

Translation of
Sheikh Al Sha'rawy's Thoughts on
Surat al-'Imran

In describing one of the two groups in hand, Allah¹ (SWT)² makes no allusion to the opposing qualities of the other group. We get to know, by way of inference, that the group fighting in the way of Allah is that of "believers", since the equivalent group is referred to in the *ayah*³ as a group of "disbelievers". It can also be deduced that this latter group is fighting in the way of the devil, as long as we are told that the former group is fighting in the way of Allah (SWT). This technique – linguistically known as **احتباك** – is meant to avoid redundancy. It's based on the idea of ignoring a certain trait in the first group, while asserting its equivalent in the second one, and overlooking another trait in the second group, while asserting its equivalent in the first. It also manifests the difference between fighting in a war waged in the way of Allah (SWT) and based on faith, on one hand, and another war waged in the way of the devil and based on disbelief in Allah, on the other hand.

As such, the *ayah*, which can be translated as, "**There has already been a sign for you in the two armies that met**" (TMQ, 3:13)⁴ demonstrates that this "sign" is an extraordinary matter, not conforming by any means to the logical facts ascribed to the given armies. Thus when both armies of believers and non believers engaged in the battle, the former army - with its well-defined purpose of fighting in the way of Allah SWT - conquered the non believers' army fighting in the way of the devil.

Then when Allah The Exalted says, "**They (the believers) saw them (the disbelievers) with their own eyes twice their number**" (TMQ, 3:13), we are still presented with two groups: that which is "capable of seeing" and that which is "being seen", but, we may ask: Which is which? If we assume

¹ The word Allah is the Arabic word for God. Although the use of the word "Allah" is most often associated with Islam, it is not used exclusively by Muslims; Arab Christians and Arab-speaking Jews also use it to refer to the One God. The Arabic word expresses the unique characteristics of the One God more precisely than the English term. Whereas the word "Allah" has no plural form in Arabic, the English form does. Allah is the God worshipped by all prophets, from Adam to Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad.

² SWT= *Subhanahu wa Ta'ala* [Glorified and Exalted Be He]

³ A verse in the Qur'an

⁴ TMQ= Translation of the Meaning of the Qur'an. This translation is for the realized meaning, so far, of the stated (Surah: Ayah) of the Qur'an. Reading the translated meaning of the Qur'an can never replace reading it in Arabic, the language in which it was revealed.

that the non believers are those who “see” the believers, then according to the *ayah*, they can see them as double their number. If the pronoun "their" refers to the non believers themselves - whose number was about one thousand – then the non believers could see the number of believers amounting to two thousand. A second meaning is that the believers can see the non-believers as being double their actual number. A third interpretation of the meaning could be that the disbelievers may see the number of believers (which was actually 314) being doubled. In other words, they could see their warriors amounting to 628.

According to the above interpretations, we need to ask the question: What is the purpose of having the disbelievers see their enemies amounting to 628 warriors or 2000 warriors? In fact, Allah *SWT* is speaking about the encounter between faith and disbelief in a battle where Allah makes faith victorious. Besides, some of those who claim to find fault with the Qur'an argue about "the seeming contradiction" between this *ayah* **"They (the believers) saw them (the disbelievers) with their own eyes twice their number"**(TMQ, 3:13) and two others in *Surat*⁵ al-Anfal:

(And remember) when Allah showed them to you as few in your (i.e. Muhammad's SAWS)⁶ dream; if He had shown them to you as many, you would surely have been discouraged, and you would surely have disputed in making a decision. But Allah saved (you). Certainly, He is the All-Knower of what is in the breasts.

And (remember) when you met (the army of the disbelievers on the Day of the Battle of Badr), He showed them to you as few in your eyes and He made you appear as few in their eyes, so that Allah might accomplish a matter already ordained (in His Knowledge), and to Allah return all matters (TMQ, 10:42-43).

These skeptics base their arguments on the fact al-Anfal verses speak about, or rather prove, the presence of large numbers of warriors - either believers or disbelievers, while al-'Imran verse proves otherwise; namely, the limited number of warriors. Thus, they pose the question: How can the Qur'an deal with one battle from two opposite perspectives?

Our reply to this argument is simply that these skeptics lack in intelligence or sagacity. This is because there is a great difference between the warriors' bravery in advancing to the battle and their morale during that battle. Allah (*SWT*) has referred to both states: He made each group of believers and

⁵ Surat= a chapter; the Qur'an is comprised of 114 surahs.

