

The Path to Certainty

The Path to Certainty

*A Rational Inquiry into God and
the Necessity of Religion*

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Series Foreword

The World Federation through its research institute ICAIR is honoured to publish two books authored by renowned scholar at the Najaf Seminary, Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Sistani namely this book *The Path to Certainty* and *The Essence of Religion*.

In an age defined by relentless noise, fleeting digital interactions, and a marketplace of competing ideologies, the quest for authentic, grounded belief has never been more urgent—nor more challenging. We are surrounded by noise, quick opinions, and competing ideas, leaving many—especially young people—feeling unsure and searching for solid ground. It is into this world of doubt and longing that these two books arrive, not as a set of commands, but as a guide and a companion for the journey.

These pages contain the work of Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Sistani, a scholar from the renowned Najaf Seminary primarily addressing university students. He brings a unique perspective. As the son of His Eminence Ayatollah Sayyid Ali al-Sistani, he is deeply rooted in Islamic tradition. Yet, he speaks directly to the questions and struggles of the modern mind. This combination of ancient wisdom and contemporary understanding makes his work especially powerful today. His work also demonstrates that the Hawza in Najaf is not just about jurisprudence and theology, it understands and works on the challenges we face today.

His books are an invitation. It invites you to ask the biggest questions: Is there a Creator? Who created the creator? Is it possible for the universe to come into existence from nothing? What is our purpose in life? What happens after this life? These are not just philosophical puzzles. The answers shape everything about how we live—our choices, our values, and our peace of mind. To ignore them is to navigate life without a map.

Many think that faith and reason are opposites. This book shows they are not. It argues that true belief is not about blind acceptance. It

is the result of using the very intellect and curiosity that make us human. The universe, with its incredible order and beauty, is presented as evidence to be pondered. The book provides clear tools for this search: how to think honestly, set aside biases, and weigh ideas carefully. It meets common doubts—about science, suffering, or the complexity of belief—head-on, with respect and logical discussion.

In essence, *The Essence of Religion* and *The Path to Certainty* together represent a powerful intellectual defence and exposition of Islam for the contemporary mind. They speak to the university student grappling with scientism, the professional questioning inherited norms, and any individual who feels that profound questions deserve profound answers. They argue that the Islamic tradition, at its core, is not a relic of the past but a living, rational, and deeply satisfying answer to the perennial human quest for meaning. They do not simply ask for belief; they provide a roadmap for conviction.

In these pages, the legacy of a supreme religious authority is lovingly translated into a language of hope and reason for a new generation. This is not a passive inheritance, but an active gift—one that has the potential to illuminate minds, fortify hearts, and reconnect the seekers of today with the eternal truths that have always guided humanity toward light, purpose, and its Creator.

For the young Muslim seeking to build a strong, personal faith, this book is an essential guide. For the sincere sceptic with honest questions, it is an open door to a tradition of deep thought they may not have encountered. For anyone feeling lost in a fragmented world, it offers anchors of wisdom that are both timeless and urgently needed.

It is with great hope and conviction that I commend this vital work to you, the reader. May your journey through it be one of discovery, resolution, and ultimately, profound peace (*sukūn*) and certainty (*yaqīn*).

Safder Jaffer

President of The World Federation of KSIMC

15th Jan 2025

Transliteration, Conventions, and Abbreviations

Arabic and Persian words, names, and titles have been transliterated according to the following key:

ء	’	ض	ḍ
ا	a	ط	ṭ
ب	b	ظ	ẓ
ت	t	ع	‘
ث	th	غ	gh
ج	j	ف	f
ح	ḥ	ق	q
خ	kh	ك	k
د	d	ل	l
ذ	dh	م	m
ر	r	ن	n
ز	z	ه	h
س	s	و	w
ش	sh	ي	y
ص	ṣ	ة	a; at in <i>idāfah</i>

Vowels and Diphthongs

آ	ā	اَوّ	aw
أُوّ	ū	اَيّ	ay
إِيّ	ī		
اَ	a		
اُ	u		
اِ	i		

In this book, all dates are given according to both the Hijri lunar and Gregorian calendars, in the following format: 61/680. The first number refers to the Hijri year and the second to the Gregorian year. To maintain consistency and brevity, the abbreviations “A.H.” and “C.E.” are omitted throughout. Dates based on the Solar Hijri calendar are marked with “Sh.”

