḥammad!], from Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus—We took from them a specially solemn covenant" (33.al-Aḥzāb:7).

Since man's real nature is thus "inlaid" in him and is then further strengthened and clarified by God's Messengers, the prophets, no valid excuse can be entertained on his behalf for not *aspiring* to goodness and for "gravitating down to the earth," as the Qur’ān has already idiomatically expressed it. For this reason, a very fundamental feature of the Qur’ān is to reiterate untiringly that all human acts which are apparently perpetrated on another person in a more ultimate sense recoil upon the agent himself. All evil, all injustice, all harm that one does to someone else—in sum, all deviation from man's normative nature—in a much more fundamental way and in a far more ultimate sense one does to oneself, and not just metaphorically but literally. This is true equally of individuals and of peoples. "Self-injustice" (*ẓulm al-naḥs*—all Arab philologists assure us that *ẓulm* in Arabic originally meant "to put something out of its proper place," so that all wrong of any kind is injustice, i.e., an injustice against the agent himself) is, therefore, a very common term in the Qur’ān, with its clear idea that all injustice is basically reflexive. After recounting all the waywardness and wrongdoings of bygone generations as well as of individuals, the Qur’ān usually says, "We did them no injustice [in destroying them], on the contrary, they did injustice to themselves" (2.al-Baqarah:54, 57, 231; 65.at-Ṭalāq:1; 27.an-Naml:44; 28.al-Qaṣaṣ:16; 3.Āli ‘Imrān:117; 7.al-A‘rāf:23, 160, 177; etc.).

The basic weakness of man from which all of his major ills spring is described by the Qur’ān as "pettiness [*da‘f*]" and "narrowness of mind [*qatr*]," and the Qur’ān ceaselessly reiterates this in various forms and different contexts. Both the pride of man—his identifying himself with the Higher Law—and his hopelessness and despair arise out of this pettiness. His self-destructive selfishness and the greed to which he is a constant prey, his hasty, panicky behavior, his lack of self-reliance, and the fears that perpetually haunt him arise ultimately from the smallness of his mind:

Man is by nature unstable; when misfortune touches him he panics and when good things come his way, he prevents them from reaching others. (70.al-Ma‘ārij:19-21)

Men's personalities have been permeated with greed [or selfishness]. (4.an-Nisā’:128)

The successful are those who can be saved from their own selfishness. (59.al-Ḥaṣhr:9; 64.at-Taghābun:16)

Say [O Muhammad! to these pagans]: If you were to possess the entire treasures of my Lord's mercy and munificence, you would still sit over them out of fear of spending [on others] and man is, indeed, niggardly! (17.al-Isrā':100)

It is because of this pettiness that man is so hasty and panicky and oblivious of the long-term consequences of his reactions: "Man has been created out of hastiness" (21.al-Anbiyā':37); "When man prays for goodness, he at once accompanies it with a prayer for evil—and man is hasty indeed!" (17.al-Isrā'.al-Isrā':11); "Nay, but you covet what is immediate and abandon what is distant in time to come" (75.al-Qiyāmah:20). "Prepare and send forth something for the morrow" is a constant Qur'ānic reminder (2.al-Baqarah:110, 223; 73.al-Muzzammil:20; 59.al-Hashr:18, etc.).

It is because of this haste that man becomes so full of pride and so utterly despairing; there is no other being who is so quickly inflated and deflated as man. The Qur'ān reiterates that when man has been endowed with blessings, he soon "forgets" God; when natural causes work for him, in his feelings of smugness and self-sufficiency, he does not "see" God in these natural causes; but when he falls on evil times, then either he becomes completely devoid of hope or else he turns to God only in that hour. He remembers God only in distress, and even in distress he may not "remember" God and "call upon Him" but may simply sink into despair:

When We make man taste mercy from Us and then pull it away from him, lo! He despairs utterly and denies [God's blessings] altogether.

But when he tastes of good things from Us after he had been touched by evil, he will certainly say that all evil had gone from him [and he had become purged]: he is, indeed, all too easily puffed up with pride—except those who are steadfast and do good deeds. (11.Hūd:9-10)

Man never tires of praying for goodness to come to him, but should evil so much as touch him, he is in total and dire despair. But when We make him taste Our mercy after evil has touched him, he will certainly say, Well, I deserved it! ... And when We shower Our blessings upon man, he simply becomes indifferent and turns away, but when evil touches him, he brings forth lengthy petitions [for mercy]. (41.Fuṣṣilat:49-51; also see 17.al-Isrā':83; 10.Yūnus:12, etc.)