⁶ Salla Allah alayhe Wa Salam = [All prayers and Peace of Allah be upom him]

disbelievers limited in number in the eyes of the opposing group. Hence when the believers are faced with their enemies' few number, both their bravery and faith are given such a boost as to enable them to achieve victory. On the other hand, when the disbelievers are confronted with the inadequate number of believers, they tend to underestimate their power and eventually meet them with a somewhat careless attitude. What happens then in such a war in which both parties are looking forward to facing few numbers of opposing forces? The believers will undoubtedly proceed fully prepared to meet the disbelievers' army. As for the disbelievers, this confrontation of unexpected numbers will be inflicting a strain on their nerves.

In Surat Al-Anfal, Allah *SWT* says, **And (remember) when you met (the army of the disbelievers on the Day of the Battle of Badr), He showed them to you as few in your eyes and He made you appear as few in their eyes, so that Allah might accomplish a matter already ordained (in His Knowledge), and to Allah return all matters (TMQ, 10:44).**

Here He depicts the whole situation before the two armies engaged in the battle. This is because Allah *SWT* does not want either party to be so much intimidated by the other to the extent that the war would not be waged. However, no sooner does the battle start than matters go to extremes. This turning of scales is an indication that Allah The Omnipotent is managing the warriors' feelings and emotions in His own way. Contrary to expectations, each party is faced with an increase in the numbers of opposing forces. Stimulated by the exuberant energy of faith and courage, the believers advance with enthusiasm, whereas the disbelievers' morale fails as they are unexpectedly confronted with larger numbers.

“There has already been a sign for you in the two armies that met (in combat i.e. the battle of Badr). One was fighting in the Cause of Allah, and as for the other, (they) were disbelievers. They (the believers) saw them (the disbelievers) with their own eyes twice their number. And Allah supports with His Victory whom He wills. most surely there is a lesson in this for those who have sight”(TMQ, 3:13).

The above *ayah* bears glad tidings to all believers of a forthcoming victory and also serves as a warning to disbelievers of a forthcoming defeat - in case of an encounter with the believers. Therefore, people must not evaluate matters according to causative factors, for they are only required to do what lies within the scope of their capabilities. Matters should rather be left to be consummated by Allah's Decree.

Accordingly, believers should not lose spirit when faced with a large number of disbelievers. Likewise, disbelievers should not take too much pride in their countless armies, since previous incidents have proved that a limited number of believers had been able to conquer large numbers of disbelievers.

Another implication of the *ayah* is that the disbelievers see the number of believers as twice their own number. A third implication is that they see the number of believers as double their actual number (i.e. that of the believers themselves). A fourth implication is that the Muslims see the disbelievers as being twice their own number (i.e. a little more than 600). In this case, how can we account for the words "**twice their number**"?

In fact, Allah has promised victory to the believers when He said what can be translated as, "**O Messenger. rouse the Believers to the fight. If there are twenty amongst you, patient and persevering, they will vanquish two hundred: if a hundred, they will vanquish a thousand of the Unbelievers: for these are a people without understanding**" (TMQ, 10:65). The promised ratio here is 1:10, that is, one believer facing and defeating ten disbelievers.

When Allah *SWT* meant to ease them of this burden, He said what can be translated as, "**For the present, Allah hath lightened your (task), for He knoweth that there is a weak spot in you: But (even so), if there are a hundred of you, patient and persevering, they will vanquish two hundred, and if a thousand, they will vanquish two thousand, with the leave of Allah. for Allah is with those who patiently persevere** (TMQ,10:66). The task has been lightened here, so one believer can defeat two disbelievers. In other words, believers are promised victory, even in a state of weakness

. Moreover, the ending of the *ayah* in hand "**Verily, in this is a lesson for those who have sight**" (TMQ, 3:13), is worth reflecting upon. The Arabic word ('ibrah) - lesson/moral – is derived from the word ('obour) which means crossing from one place to another, like crossing one side of the street to the other. Similar derivatives are ('abrah) which refers to the tears flowing from the eyes over the cheeks, ('ebarah) which refers to the statement used in speech, moving from one's lips to another's ears. (I didn't include all the examples given, since this is addressed to non Arabs).

Consequently, the word ('ebra) gives a similar meaning, as it represents a shift in the status of believers from being intimidated, on account of their limited number, to a different status – that of victory induced by the help of Allah. The

disbelievers, likewise, witnessed a shift represented in their defeat, in spite of their numbers and weapons. Bearing this meaning of the word ('ebra) in mind, we notice that the ending of the glorious *ayah*, **"Verily, in this is a lesson for those who have sight"** stands as a clear manifestation of its beginning **("There has already been a sign for you" (TMQ, 3:13)**. The Arabic word ('ebra) - lesson/moral - then signifies a shift from one status to another that is totally unexpected, both from the standpoints of logical reasoning and ordinary causative factors, since Allah meant the suffering of the disbelievers to be inflicted by the very hands of these believers.