In this book, “a.s.” is an abbreviation of *‘alayhi/‘alayhā/‘alayhim al-salām* (“peace be upon him/her/them”), used by the author as a respectful invocation after the names of the Imams and other holy Shī‘ī figures; and “s.a.w.” stands for *ṣallā Allāh ‘alayhi wa-ālihī wa-sallam* (“may God bless him and his family and grant them peace”), used after the name of the Prophet Muḥammad.

Introduction

Every mature human being, when reflecting upon his own condition and the condition of other people, finds through a living, intuitive awareness (*wijdānī*) that he is characterised by four qualities. All rational people are agreed upon this point. These qualities are as follows:

1. The spirit of reason and thought (*al-ʿaql wa-l-tafkīr*), through which a person can perceive what he encounters, infer what is absent, discover the relationships between things, and comprehend the laws that govern existence and life from various aspects.

2. The spirit of moral conscience (*al-ḍamīr al-akhlāqī*), which inclines a person toward truthfulness, loyalty, and justice; through which he loves mercy and kindness; through which he detests lying, deception, betrayal, and injustice; and through which he senses the rights of others and the bonds that generate them.

3. The spirit of inclination toward wisdom (*al-ḥikma*), which is the capacity to choose what is most fitting and most conducive to human flourishing, on the basis of a comprehensive view of the present and future, the immediate and the deferred. Whoever becomes absorbed in a narrow aspect of life at the expense of other, more consequential aspects—absent or future—will naturally miss those aspects and thus fail to be wise.

4. Free will (*al-irāda al-ḥurra*), which enables a person to choose what accords with reason, conscience, and wisdom, and to avoid paths that contradict them—those that are erroneous, harmful, or blameworthy.

From this standpoint, any truth to which a person has access—through his reason, toward which conscience impels, which wisdom urges him to consider, and which he is able to pursue by his own will and choice—constitutes a proof against him, rendering him responsible for the consequences of his conduct and actions. But when one truly lacks access to knowledge of the truth—not through negligence, indifference, or obstinacy, but through error in his thinking—then,

although he bears no responsibility for that error, still the one who is correct is not the same as the one who errs, nor is the one who walks an enlightened path like the one who walks in darkness. This is a certain law among the laws of life.

For this reason, the truth of religion and divine messages ought to be the foremost priority of every mature person in life, because this message represents a vast and profoundly significant expansion of the horizons and dimensions of life. This is so for several reasons.

Firstly: it alerts the human being to the reality that he has a Creator characterised by the highest values in a manner befitting His position as the originator of existence and life; a Creator concerned with the human being, having endowed him with the distinguishing qualities of reason, wisdom, and conscience so that he may recognise this Creator, recognise what is accessible to him of His greatness and creativity, and be spiritually and morally connected to Him.

This resembles—albeit in a distant and limited way—the desire of a learned and creative person to reveal to the public what he possesses of knowledge, capability, and creativity. Likewise, God has manifested Himself to the human being in this vast, majestic, ordered, and wondrous universe, so that the human being may come to know Him, delight in it, draw from Him, and give thanks for His grace. This universe in all its parts—including the human being himself—is a divine display before humanity of the power, knowledge, and creativity of God.

Secondly: these messages reveal that the human being possesses a spiritual dimension that transcends this worldly life, and that his knowledge or ignorance of the path, his virtues or vices, and his bad or good conduct will be reflected in what befits them in the Hereafter. This life is like an opportunity given to the human being to strive for the perfections and achievements he seeks within a magnificent scene presided over by God, the Creator and Originator. This opportunity ends with death, after which begins the stage of waiting until the Hour. This is the essence of the divine messages that have constituted turning points in human history, awakening the human being to the horizons and dimensions of life, and to the path and destination that await him—whether in the case of the known messengers Moses (a.s.), Jesus

(a.s.), and Muhammad (s.a.w.), or other messengers whose divine commissioning has gradually become obscured even while their characterisation by spirituality and wisdom has remained. Among these may be Buddha, Zoroaster, and others among ancient figures of peoples whose only surviving legacy is that they possessed wise, spiritual teachings that later became intermingled with other elements. Yet the final, comprehensive divine message—preserved with distinguished level of historical reliability, namely the message of Islam—is naturally the decisive message and the most reliable and complete expression of the content of all previous messages, as it contains the last divine legislation revealed by the Creator concerning the human being.