This unstable character of man, this going from one extreme to the other, arising as it does out of his narrow vision and petty mind, reveals certain basic moral tensions within which human conduct must function if it is to be stable and fruitful. These contradictory extremes are, therefore, not so much a "problem" to be resolved by theological thought as tensions to be "lived with" if man is to be truly "religious," i.e., a servant of God. Thus, utter powerlessness and "being the measure for all things," hopelessness and pride, determinism and "freedom," absolute knowledge and pure ignorance—in sum, an utterly "negative self-feeling" and a "feeling of omnipotence"—are extremes that constitute natural tensions for proper human conduct. It is the "God-given" framework for human action. Since its primary aim is to maximize moral energy, the Qur'ān—which claims to be "guidance for mankind"—regards it as absolutely essential that man not violate the balance of opposing tensions. The most interesting and the most important fact of moral life is that violating this balance in any direction produces a "Satanic condition" which in its moral effects is exactly the same: moral nihilism. Whether one is proud or hopeless,

self-righteous or self-negating, in either case the result is deformity and eventual destruction of the moral human personality.

The model for this is Satan himself: When he refused to obey God's command to honor Adam, he was full of pride, thinking he was far superior to Adam, and he even took God for granted. When he fell, he lost all hope and in total desperation asked God to give him respite till the Last Day, so that he could seduce and beguile Adam's progeny (7.al-A'rāf:11 ff.; 15.al-Ĥijr:29 ff., etc.); he became a professional evilmonger because he thought his personality could not be recovered.

The Qur'ān, therefore, condemns not only pride and self-righteousness but equally hopelessness and utter despair, which it describes as the hallmark of "unbelievers," those who reject truth: "Do not despair of God's mercy for none despair of God's mercy except unbelievers" (12.Yūsuf:87; also 29.al-'Ankabūt:23; 15.al-Ĥijr:56; 39.az-Zumar:53 and the verses quoted on pp. 12-13, concerning man's loss of hope). Both pride and hopelessness are equally "*kufī*" or unbelief, which is another name for the total loss of moral energy.

Idol-worship is the sure consequence of this condition, for, having lost the transcendental anchoring point of human conduct, one must either "worship one's own [subjective] desires" (25.al-Furqān:43; 7.al-A'rāf:176; 18.al-Kahf:28; 28.al-Qaṣaṣ:50; etc.), or if one objectifies one's desires, worships "socialized desires"—self-projections of one's society: "And he [Abraham] said [to his people], You have adopted these idols besides God only as a way to socialize your mutual desires in this world [*mawaddata-bainikum fil-ḥayāt ad-dunyā*]; but on the Last Day you will disown each other and curse each other" (29.al-'Ankabūt:25). When man's moral vision is narrowed and the transcendental dimension is gone, then, from the universally objective moral point of view, it is immaterial whether one worships oneself as God or one's society or nation as God (*pace* Emile Durkheim!). All particularizing of Truth, whether individually subjective or socially (by nation or sect) subjective, numbs moral faculties, and numbs them equally. It is a large price to pay for one's smallness.

We said earlier that to "forget God" is to destroy one's personality, whether individual or social, for only "remembrance of God" can cement personality. We have now found that violating the balance of the tensions of human conduct destroys personality. The "remembrance of God," then, is to work within the framework of these tensions, since all wrong involves a violation of the balance of these tensions, what the Qur'ān also describes as the "transgression of God's limits" (2.al-Baqarah:187, 229, 230; 4.an-Nisā':13; 9.al-Tawbah:112; 58.al-Mujādilah:4; 65.aṭ-Ṭalāq:1).