This is illustrated in Surat at-Taubah, where Allah *SWT* says, **"Fight them and Allah will punish them by your hands, cover them with shame, help you (to victory) over them, heal the breasts of Believers" (TMQ, 10:14)**. Allah could have simply made the disbelievers suffer on account of some natural phenomenon, like an earthquake for instance. However, he meant it to be caused by the believers themselves: **And Allah supports with His Victory whom He wills. most surely there is a lesson in this for those who have sight" (TMQ, 3:13 (I've provided a summary of the above paragraphs to avoid repetition)**. The word "hands" in at-Taubah *ayah* refers to "might", so Allah, just needs us to take practical action which He would consummate with victory, for He supports whoever he wills with victory and the "lesson" is there to be grasped by those who are endowed with "eyesight".

It may be asked whether the lesson was meant for those endowed with "eyesight" or "insight". In fact, the lesson here is meant for the former group, since the *ayah* deals with a real visual scene, simply because while some people are denied the gift of contemplation and reflection, the majority enjoys their eyesight by which they can visualize such a scene.

A look at the battle can provide a clear illustration of the above: the believers are just a few and with little armour. Waging a war as such was not their purpose, but rather to get hold of the caravans laden with food and clothes in order to make up for their wealth, usurped by the pagans back in Makkah. If they had merely achieved such an easy-going goal, their victory would not have been that glorious, for caravans - generally speaking - are not profusely laden, and are even feebly safeguarded. In such a case, it would have been said that Muhammad (SAWS) and his companions, had simply attacked a group of unarmed tradesmen and defeated them. Even though this simple victory was what the Muslims - with their limited human nature - hoped for, yet Allah (SWT) meant for them a more resounding victory over the armed group of pagans who

have advanced to meet them with all their might and human power.

In *Surat al-Anfal*, Allah (SWT) promised to grant the believers victory over one of two parties: **“Behold! Allah promised you one of the two (enemy) parties, that it should be yours: Ye wished that the one unarmed should be yours, but Allah willed to justify the Truth according to His words and to cut off the roots of the Unbelievers (TMQ, 10:7).** However, Allah wanted them to achieve victory over the strong, armed party so that He would justify Truth and draw a distinctive line between Truth and Falsehood. When this victory is granted by Allah in such a battle, it is nothing but a real victory. It stands as one of the marvellous signs of Allah the Exalted on one hand, and as a lesson or moral for others to benefit from, on the other.

That is why one may note wondrous incidents in this battle - the **Battle of Badr**. We may find two brothers or a father and son fighting against each other, despite their deep ties of kinship. For example there is the son of Abu-Bakr (RA)⁷ - who was still a non-Muslim siding with the pagans - fighting against his father (RA) who was siding with the Prophet (SAWS). When this son embraces Islam later on, he narrates to his father, with an air of gratitude how he (the son) had seen him (the father) on the Day of Badr, but simply turned his face away from him to avoid a face-to-face engagement with his father. Yet Abu-Bakr (RA) gives a reply reflecting his deep faith, by swearing by Allah that if he had seen him (his son), he would have killed him. In fact both attitudes, are quite logical for when Abu-Bakr’s son meets his father (RA) and looks at his face, he compares between him and what he holds wholeheartedly to be mere Falsehood. Consequently he gives precedence to his father and hence determines not to “touch” him. On the other hand, when Abu-Bakr draws the comparison, he compares between his son on one hand, and his belief and faith in Allah (SWT), on the other. Undoubtedly Abu-Bakr’s faith outweighs his feelings towards his son and this explains his oath to kill him if he had seen him on that Day.

Moreover, there is, definitely, underlying Divine Wisdom behind having some of the Quraishi war criminals killed by the believers on that day, and having the lives of others spared, or rather preserved. Examples of this latter group are Khalid Ibnul-Walid and ‘Ikrimah Ibn Abu-Jahl. In fact, the Muslims, at that time regretted being unable to kill such warriors, because they did not know that Allah the Exalted meant these people to join the Muslim forces later on and participate in

⁷ *Radya Allah anhu* [May Allah be pleased with him]

their future battles. This, in itself, stands out as a different type of victory. There is no doubt that had Khalid Ibnul-Walid and 'Ikrimah been killed while siding with the disbelievers, the Muslims would have highly regretted it, since the former was meant to be the Sword of Allah, while the latter was meant to be a highly gifted warrior.