This humble writer is but a human being who has felt the gravity of this subject in accordance with the principles of maturity, wisdom, and conscience. He has sought the truth for himself and has been committed to ensuring that his knowledge of it be pure knowledge, arising from the motives of natural disposition (*fiṭra*) and proper verification of the reports of the messages—measuring the information available to him, and giving precedence to the points of illumination and clarity over places of ambiguity and obscurity, striving to be free in his judgment, and submitting to the truth towards which his research leads him, without allowing his affiliation or environment to influence the truth he arrives at. At the same time, he recognises that it is natural for some people in this life to be closer to the river than others; yet this does not excuse the distant one from seeking water. Indeed, the distant one is praiseworthy for his insistence on seeking it in a way that the one already near is not praised for to the same degree. That is a cost upon the nearer one for his nearness, and a merit for the distant one that compensates for his distance—and this is the balance of justice in life.

The writer of these lines wished to share this knowledge with those who seek it, according to his modest ability, since all people share in this path and this journey. For this reason, he accepted requests to deliver lectures on religion and faith to a group of Iraqi university students. These lectures were then recorded, compiled, and revised, resulting in the form now before the reader.

Introduction

I hope that what this book contains will benefit all the brothers and sisters who read it, and that the information within it will enlighten and assist them. I also hope that the motive behind writing it is truly a noble and virtuous calling, and that God—the Great, the Creator, the Originator—will, despite the modesty of this work, record it as an acknowledgment of His grace, gratitude for His generosity, and a means of conveying awareness of Him to people.

I must also thank the brothers who took interest in translating this work into other languages, out of a desire to spread awareness among people. From God, the Exalted, we seek guidance and success.

Chapter One

My Journey to Religion

1. Introduction

Every self-determining individual must investigate the matter of religion and its truth, and gain insight into what it teaches about the horizons of this life, the position of the human being in this existence and his destiny beyond it, as well as the role of his actions and qualities in the outcome that awaits him—given the importance of this subject and its role in human happiness and misery.

I have investigated this matter and established for myself—through appropriate rational tools—conclusions concerning this subject. After thorough inquiry and comprehensive reflection, I have found that there exists indeed sufficient evidence to produce conviction in my mind and tranquillity in my soul that there is a God who created this beautiful and astonishing universe, and that He is characterised by virtuous ethics, that He loves justice and goodness, and hates injustice and evil, and that He is concerned with the human being. He created him as a distinctive creation comprising two dimensions: material and spiritual, equipping him with the power of thought, the spirit of wisdom, a conscience comprising of noble values, and free will through which he can control the direction of his actions. If he wishes, he can choose goodness and guidance; and if he wishes, he can choose evil and destruction. God has sent humanity a message explaining the horizons of existence and the future of humanity, and I have attained certainty that I am indeed proceeding in this life toward God in a long journey to an eternal life in which each human being will have his rank according to his insight in this life and his conduct within it, for this life is not a permanent abode but rather a passage and a crossing.

I was asked to speak about my experience with religion. In response, I will describe this experience of mine so that it may serve as a

testimony from me about my insight for myself in this life, hoping that God will benefit through it every self-determining person who seeks insight into the reality of this life, its purposes, and his position in it.

I had previously described this experience at the end of the research *Risālat Allāh ilā l-insān* (“God’s Message to Humanity”),¹ from the book *al-Anbā’ al-thalāthat al-kubrā* (*The Three Great Tidings*) within the series *Manhaj al-Tathabbut fi l-Dīn* (“The Method of Verification in Religion”). However, I will describe it here with greater detail on certain points.²

2. The First Stage: Interest in Religion and Its Causes

The two issues that first spurred my interest in religion are:³

¹ Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Sistani, *al-Anbā’ al-thalāthat al-kubrā* (Dār al-Badhra: 1439/2018), 533 ff.