The "middle road" is not only the best road, it is the only road. Many people think that to be "in the middle" is to be "humdrum" and "banal," and to be "in the mean" is to be really "mean" and "un-original" and "un-grand." This is true if the "middle" or the "mean" is construed as something from which both sides are absent, as a negative mean, dry bones from which all flesh is gone. But this is not the mean of the Qur'ān; what it has in mind is a positive, creative mean, an integrative moral organism. This is why it is not quasi-automatic but can be achieved only by all the alertness and power one can muster. It is that moment of balance where both sides are fully present, not absent, integrated, not negated.

This unique balance of integrative moral action is what the Qur'ān terms *taqwā*, perhaps the most important single term in the Qur'ān. At its highest, it denotes the fully integrated and whole personality of man, the kind of "stability" which is formed

after all the positive elements are drawn in. The term is usually translated by the words "fear of God" and "piety." Though these are not wrong, Muslims are increasingly discarding the term "fear of God" because they think the phrase misleading in view of the false picture, widely prevalent in the West until recently—and present even today—of the God of Islam as a capricious dictator or a tyrant, in the light of which "fear of God" might be indistinguishable from, say, fear of a wolf. The root of the term, *wqy*, really means "to guard or protect against something" and it has also been used in this literal sense in the Qur'ān (e.g., 52.ṭ-Ṭūr:27; 40.Ghāfir:9, 45; 76.al-Insān:11).

Hence *taqwā* means to protect oneself against the harmful or evil consequences of one's conduct. If, then, by "fear of God" one means fear of the consequences of one's actions—whether in this world or the next (fear of punishment of the Last Day)—one is absolutely right. In other words, it is the fear that comes from an acute sense of responsibility, here and in the hereafter, and not the fear of a wolf or of an uncanny tyrant, for the God of the Qur'ān has unbounded mercy—although He also wields dire punishment, both in this world and in the hereafter.

Considering all the verses in the Qur'ān related to this concept, perhaps the best way to define *taqwā* is to say that, whereas action belongs to man, real and effective judgement upon that action, as well as the standard whereby that action is to be judged, lie outside of him. Similarly, in the case of the collective performance of a society, both the final criterion of judgment upon it and the judgment itself transcend that society. When a man or a society is fully conscious of this while conducting himself or itself, he or it has true *taqwā*. This idea can be effectively conveyed by the term "conscience," if the object of conscience transcends it. This is why it is proper to say that "conscience" is truly as central to Islam as love is to Christianity when one speaks of the human response to the ultimate reality—which, therefore, is conceived in Islam as merciful justice rather than fatherhood.

Taqwā, then, in the context of our argument, means to be squarely anchored within the moral tensions, the "limits of God," and not to "transgress" or violate the balance of those tensions or limits. Human conduct then becomes endowed with that quality which renders it "service to God [*ibāda*]." Such conduct, as the Qur'ān tells us (6.al-An'ām:160), multiplies tenfold (or "manifold," as 4.an-Nisā':40 has it), while evil draws its equivalent consequence—if, that is, it is not "forgiven," i.e., if its effects are not obliterated. For, according to the Qur'ān, that which is good remains for the benefit of mankind but that which is false has a transient existence only, even though it looks present: "[When] God sends down water from the heaven, valleys flow with it according to their measures, but the torrent also carries mounting foam on its top; again, the precious metals upon which they [the jewellers] blow fire, seeking to fashion therefrom jewelry or other precious things, generate foam likewise—even so does God cause truth and falsehood to go together in mutual competition. As for the foam, it vanishes quickly, but as for that which is beneficial to mankind, it stays in the earth; even so does God strike parables" (13.ar-Ra'd:17).

On the whole, despite the sad accounts of the human record in the Qur'ān, its attitude is quite optimistic with regard to the sequel of human endeavor. It also advocates a healthy moral sense rather than the attitude of self-torment and moral frenzy represented, for example, by the teachings of Paul and many Sufis, which require some sort of *savior ex machina*. Given a merciful and just God and the solidarity of character called *taqwā*, human well-being is provided for: "If you avoid the major evils that have been prohibited to you, We shall obliterate [the effects of]

occasional and smaller lapses" (4.an-Nisā':31); "And those [are believers] who avoid major evils and obscenities and when they are under the influence of anger, they exercise forgiveness" (42.Fuṣṣilat:37); "Those who avoid major evils and obscenities—except [occasionally] coming to their brink" (53.an-Najm:32); "A work that is really good earns its reward ten times over, while an evil deed draws out an equivalent response" (6.al-An'ām:160).