A similar example was that of the two brothers Abu Aziz and Mus'ab Ibn Umair, the companion sent by the Prophet (SAWS) to bear tidings of the religion of Allah (SWT) and instruct the people of Al Madinah. Mus'ab (RA) was known as the most pampered, luxurious, and most elegant Quraishi youth who was raised by a wealthy mother. After embracing Islam, however, the Prophet (SAWS) once saw him wearing the roughest of clothes, made of ewe skin, in place of his silken garments. He (SAWS) comments by saying, "Look how faith has changed your companion".

In the battle of Badr, again, we see two brothers; Abu Aziz and Mus'ab Ibn Umair, facing each other. When Mus'ab (RA) finds his brother, Abu Aziz, held as a war prisoner by another companion, Abul Yusr, he tells the latter to hold his prisoner tight and not release him, since his mother was a rich woman and would probably pay a good ransom. When Abu Aziz hears this, he reproaches his brother for such an unexpected recommendation; however Mus'ab simply points to Abul Yusr saying that that companion was more of a brother to him. It was this spirit of faith, with its strong energy, that outweighed any brotherly, paternal or filial affection and that allowed those few Muslims, at the same time, to overcome the disbelievers. Thus Allah the Exalted has presented the battle of Badr as one of His Signs conveying a two-sided message to both believers and non-believers: the believers should never lose spirit even if they are fewer in numbers. On the other hand, disbelievers should not take pride in their excessive numbers and equipment.

Indeed, Allah (SWT) has made this battle a sign of true faith that is deeply rooted in the hearts of the believers and based, so to speak, on the saying, "If you strive for death, you are granted life." This is shown in the believers' statement recorded in *Surat at-Tawbah*, "**Say: Do you await for us but one of two most excellent things? And we await for you that Allah will afflict you with punishment from Himself and by our hands. So, wait; we too will wait with you**" (TMQ, 10:52).

Here, victory is achieved by one of two options: either by defeating the disbelievers or achieving martyrdom and, consequently, reaching the elevated status of martyrs in paradise, both of which are glorious matters. At the same time,

the believers are awaiting punishment to befall the disbelievers, either by way of Allah (*SWT*) or by their own hands. It is a clear, balanced proportion.

Then Allah (*SWT*) says what can be translated as , "**Beautified for mankind is love of the joys (that come) from women and offspring (sons); and stored-up heaps of gold and silver, and horses branded (with their mark), and cattle and land. That is comfort of the life of the world. Allah! With Him is a more excellent abode**" (TMQ, 3:14).

The context in which this *ayah* appears – where Allah *SWT* mentions battles of faith among His continual, ongoing signs – shows that such battles require a complete withdrawal from habitual actions contributing to one's pleasure. Moreover, these battles can lead a true believer to sacrifice a lot of his wealth for the sake of arming himself as well as others.

It is worth noting that whoever refrains from taking part in such wars is, probably, someone overpowered by worldly lusts. That is why Allah (*SWT*) mentions this *ayah* right after the one depicting the never-ending path leading to the believers' victory. The purpose is to make Allah's word the highest and to prevent worldly desires from distracting us from the pleasure of fighting in the way of Allah (*SWT*).

This explains the use of the word "**beautified**" in the *ayah*, "**Beautified for mankind is love of the joys (that come) from women and offspring (sons).**" This word actually draws a borderline between the pleasures allowed by Allah (*SWT*) and those which He has forbidden.

The act of adornment or beautification is, by and large, an additional attribute to the "essence" of something. For example, a woman is beautiful per se, then she wears make up as a kind of adornment to be added to the essence of her beauty. In fact, Allah (*SWT*) does not want us to reject life, but rather accept it and take hold of its true essence – the preservation of the kind. At the same time, He does not want us to be lured by its deceptive ornamentation, mainly instigated by passionate desires or lusts. (A summary has been provided to avoid repetition)

We have previously discussed the example of the most powerful human instinct – that of sex – and how animals adopt a nobler attitude than humans. This is mainly due to the fact that their mating is merely for the preservation of their kind and not, like humans, as a source of ongoing pleasure. Thus, in the world of animals, an already inseminated female would immediately repel the advances of another male. On the other

hand, the male would never make any advances to a pregnant female.

However, humans are doing animals a great deal of injustice in describing someone's lust as being animalistic or bestial. The mating of animals, in fact, does not exceed the necessary measures of preserving their kind, while humans have given this lust a philosophical hue. By so doing, humans are going beyond what is allowed or legitimate and this may be called "meanness of the self's desire."

Allah (*SWT*) wants to guarantee the survival of creation in the universe. This survival is of two types: First, by means of food and drink that enable man to survive. Second, by multiplication (mating) which preserves the human race.