² I have described the foundations of this experience in detailed scholarly discourse in the series *Manhaj al-Tathabbut fi l-Dīn*, which comprises five books. In the first book, *Ḥaqīqat al-dīn* (*The Essence of Religion*) (Dār al-Kutub wa-l-Wathā’iq: 1438/2017), I describe it and mention its main features, including its epistemological, cosmological, human, and legislative perspectives. In the second book, *Ittijāh al-dīn fi manāḥil l-ḥayā* (*The Direction of Religion in the Spheres of Life*) (Dār al-Kutub wa-l-Wathā’iq: 1439/2018), I address the spheres of general life: science, wisdom, ethics, inspiration, justice, the spiritual dimensions of humanity, happiness, personal freedom, law, politics, and contemporaneity, and I demonstrate that the direction of religion in all these spheres is natural, rational, and appropriate. In the third book, *Ḍarūrat al-ma’rifat al-dīniyya* (Dār al-Kutub wa-l-Wathā’iq: 1439/2018), I describe *The Necessity of Religious Knowledge*. In the fourth book, *al-Qawā’id al-ḥikmiyya al-‘amma li-l-ma’rifat al-insāniyya wa-l-dīniyya* (Dār al-Kutub wa-l-Wathā’iq: 1439/2018), I go through *The General Natural Principles of Human and Religious Knowledge*. The fifth book is called *al-Anbā’ al-thalāthat al-kubrā: Wujūd al-ilāh, al-Ma’ād, al-Risāla* (*The Three Great Tidings: The Existence of God, the Resurrection, and Prophethood*), in four parts.

³ For further discussion, see Chapter Four, and also al-Sistani, *Ḍarūrat al-ma’rifat al-dīniyya*.

2.1 The Survival of the Human Being After This Life and the Existence of the Hereafter

The first issue: religion's claim that the existence of the human being does not end with his death, but that he will live on, be resurrected and held accountable for all that he did in this world.

Thus, this world becomes the plantation for the Hereafter, where a person plants seeds today to harvest their crops tomorrow, and this life is not a place of amusement, rest, and indulgence, but rather a place of learning and testing, in which the human being learns its ways and the various paths within it, then chooses what he wishes from them.

It is an opportunity for the human being to be tested through its events; for the events of life are like examination questions, and his reaction to them represents his answers to those questions, so each person will have his rank in the coming scene according to his efforts and deeds in it.

This is a very significant fact whose depth a person cannot reach, nor can he truly appreciate it as it deserves.

There are moments that pass over me when I recall this truth and reflect on its dimensions, and I find it overwhelming, and feel that I cannot bear it.

How can I invest in a life of such enormous significance in a fitting manner? At least a quarter of a person's life is spent sleeping, and the remainder is spent in much negligence, indulgence, and relaxation; and even when a person does something good that he expects to be righteous, he does not necessarily maintain a sound intention and sincerity throughout it, but rather is afflicted by concerns of pretence, affectation, and worldly interests.

Moreover, what could the deeds of someone like me possibly be worth—in the competitive arena of this life—compared to the deeds of truly righteous, insightful, and intelligent people who look at this life with a penetrating and wise gaze, who are able to look beyond the superficial aspects of things to their inward aspects, and can contemplate beyond their present existence to their future potential and

purpose, and devote themselves to investing their life in the optimal way?⁴

Anxiety may sometimes overcome a person to the point that he wishes he had not existed, or that God had taken his soul before the age of self-determination and religious obligation (*taklīf*), as quoted in the Qurʾān about Mary (a.s.) in her statement at the conception of Jesus (a.s.): “O, I wish I had died before this and had been forgotten and out of sight.”⁵

And a person may wish that God would grant him martyrdom in His cause, so that it might compensate for the negligence and shortcomings he finds in himself, for martyrdom, in the case of people like me, is like winning the jackpot compared to the hard graft of controlling oneself throughout one’s life to maintain virtuous qualities and righteous conduct.

I expect that if a believing person, after his death, were to go through the record of his life and its events, he would be astonished at his deeds, despite his faith in God, the Exalted, and the Hereafter, and would wish that he had built himself in a better way, had possessed more foresight and certainty about the future, and had increased in piety (*taqwā*) and righteousness. As the Commander of the Faithful, Imam ‘Alī (a.s.), said when he passed by the cemetery: “If they were permitted to speak, they would tell you that the best provision is *taqwā*.”⁶

How much time he had wasted!

How many opportunities for good he had neglected!

And how many actions in word or deed he had indulged in without

⁴ Imam ‘Alī (a.s.) described one such person in a statement where he said, “He has donned the armour of wisdom and taken it with all its proper conduct, through devotion to it, knowledge of it, and dedication to it. For him, it is his lost object that he seeks and his need that he inquires about.” (Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn b. Mūsā al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-balāgha*, ed. Ṣubḥī al-Ṣāliḥ (Markaz al-Buḥūth al-Islāmiyya: 1374Sh./1995), 263).

⁵ Q 19:23.