Several other verses also indicate that God will pardon or overlook men's lapses, provided the overall performance is good and beneficial (see 39.az-Zumar:34-36—which adds, "Is God not sufficient for man" that he seeks other sources of intercession?). What is essential is that the overall attitude be governed by *taqwā*, which will prevent men from transgression, and should they transgress, will lead them soon to; repent and redress the imbalance in their personalities: after talking about the unforgivable abomination wrought by hardened "hypocrites," the Qur'ān goes on, "And there are others who have confessed to their wrongdoing; they have mixed good deeds with bad; ones [in following the 'hypocrites']; it may be that God will return to them, for God is forgiving and merciful" (9.al-Tawbah:102). The door of repentance is ever open, except to those who are bent on doing wrong till the very end, when they think they will repent and ask forgiveness. It is strikingly illustrative of the action orientation and practicality of the Qur'ān that it insists that "last minute" declarations of faith and pleas for forgiveness are absolutely rejected. In the story of Moses, the Pharaoh on the point of death asks God's forgiveness, but his appeal is severely rejected (10.Yūnus:90-91); also God is apt to accept repentance only from those who commit evil inadvertently and repent promptly. Repentance cannot be accepted from those who continuously perpetrate evil, even if when death overtakes one of them, he says, "I now repent of sins to God" (4.an-Nisā':17-18; also 10.Yūnus:54).

We have already said that the Qur'ān rejects "saviorship." As a corollary, it equally rejects intercession. Although the Hadīth literature is loaded with references to intercession of the prophets on behalf of the sinful of their communities, particularly the Prophet Muḥammad's (PBUH) intercession on behalf of his community (and in popular Islam, "saints" will do so much effective intercession that they even surpass the prophets), the Qur'ān seems to have nothing to do with it. On the contrary, it constantly speaks of how God will on the Day of Judgment bring every prophet as a *witness* over the deeds of his community, a witness whereby the people will be judged: "What about when We bring a witness from every community and We bring you [O Muḥammad!] to bear witness upon these people?" (4.an-Nisā':41; cf. 28.al-Qaṣaṣ:75).

The whole temper of the Qur'ān is against intercession, for, to begin with, "God does not require from any person what is beyond his [or her] power" (2.al-Baqarah:233, 286; 6.al-An'ām:152; 7.al-A'rāf:42; 23.al-Mu'minūn:62); secondly, as we have repeatedly underlined, God's "mercy comprehends everything" (7.al-A'rāf:156; 40.Ghāfir:7). According to the orthodox Muslim belief, as it crystallized in the second and third centuries of Islam (the eighth and ninth centuries of the Christian era), intercession is not possible with regard to infidels or non-Muslims in general (on the fate of Jews and Christians some Muslim theologians like Ibn Taimīya have advocated a non-committal attitude), but it will be effective on behalf of sinful Muslims. This belief was originally opposed by the Mu'tazila (who subsequently, however, fell in line with the orthodox view on the point—so strong is the psychological factor involved in the ideas of intercession and redemption) yet here is a clear-cut verse of the Qur'ān negating, beyond doubt, any intercession even on behalf of Muslims: "O you who believe! spend [for the welfare of the poor] from what

We have provided you before the arrival of a Day on which neither trade shall benefit, nor any friendship, nor any intercession" (2.al-Baqarah:254; cf. also 2.al-Baqarah:48, 123; 6.al-An‘ām:51, 70; 39.az-Zumar:44, 53).

However, the Qur‘ān also says that no one shall intercede with God "*except whom He permits*" (2.al-Baqarah:255; 10.Yūnus:3; 20.Ṭā Hā:109; 34.Saba‘:23; 53.an-Najm:26) and it is to these words that the orthodoxy attached the idea that intercession is permissible *on the assumption that God would permit Muḥammad (PBUH)* to intercede on his community's behalf. But as Ibn Taimīya has pointed out, the clause about permission in this context cannot be taken literally; it is simply a rhetorical device meant to portray the majesty of God, before Whom all are helpless except by His mercy: "Picture the Day when the [Holy] Spirit and the angels shall stand [before God] in rows—none shall be able *to speak* except he whom the Merciful permits and who speaks the truth" (78.an-Naba‘:38). Not only is intercession with permission an unintelligible concept, but, as verse 78.an-Naba‘:38 shows, if the Qur‘ānic words are to be taken literally, nobody will even be able to speak, let alone intercede, without God's permission. The Qur‘ān is portraying a sense of the overwhelming majesty of God through such rhetorical phrases (cf. also 78.an-Naba‘:37: "The Lord of the heaven and the earth and whatever is between them, the Merciful Whom none shall be able to address").