A closer look reveals the greatness of the Creator: the Ever-Wise, the All-Knowing (*SWT*). He knows that the childhood phase of any animal is simple to handle by its animal, or bird, parents. For example, a pigeon/dove keeps on feeding its chick until it is capable of flying, after which the mother has no clue of its whereabouts. On the other hand, when the intercourse between a man and a woman results in offspring, if Allah (*SWT*) wills it, this involves a great deal of hardship and suffering until the child reaches the stage of puberty. This is meant to create a kind of balance and proportionality between the desires sought by mankind, on one hand, and the hardships faced for the sake of enjoying these desires and preserving the human kind, on the other.

If we go back to the *ayah* "**Beautified for mankind is love of the joys (that come) from women and offspring (sons), and stored-up heaps of gold and silver, and horses branded (with their mark), and cattle and land,**" we need to know who the "beautifier" is. If the beautification implies no more than the preservation of the kind, then the "Beautifier" is Allah (*SWT*). If it goes beyond this prerequisite, then it is definitely the workings of the accursed devil.

It is also noted that Allah (*SWT*) includes "sons" among these desires, i.e. male rather than female children. The reason for this is that male descendants are always sought for the sake of providing support, on one hand, and for not being likely to disgrace their families, on the other. It was this fear of disgrace that drove the Arabs to bury their baby girls alive. It is worth noting that, even in the present age, men still give preference to male birth. Strangely enough, even the advocates of women's rights, would rather have a male, rather than a female, child.

Then Allah *SWT* adds, to these worldly desires, "**stored-up heaps of gold and silver**" - (literally, "arched" hoarded kantars of gold and silver). It's worth noting that a kantar is a unit of weight decided by the density of gold. This kantar was previously used in terms of volume, but when this was found to weigh too much, people started using it as a unit of weight instead.

This goes back to a primitive process in old times when people used to fill the skin of a bull – after being skinned - with gold. This quantity was called a "kantar." Later, this quantity of gold was weighed and it became a weight unit. Thus, originally it was meant to be a volume, after which it became a weight unit. In fact, this literal use of "arched hoarded kantars of gold and silver" is meant to give the impression that it is a full-weight kantar, not just an approximate estimation.

In addition to the accurately weighed kantars of gold and silver, Allah *SWT* mentions "**horses branded (with their mark)**". Horses were regarded at that time as a sign of power and grandeur and the Prophet *SAWS* says in one of his *hadiths*⁸, "A great benefit i.e. reward, has been tied to the forelocks of horses until the Day of Judgment." (Bukhari, Muslim, Nasa'i, Tirmithi and Ahmed).

Literally speaking, the word used in describing horses - "**branded (with their mark)**" - has a rich versatile meaning. First, it means that these horses are freely grazing in pastures, eating as much as they wish, not as much as what's being offered them. Another meaning is that they may have marks, one may have a blaze, another can be black, another may be fair- skinned and so on. A third meaning is that these horses,

⁸ Hadith: The Prophet's actual sayings or actions as narrated by his companions.

which are wild by nature, have been tamed and trained so that man can benefit from them.

What, then, are the prerequisites of war? War requires complete withdrawal from family, overcoming any kind of barrier induced by the soul's desires or lust: lust for women, offspring (sons), money, etc. This latter, money, should rather be spent in the cause of Allah *SWT* and even horses should be used in wars to make the Word of Allah *SWT* the Highest.

Note here that the *ayah*, enumerating different kinds of adornment, comes right after that one speaking of fighting in the way of Allah *SWT*:

“There has already been a sign for you in the two armies that met (in combat i.e. the battle of Badr). One was fighting in the Cause of Allah, and as for the other, (they) were disbelievers. They (the believers) saw them (the disbelievers) with their own eyes twice their number. And Allah supports with His Victory whom He wills. most surely there is a lesson in this for those who have sight”(TMQ, 3:13).

This is meant to remind believers that one's one's real, sublime desires: reaching martyrdom in the way of Allah *SWT* or achieving victory over the enemy – should not be sacrificed in return for passing desires, represented in women, sons, stored up heaps of gold and silver, horses or cattle.

Speaking of cattle, Allah *SWTi* says,

“(Take) eight (head of cattle) in (four) pairs: of sheep a pair, and of goats a pair; say, hath He forbidden the two males, or the two females, or (the young) which the wombs

of the two females enclose? Tell me with knowledge if ye are truthful:

"Of camels a pair, and oxen a pair; say, hath He forbidden the two males, or the two females, or (the young) which the wombs of the two females enclose? - Were ye present when Allah ordered you such a thing? But who doth more wrong than one who invents a lie against Allah, to lead astray men without knowledge? For Allah guideth not people who do wrong." (TMQ, 6:143-144).