⁶ Al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-balāgha*, 492.

criticism nor scrutiny!

How can a person prepare himself in this life in a manner befitting of what comes after it, when every step he takes or neglects has an eternal effect on an eternal life?

Truly, what the Commander of the Faithful used to whisper to his Lord and to himself in the hours of the night as he contemplated the limited span of life in this world and the eternity of what comes after, “Ah, how little the provision and how long the journey.”⁷

Whenever I reflect upon the matter of God and the Hereafter, I find that this momentous fact has dimensions that are difficult to calculate, and I truly feel that if I were to dedicate all my time and capacity—besides what is necessary for sleep, food, and rest—to righteous deeds such as worship, gratitude to the Creator, fulfilling the rights of creation, and doing good to others, it would be worthy of that.

All of this may lead a person to despair of the remedy, but in moments of fear and dread when contemplating this scene, I recall what God has described Himself with: kindness, compassion, and mercy toward creation, and forgiveness for their errors and shortcomings. By this, my soul is calmed, and my heart finds peace.

God says, “Indeed, God is Kind and Merciful to people,”⁸ and, “And He is the Forgiving, the Loving,”⁹ and, “Verily, in the remembrance of God do hearts find peace.”¹⁰

Indeed, the news of the Hereafter is so significant and astonishing that it stirred my fears and apprehension from the very beginning of my quest to think about the matter of religion.

The serious possibility of the truth of this news¹¹ led me to occupy myself with investigating the topic of religion and prevented me from treating it with neglect and inaction, content only with raising doubts but then returning to the concerns of this worldly life. Rather, I see that

⁷ Ibid., 481.

⁸ Q 22:65 and 2:143.

⁹ Q 85:14.

¹⁰ Q 13:28.

¹¹ For details on this, see al-Sistani, *Darūrat al-maʿrifat al-dīniyya*, 73 ff.

even if I were to remain in doubt about the matter of religion, this information about the Hereafter would make it incumbent upon me to exercise caution in my conduct, requiring vigilance against sins and striving to refine my soul and rid myself of blameworthy traits.

2.2 God's Special Care for Humanity

The second issue: what religion has conveyed concerning God's care for His creation and His special concern for humanity.

It states that God created the human being equipped with intellect, conscience, and free will, so that he may come to know Him through his intellect, thank Him through his conscience, and benefit from the blessings He has prepared for him in this life.

It also states that He will take charge of the human being in this life in proportion to his response to the guidance He has planted within him. If he thanks God, He increases him; if he confides in Him, He listens to him; if he praises Him, He honours him; and if he calls upon Him, He responds to him.

Thus, the likeness of God in relation to the human being is like that of parents, but in a much higher position—one that has dominion over all things.

If God, the Creator of humanity, has created him for this purpose and asked him to adorn himself with knowledge of Him and gratitude to Him, then it is fitting for the human being—with the conscience he has been given—to respond to God's command in gratitude for His blessings, seeking increase in His favour and gaining His guardianship (*walāya*).

How can a person turn away from God, when He is his Creator, the Bestower of blessings, and the One who favours him—to the extent that when He calls him, he does not answer; He urges him but the human being hesitates; He guides him but he does not follow His guidance, acting as if it were God who is in need of the human being!

How gracious is this Lord who has granted everything to humanity, then merely asks to borrow from him what He has given him—whilst He is independent of him, and if He willed, He could take back

whatever He has given, and humanity and all things would be nothing.

God says, “Who is it that will lend God a goodly loan, so that He may multiply it for him, and he shall have a generous reward?”¹²

How ugly it is for a person to be ignorant of the right of God and to live like cattle, as God said, “And He gave you of all that you asked Him; and if you count the blessings of God, you will not be able to number them. Indeed, man is truly unjust and ungrateful.”¹³

How beautifully this is expressed in a supplication in the words of the supplicant, “You call out to me, but I turn away from You; You show love to me but I show hostility toward You; You show affection to me but I do not accept from You, as if I am above needing You. Yet that has not prevented You from having mercy on me, doing good to me, and favouring me with Your generosity and nobility.”¹⁴

In addition to this: if God has created the universe and humanity for this purpose, then He has—naturally—established the existence of humanity and all that surrounds it according to a system of laws that produce happiness if one proceeds in accordance with them. These would be the correct course in life and the path to follow within it, and the pursuit of any other path would be a grave error, as God said, “And [He revealed] that this is My straight path, so follow it, and do not follow other ways, lest they scatter you from His way. This He has enjoined upon you, that you may be Godwary.”¹⁵

Therefore, I came to certainty that there is importance to religion in light of these two issues that I have described above:

1. The continuation of human existence after this life and the existence of the Hereafter.
2. The existence of God, who is concerned with humanity, who desires that humanity maintain connection with Him, know Him, thank Him, and appreciate Him as befits one possessing such perfect and

¹² Q 57:11.