But let us now return to the question of the "accounting" of actions and "balancing" of deeds which will take place in assessing the total performance of an individual or a society, an "accounting [*hisāb*]" upon which will depend the fate to be meted out to humans. It is correct that the concept of "accounting" and "balancing" so vividly portrayed in numerous Qur‘ānic passages has as its sociohistorical background the commercial life of Mecca; but this interesting fact is trivial in religious terms. There what matters is the *quality* of an act, what the Qur‘ān calls its "weight." A man may be able to realize an ambitious personal good but its beneficial effects may be limited to him alone, not enhancing the fate of others or even affecting their fate adversely. If the effect on others is adverse, then his action, being totally alienated from God, is an act of *kufr*, of rejection of truth; if it affects well only him, it is still an act of *khusrān*, of loss. A person may perform a heroic deed for "his own people" but in contradiction to the principles of justice and in "transgression of the limits of God"; such an action would also emanate from the state of mind the Qur‘ān terms *kufr* for it counteracts the purposes of God for man, and the true purposes of man himself.

God did not create either man or the universe "in sport [*‘abath*]" (23.al-Mu‘minūn:115); also: "We have not created the heaven and the earth and what is between them purposelessly [*bāṭilan*, 38.Ṣād:27; cf. also 3.Āli ‘Imrān:191] but with a serious purpose." That purpose is the "service of God," i.e., the implementation of the divine imperative for man, for this "service" is for man's own benefit, not for God's: "Whatever good a person earns is for his own benefit and whatever evil he earns is only against himself" (2.al-Baqarah:286; cf. 4.an-Nisā‘:111; 2.al-Baqarah:79, and various other entries in the Qur‘ānic index under '*amal* and its derivatives, and *kasb* and its derivatives; cf. also the discussion of "self injustice," above, pp. 12-14).

Nor can man be left alone, therefore (75.al-Qiyāmah:36), but he must be constantly invited to goodness; for when "left alone" with his own subjective desires, he is apt to misjudge the quality and validity of his own performance:

Say: Shall We inform you of those who are the greatest losers in [consequence of] their actions, while they *think* they have made wonderful achievements? These are the ones

who rejected their Lord's signs and denied that they would face Him [with their answerability]—thus will their deeds have come to nothing and We shall not consider them of any weight on the Day of Judgment. (18.al-Kahf:103-105)

When it is said to them: Do not corrupt the earth [with your negative deeds], they say: We are only doing reform! Beware! They are the corrupters but they do not know that. (2.al-Baqarah:11-12)

Special victims of self-deception are human institutions, organizations, and more particularly religious communities; the Qur'ān says, addressing Muslims, "This is not a matter of your subjective desires or wishful thinking, nor that of the People of the Book, for whosoever perpetrates evil must get its requital and he has no friend or helper besides God" (4.an-Nisā':123).

Given the depth of human self-deception, how important it is that man be "awakened" to his real nature, to be responsible before God, to think thoughts and do deeds that would be consequential, for upon this depends the whole destiny of man and of God's purposes for man. The layers of "heedlessness are indeed thick and manifold and it is all-important that "man make his sight keen," before it is too late (50.Qāf:22). In this context, the warnings of the Qur'ān assume the most severe and threatening tone:

We have created many of the jinn and humans for hell: they have minds but they do not understand therewith; they have eyes but they do not see therewith; they have ears but they do not listen therewith.