In other words, the Quran mentions here two sheep, two goats, two camels and two oxen, amounting to eight pairs. They can, by no means, be calculated as sixteen, as some earlier scholars have previously assumed, since a pair does not stand for two things, but rather for one thing, provided it has a similar or corresponding one along with it. (The example of the "twins" is not an appropriate one, since other words such as triplets, octuplets, etc.. are used in English)>

Another look at the *ayah* speaking of the beautified desires, **"Beautified for mankind is love of the joys (that come) from women and offspring (sons); and stored-up heaps of gold and silver, and horses branded (with their mark), and cattle and land,"** shows that the word "land" here literally refers to the process of cultivation, which implies ploughing or tilling of the land. However, Allah *SWT* is drawing our attention to the fact that while certain plants/seeds are allowed to grow without human intervention, there are others that can only be grown through the process of cultivation or ploughing.

This act of ploughing is the breaking up of the ground, since the soil is usually hard and dry, with its atoms sticking to one another. As such, the soil is not good enough for the plant to grow. This is because it needs water and air, on one hand, and

some kind of human intervention, on the other, represented in ploughing to pave the way for the root hairs to sprout and move about in the soil until the roots germinate and become strong. This turning up of the soil makes it soft and flexible enough for the seeds to grow.

In fact, Allah *SWT* has furnished the *cotyledons*⁹ of every seed with all the necessary food supplies until the root is formed and starts, on its own, taking in these life elements from the soil. Besides, it's worth noting that the more the plant root hardens and becomes strong, the more diminished are the *cotyledons*, simply becoming no more than a couple of leaves (*dicots*).¹⁰

But what has happened to the size of these dicots? The dicots actually keep nurturing the shoot, until it becomes capable of soaking up the nutrients from the soil – which is unlikely to happen unless the land is tilled. That's why it is said that both the black clayey land and the sandy land are infertile. The reason is that there are two prerequisites of a good soil: The first is that it should be good enough to allow the penetration of water in order to guarantee the irrigation of crops. The second is that it should not let the water flow off. In the absence of this latter prerequisite, the plant roots get choked and rotten if the soil is clayey. On the other hand, if the soil is sandy, the water eventually flows off. Consequently, the type of land needed is that which combines the qualities of both the clayey as well as the sandy soils. In other words, a yellowish soil.

When Allah *SWT* speaks about the process of cultivation, He (*SWT*) literally refers to it as " ploughing " or "tilling," mainly for the purpose of drawing our attention that plants can only be

⁹ a temporary food supply, packed around the embryo in the form of special leaves called [cotyledons](#) or seed leaves. (translator's footnote)

¹⁰ A plant that has two *cotyledons*. A bean is an example.

attained through the painstaking process of ploughing. This notion is also demonstrated in Surat Al-Waqia, ([summary](#))

"Then tell Me about the seed that you sow in the ground. Is it you that make it grow, or are We the Grower?" (TMQ 63-64)

It can be noted that all the above mentioned worldly desires - represented in women, children, hoarded kantars of gold and silver, branded horses, cattle and plants – are valued by man as what Allah *SWT* refers to as, **"This is the pleasure of the present world's life; but Allâh has the excellent return (Paradise with flowing rivers) with Him."** (TMQ, 3:14).

The point is that man is always worried about losing this pleasure, either by failing to reach it or by his inevitable death. However, it's worth noting that whatever man is likely to miss in this world or whatever is likely to miss him should not be cherished. Allah *SWT* demands His believing slaves to build their lives according to His Will *SWT*. Why, then, would they turn their backs to one of His commandments in favour of an adverse one? It is certainly one's whims or passion that distracts one's heart and leads to its deviation.

In fact, a close look at the *ayah* reveals some of the keys to the personality of those who are likely to deviate from the methodology of Allah *SWT*.

Beautified for mankind is love of the joys (that come) from women and offspring (sons); and stored-up heaps of gold and silver, and horses branded (with their mark), and cattle and land. This is the pleasure of the present world's life; but Allâh has the excellent return (Paradise with flowing rivers) with Him." (TMQ, 3:14).

The *ayah* lists different kinds of passion, each of which having a different key or clue leading thereto. At the same time, each

person obligated to observe the precepts of Allah's methodology has, likewise, a key to their passion, or rather, a vulnerable spot. Thus we may find one's key (vulnerability) represented in lust for women, another's in giving ultimate care to one's children. This can even go as far as resorting to stealing or bribery to satisfy the children's needs – in case these needs surpass one's earnings. There are also others who may be vulnerable to money, horses, war equipment, etc.