¹³ Q 14:34.

¹⁴ Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām* (Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya: 1364Sh./1985), 3:83.

¹⁵ Q 6:153.

virtuous attributes and such beneficence.

For all these reasons, I have concluded that the matter of religion is extremely serious, and I cannot treat it with neglect and doubt. Rather, I must ascertain it with the type of certainty that produces confidence in it, tranquillity toward it, and adherence to its teachings; or alternately, that it should produce confidence in its erroneousness with a confidence for which I then bear responsibility, if error should happen to occur.

The importance of the content of religion for me—according to the testimony of my reason—is to such an extent that a person possessing any wisdom in determining epistemological priorities can only place it at the top of the list of these priorities. It is absolutely the most important concern in this life.

3. The Second Stage: Reflection on the Religion of Islam

Then, in the second stage, I reflected on the matter of religion.

First, I determined by the judgment of my reason that the appropriate logic for conviction in religion is that it be established according to the rational and sound tools with which humanity has been equipped in its intellectual makeup, and that its contents proceed in their directions and broad outlines from what humanity is naturally disposed toward in terms of inclination to wisdom and virtue. There is no harm thereafter in its containing ambiguous texts and details.

Then I observed that what deserves attention is divine religion, which contains the transmission of an explicit and declared message from God to humanity, in which He clarifies the realities of existence and life, and explains the correct path for humanity within them. As for religions built on purely human experiences, they do not reveal in a reliable manner anything real and serious of the kind mentioned above. This is because the breadth of human capacity for imagination and delusion allows for falling into a spectrum of imaginations and delusions during those experiences. Moreover, if a divine message to creation is established, there is no place for seeking to receive God's teachings through experience.

In reflecting on divine religion, I observed that what are known as the three divine religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) are in reality one religion, as would be expected, and as the Qur'ān has explicitly stated. However, the divine messages within the divine religion have multiplied so that they may confirm one another, as evidenced by their unity in their teachings, reports, beliefs, history, figures, orientations, and fundamental legislations. All of them include the obligation to believe in God, the Hereafter, the previous messengers and their books, and they enjoin the worship of God through prayer, fasting, pilgrimage to the House of God, and spiritual retreat (*i'tikāf*), as well as the observance of moral values such as benevolence, truthfulness, chastity, and the like. What is called a new religion is in fact the message of another messenger who confirms all that preceded and removes important errors that have arisen and may abrogate certain legislative details in his message as required by changing factors that enter legislation.

In light of this, I found that divine religion should be examined through Islam, which is the final message, because it is the most historically reliable given the recording of its scriptural text during the lifetime of the Messenger. Thus, it is the most reliable in the doctrinal teachings it expresses, and the most recent in the legislative teachings it contains. It is considered a universal divine message that must be experienced and submitted to if a person falls within its scope, for there is no sense in turning away from a message addressed to him by God while contenting himself with a previous message—especially given that some previous messages were specifically concerned with a particular people rather than all of humanity, in accordance with the circumstances of human division at that time into separate peoples. However, the general human situation appears to have become ready for a comprehensive universal religion through Islam.

I observed that the best way to verify Islam is to examine its scriptural text, which is the Qur'ān, because this text is the very text that the Prophet recited to society at that time, according to clear historical evidence. It is thus a text preserved in its original form in an extremely reliable manner, and it can truthfully convey the contents of the

religion.

I examined this text and reflected upon it thoroughly, and it completely convinced me of the truth of this religion. Through it I became certain that God has indeed addressed humanity through an elite group of people, clarifying for them the horizons of existence, the position of this life, and what follows after it.

This text was extremely sound in the three crucial areas by which the truth of religion should be tested: its method of invitation, its contents, and the proofs of its message.

I observed that this text, in its method of inviting humanity to believe in God and in religion, relies on the three fundamental principles: rationality (meaning the perception of things as they truly are), wisdom (meaning attention to the patterns in the cosmos and life, and taking lessons from them), and human conscience (which encompasses noble values)—thereby conforming to the sound, appropriate, and innate method that accords humanity's natural equipment.