These are like cattle, indeed even more difficult to guide—for these are the heedless ones. (7.al-A'rāf:179)

"Empirical" knowledge itself is of little benefit unless it awakens the inner perception of man as to his own situation, his potentialities, his risks, and his destiny:

Have they not travelled around the earth, so that they might come to possess hearts whereby they can understand or ears wherewith they can listen? For it is not the [physical] eyes that become blind but the hearts in people's breasts [that lose perception]. (22.al-Ḥajj:46)

This is why the Qur'ān appears to be interested in three types knowledge for man. One is the knowledge of nature which has been made subservient to man, i.e., the physical sciences. The second crucial type is the knowledge of history (and geography): the Qur'ān persistently asks man to "travel on the earth" and see for himself what happened to bygone civilizations and why they rose and fell. The third is the knowledge of man himself, since "We shall show them Our signs in the horizons [external nature] and within themselves, so that Truth becomes clear to them—is your Lord not a sufficient witness everything?" (41.Fuṣṣilat:53). This knowledge is "scientific" knowledge, is based on observation by "the eyes and the ears"; yet this scientific knowledge has finally to "strike the heart" and to kindle a perception in man which will transform his scientific and technological skills in accordance with the moral perception that will, one hopes, be born in him. Without this perception, scientific and technological knowledge; could be—indeed, must be—positively dangerous, and in its critique of the materially prosperous Meccans, the Qur'ān makes

this very point: "They know well the externalities of the worldly life, but they are so, ignorant ['heedless'] of the ultimate consequences" (30.ar-Rūm:7).

When one talks about the comparative weightiness of human deeds, one speaks essentially of their consequences for man's destiny. We recall once again the metaphor of the "foam that mounts upon the torrent" but which quickly becomes nothing, leaving no consequences behind, while "that which benefits mankind stays in the earth." Further:

Did you not see how God strikes the parable of a good word like a luxuriant tree whose root strikes deep into the earth and whose top hits the sky? It gives its fruit all the time by permission of its Lord—and Allāh strikes parables for men on the chance that they will take admonition. The parable of a heinous word [on the other hand] is that of a heinous tree that has been rooted out without finding any place to stay. (14.Ibrāheem:24-26)

It is in this sense that all evil deeds, especially worship of false gods, are very often termed *ḍalāl* by the Qur'ān. This term is usually translated as "misguidedness," which is correct provided we clearly understand that "misguidedness" and "wrong path" signify primarily that "one will not get anywhere," no matter how long or how hard one walks—indeed, one will fall into a pit. That is to say, *ḍalāl* is sterile, inconsequential, *in vain*, and its equivalent term, *bāṭil*, is also used in this sense by the Qur'ān. The results of evil deeds are often portrayed in the Qur'ān by powerful and lively symbols of burning in hell-fire, whose "hissing sound" can be heard from afar by the sinful and which burns even rocks.

Some Muslim thinkers, past and present, have explained both the punishment of hell and the joys of paradise as non-physical, "spiritual" states. There is considerable support for this in the Qur'ān itself, provided the "spiritual" is not supposed to negate the physical, for there is no pleasure or pain which is purely spiritual or purely physical. Also, it is important to point out that the Qur'ān makes it clear in more than one place that torture in hell would depend upon the nature of man's awareness of the sterility of his deeds:

Whenever a [new] community shall enter [hell-fire] it shall curse its sister [which preceded it], until when all sink into it together, the last community [in time] shall say other predecessor: O God! these people led us astray [by their example], so give them double punishment in hell; upon which God will say, Each one of you is receiving double punishment, but you are not aware. (7.al-A'rāf:38)

[God shall say to an evil-doer,] you never realized this [result of your actions], but now that We have lifted the veil, your sight today is very keen! (50.Qāf:22)

Torture in hell, then, basically consists of the realization that the mountains one thought one had built have suddenly shrunk to a particle of sand and the Qur'ān frequently says that on the day of accounting all false gods will have been "lost," "will come to nothing"—will simply not be there (6.al-An'ām:24, 94; 7.al-A'rāf:53, 139; 10.Yūnus:30; 11.Hūd:16, 21; 16.an-Naḥl:87; 41.Fuṣṣilat:48; 22.al-Ḥajj:62; 29.al-'Ankabūt:67; 47.Muḥammad:3). This establishes the equation of *bāṭil* and *ḍalāl* ("being lost" and that which is "in vain," "unreal," and "inconsequential"), and their contrast with *hidāya* and *haqq* ("getting somewhere" and "the truth," that which is "real" and therefore "stays" and "does not vanish").