At the same time, those people who are bent upon beautifying the wrong path to others are well aware of their vulnerable spots. Hence, they use the "key" to their predominant passion to serve in their temptation.

It could be asked here, "If Allah *SWT* wants to drive us away from the above mentioned desires, why then has He *SWT* created them? In answering this question, it could be said that as long as Allah *SWT* has – grammatically speaking – used the word " beautified" in the passive form, without specifying the subject (doer of the action), then He *SWT*, as it has been mentioned before, wants to inform us that the subject can be one of two things. It can either be the devil who is beautifying these things for us, or the "beautifier" could simply be the logic of His Methodology *SWT*. This is demonstrated in Surat Al-Furqan in the supplication made by one of His righteous slaves:

"And those who say: 'Our Lord! Bestow on us from our wives and our offspring the comfort of our eyes, and make us leaders of the *Muttaqûn* i.e. the pious.' "(TMQ, 25:74).

The point is that Allah *SWT* has assigned a certain function for each of the blessings of life. The woman, for instance, is taken as a source of repose and comfort, providing all kind of affection and compassion. Thus Allah *SWT* says,

"And among His Signs is this, that He created for you wives from among yourselves, that you may find repose in them, and He has put between you affection and mercy. Verily, in that are indeed signs for a people who reflect." (TMQ, 30:21).

In fact, Allah *SWT* wants men to find legal repose in their wives and wants women, on the other hand, to help their husbands lower their gaze to protect the honour of others . But what about men who are craving for offspring? Hasn't Zakariya (AS)¹¹ (Zechariah) said in Surat Maryam,

"My Lord! Indeed my bones have grown feeble, and grey hair has spread on my head, And I have never been unblest in my invocation to You, O my Lord!

"And verily I fear my relatives after me, and my wife is barren. So give me from Yourself an heir.

"Who shall inherit me, and inherit (also) the posterity of Ya'qûb (Jacob) (inheritance of the religious knowledge and Prophethood, not of wealth.). And make him, my Lord, one with whom You are Well-Pleased!" (TMQ, 19:4-6).

As is the case with all Prophets, Zakariya (AS) was asking Allah for an heir who would inherit his knowledge and wisdom and with whom Allah *SWT* would be well pleased. He didn't mean to have one who would inherit his wealth, but rather who would spread the methodology of Allah *SWT* on earth. This is exactly what Allah *SWT* wants for pious people: that their offspring would inherit the behavioural methodology and become good role models for people to follow.

"And those who say: 'Our Lord! Bestow on us from our wives and our offspring the comfort of our eyes, and make us leaders of the *Muttaqûn* - the pious.' "(TMQ, 25:74).

¹¹ *Alayhe as-Salam* [All peace of Allah be upon him].

The same applies to those who aspire for wealth to have it spent in the cause of Allah *SWT*, to those who cultivate the land in order to feed others from their own food as well as to those who breed horses to have them trained for the purpose of *jihad*¹² – a fact which the Prophet *SAWS* has highly recommended. This is pointed out in the *hadith* by the Prophet *SAWS*: ***MISSING HADITH***

عن أبي هريرة رضى الله عنه عن رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم أنه قال: (من خير معاش الناس لهم رجل ممسك عنان فرسه في سبيل الله يطير على متنه كلما سمع هيفة أو فزعة طار عليه يبتغى القتل و الموت مظانة)

However, it should not be understood that Allah *SWT* wants us to be put off by these desires or to maintain an ascetic attitude towards them. The real purpose is to make us refrain from using what He *SWT* has created for us in a manner that contradicts His Will. Thus it may be concluded that any worldly desire can either be directed to the good that Allah *SWT* wants from mankind, or to the evil dictated by one's self.

Now let's look at Allah's comment on these " beautified" desires. He *SWT* merely refers to them as "**the pleasure of the present world's life.**" (TMQ, 3:14). In other words, they are, superficially, nothing more than a temporary kind of pleasure, limited to this transient world. On the other hand, let's have a look at man's attempts to gain benefit from, or enhance, any "good" in this world. It will be noted that these can take different forms. First, working on the progression or enhancement of this "good"; in other words, trying to increase or develop it. Secondly, striving to guarantee the continuity of this "good". Thirdly, ensuring one's survival to keep on enjoying it. Fourthly, not associating it with any changeables: associating it, for example, with a powerful person can be disappointing, since this very person may lose power, fall ill,

¹² fighting to protect Islam from attack or oppression. In such fighting, no woman, child or innocent civilian is to be harmed, and no tree is to be cut down.

disappear for one reason or another, or even may betray or deceive the other party. Consequently, one should depend on Allah *SWT* in the first place and, then, on one's own self.