As for the contents of this scriptural text, they were thorough, sound, and appropriate, revolving around two axes: God and humanity.

Regarding God: I found this text to be rational, objective, and intuitive in pointing toward God. It drew my attention to what I find within myself and in all that surrounds me of the cosmos and creation—aspects of order, beauty, and magnificence—and called me to reflect upon this through many noble verses.¹⁶ Thus I came to perceive the existence of God through all creatures.

It appears to me that the existence of God is beyond doubt, except that habituation to the spectacle of life may initially extinguish the

¹⁶ God said, "Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, and the ships that sail through the sea with what benefits people, and the water that God has sent down from the sky, giving life thereby to the earth after its lifelessness and dispersing therein every kind of creature, and the directing of the winds and the clouds controlled between the sky and the earth are signs for a people who use reason." (Q 2:164).

significance of the cosmos and creation in a person's consciousness. However, if one stimulates one's thinking in this direction and reflects upon it carefully, one does find it convincing.

I became convinced of the existence of God with a conviction that fills my soul and consciousness, through contemplating the signs of God.

I also found this text to be sound in establishing the oneness of God and negating divinity of anything other than God, since the spectacle of the cosmos represents only one God; and humanity has no proof or evidence for the existence of another god. All that humanity has considered divine—whether human beings, idols, or other things—are contingent, weak, and created entities, just like all other things and people. Thus, the discourse of polytheism (*shirk*) is truly a discourse of superstition and ignorance.

I also found the Qur'ānic text inspiring in its establishment of virtuous values for His majesty, as it indicated that He loves goodness, justice, benevolence, truthfulness, and faithfulness, and that He abhors evil, injustice, transgression, and falsehood. God observes these values completely despite His power over all things: He does not wrong anyone by the weight of an atom, He does not break a promise He has made to Himself, He speaks only truth and honesty, and He loves these values to be reflected in humanity.

I reflected and found that attributing such qualities to God is entirely fitting, because God is an essence characterised by knowledge, will, and choice, just as is the case with humanity. Part of the perfection of any essence with these attributes is the observance of virtuous values. Thus, what featured in the scripture about God's ethics was sound and wholly appropriate.

Subsequently, I found evidence of truthfulness and soundness in all that the divine text mentioned about His oneness, His characteristics, and His ethics.

As for what relates to humanity, this scripture relies upon humanity's possession of four qualities: rationality, inclination toward wisdom, moral conscience, and free will—and that is a correct and evident matter.

The scripture also included God's care for humanity, whom He distinguished with reason, conscience, and wisdom. He desired that humanity should be guided to Him through reason, proceed according to the patterns that He has established through wisdom, and to interact with Him and with all fellow human beings through the conscience that He has bestowed, thus standing before Him in gratitude and propriety rather than in disregard, neglect, and ingratitude, as He has said, "So remember Me; I will remember you. And be grateful to Me and do not deny Me."¹⁷

God has sent His messages to humanity in this context.

This meaning appears to be appropriate, for if God—who is characterised by knowledge, wisdom, and conscience—has created humanity with these attributes, then it is expected that He would deal with humanity accordingly. This also accords with humanity's observable inclination throughout history toward God, which may express that humanity has been created with this innate disposition (*fiṭra*), as understood from His saying, "The natural disposition (*fiṭrat*) of God upon which He has created humanity."¹⁸

However, this text—like the divine messages before it—also contained an extremely momentous announcement that is almost shocking to humanity: that this life is not the ultimate goal or end for humanity, but rather an opportunity to test humanity's insight and conduct after being guided to the path of good and the way of evil, and given free will to choose, so that humanity may return to life in another existence and receive its due rank. God said, "And for all there are degrees according to what they have done, and your Lord is not unaware of what they do."¹⁹ Thus this life is transformed, as we mentioned before, from a place of distraction into a station of testing.

This announcement, although new to humanity, is plausible and appropriate for numerous reasons. It gives profound meaning to humanity's existence and the significance of its instruction and

¹⁷ Q 2:152.

¹⁸ Q 30:30.

¹⁹ Q 6:132.

education through the divine message, and it makes ethical principles the markers of happiness and misery in another life. It represents an appreciation of humanity's insight and its conduct in this life, so there is no reason to reject it if proof is established for the truthfulness of the message.