Hence, it may be stated that any "good" in this world that fails to meet these requirements is not substantial. It is true that one's lust for women, wealth, sons, horses, cattle and plants can provide worldly pleasures. However, even if we assume that one will be enjoying these pleasures as long as one lives, what would the value of this worldly life be, if one's life is only limited to the specified number of years decreed by Allah *SWT*? (Some parts are summarized and others skipped due to repetition)

Besides, every single person has a certain limited lifetime that Allah has enveloped with a great deal of mystery. In fact, Allah *SWT* has hidden the cause of each one's death as well as when and where it will take place. Accordingly, the believer has to be ever-watchful, expecting death to strike at any moment. This obscurity of death implies, in itself, a great deal of elucidation. In other words, it makes one fully conscious of the limitations of life: it is time-limited, uncertain and elusive, with imperfect pleasures, merely dependent on one's own imperfect potentials and abilities. This explains the synonymous use of the Arabic word "dunya" for "life" – which means "lower" – as compared to "higher" – which is the life of the hereafter, simply regarded as "higher" for its progression of "good."

Once this "limited" life is over, the believers are bound to enjoy an "unlimited" life in *jannah* (paradise), this being the first progression. There, they are guaranteed never-ending provision, an eternal life as well as the pleasurable enjoyment of the value of "good" in this *jannah*. It is worth noting that this

enjoyment is based – not on their imperfect understanding of "good", but rather on Allah's Absolute and Perfect criterion of "good."

Thus, how can the commands of Allah *SWT* to avoid being deceived by this "lower" worldly life and its pleasures be regarded? Are they an urge to love one's self or, on the contrary, to hate it? In fact, this is a Heavenly methodology leading to loving one's self and urging it to aspire to the ultimate "good" and bliss of the hereafter that are set according to the abilities of The Creator *SWT*. It goes without saying then that Allah *SWT* says, **"This is the pleasure of the present world's life; but Allâh has the excellent return (Paradise with flowing rivers) with Him."** (TMQ, 3:14).

It may be wrongly believed, on a superficial level, that Allah's orders to lower one's gaze from illegal things are no more than a restraint of the freedom of one's eyes. On the contrary, they are meant to allow one's eyes to be satisfied to the full with what Allah *SWT* has allowed in the hereafter. Accordingly, this is a sign of the love of Allah *SWT* for His slaves, as it is a progression of "good." A similar example is that of a person who would willingly give the small sum of money that he has to a poor person, with the intention of being doubly rewarded in the hereafter. It is a highly sublime, rather than a foolish, kind of selfishness.

Then Allah *SWT* demonstrates what is meant by the "excellent return" in the following verse,

Say: "Shall I inform you of things far better than those? For *Al-Muttaqûn* (the pious) there are Gardens (Paradise) with their Lord, underneath which rivers flow. Therein (is their) eternal (home) and *Azwâjun Mutahharatun* ^{III}

(purified mates or wives). And Allâh. be pleased with them. And Allâh is All-Seer of the (His) slaves". (TMQ,3:15).

It is noted that whenever we hear the words "**Shall I tell you ...**", it goes without saying that the words to follow are nothing but ordinary talk. However, the use of "**Shall I inform you**" implies that the following words refer to important or great news or information. For example, it is never said, "I inform you that you will be having so and so for lunch," but we may say, "I inform you that you have won a great prize."

This explains why Allah *SWT* is referring to the Day of Judgment as "the great information/news" in Surat An-Naba', "**1. What are they asking (one another) about? 2. About the great news, (i.e. Islâmic Monotheism, the Qur'ân, which Prophet Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم brought and the Day of Resurrection),** since it is the Day that will turn the whole world upside down. Thus when Allah *SWT* says, "**Shall I inform you of things far better than those?**", then it is clear that Allah *SWT* has made "those things" a standard of measurement. Why? Simply because it is a tangible standard to which the means of progression or enhancement has been made manifest," **For Al-Muttaqûn (the pious) there are Gardens (Paradise) with their Lord.**" The believer will therefore rest assured that that this Lord is The Most High Lord who undertakes the process of raising of and preparation for His slaves until they reach the highest possible degree of perfection.

Now let's see what this High Lord *SWT* has prepared for His pious slaves. He *SWT* has prepared for them ready-made gardens whose "good" highly surpasses the good aspects of those of our worldly life. While the latter gardens are literally referred to as "cultivated land," implying a great deal of toil and laborious ploughing, the gardens of the hereafter are not

only toil-free, but have rivers flowing underneath them as well. Moreover, its believing inhabitants are promised eternity, so they neither depart from these pleasures nor do these pleasures depart from them.