As for the proofs of the truthfulness of this message, they are contained within this very text, for this text has been truly convincing to me in establishing God's speech through the Messenger of Islam and the preceding messages that came before it, about some of which history tells us.

I observed in a very clear and certain manner that the Qur'ān represented a tremendous event and a great challenge to Arab society in the Arabian Peninsula at both the substantive and literary levels. It came to an idolatrous nation in which idol worship was deeply rooted, and upon which its social order was built; a nation that had no religious scripture nor religious teachings, and which was greatly and overwhelmingly concerned with eloquence of speech, to the point that eloquence was the arena for its poets. It came with a highly refined religious book in contrast to the known scriptures (the Torah and the Gospel), containing all the established elements of religion—matters concerning the Divine, the history of creation, the lives of the prophets, and matters of legislation—yet in a distinctive rhetorical style with which it repeatedly challenged the Arabs; and they were clearly unable to match it.

The spiritual, historical, and legislative content that the Qur'ān contained, along with its rhetorical devices and styles, were beyond the Prophet's capacity according to what his people had known of him before, as God said in the Qur'ān, "I have dwelt among you for a lifetime before it. Do you not understand?"²⁰

Upon contemplating all of this together, I did not find it reasonable to doubt in any way the fundamental phenomenon of God's address to His creation through messengers, or to consider it a false phenomenon born out of purely human spiritual musings or false motives for

²⁰ Q 10:16.

the purpose of social reform.

3.1 Confirmation of the Truth of Islam through Imam ‘Alī’s (a.s.) Position toward It

What further increased my conviction in this was that I found Imam Amīr al-Mu’minīn affirming the Prophet, and he was, as clear historical reports indicate:

First: a constant companion of the Prophet before the prophetic mission, going with him to the cave of Ḥirā’ for worship, as Abū Ṭālib (d. 4 B.H./619) had entrusted him to the Prophet’s care, so he was undoubtedly aware of all the Prophet’s private affairs and practices.

Second: intelligent, clever, and perceptive, and it would not have been possible to deceive him such that he would believe in something that had no reality.

Third—and I have no doubt about this: he was an independent seeker of truth for himself, and he suffered in its pursuit what he suffered. So, if there had been anything in the Prophet’s circumstances indicating that they arose from his personal ambitions, he would have been the first to discover that, and he would not have been compliant in his affair.

As he said in a speech to his son Imam al-Ḥasan (a.s.):

Know, my son, that the most beloved thing you can take from my counsel is mindfulness of God (*taqwā*), limiting yourself to what God has obligated upon you, and following what the first ones among your forefathers and the righteous among your household followed. For they did not neglect to look out for themselves as you are looking out, and they thought as you are thinking, but the end result of that led them to take what they knew and refrain from what they were not charged with... And know, my son, that no one has informed us about God as much as the Messenger has informed about Him, so be content with him as a guide and as a leader to salvation. For I have not spared you counsel, and you will not reach in looking out for yourself—even if you strive—the extent of my looking out for you.

And know, my son, that if your Lord had a partner, his messengers would have come to you, and you would have seen the traces of his dominion and authority, and you would have known his actions and attributes. But He is one God as He has described Himself, no one opposes Him in His dominion, and He will never cease to exist, nor has He ever ceased to exist...²¹

Therefore, in the faith of Imam Amīr al-Mu'minīn in Islam—according to what we know of his personality, conduct, and ideas based on clear historical evidence—there is another witness to the truth of this message.

Accordingly, I believed that I had secured certainty for myself and had perceived this truth sufficiently to have faith in God, the messengership, and the Hereafter, according to my conviction.

And I did not find that my proximity to this truth, in terms of believing in it within my family and environment, was something that would provoke doubt after I had proceeded with an internal motivation to search for the truth and to be free from error concerning it, being cautious against merely following what I had received from my family and the environment surrounding me.

And I knew that life's circumstances allow for some people to be closer than others to the truth in this matter, just as is the case in all other fields of life. Human and moral values, for example, are acknowledged by everyone, but some people live in an environment conducive to them, while others live in environments that deny these values in one way or another. A person is not to be blamed for believing what he finds in his environment if he has sought the truth and searched for guidance and found in it the signs of truth and the proofs of veracity. For the various beliefs spread across different environments cannot all be false—some of them must be true.

3.2 My Testimony Concerning Religion

Faith in God—glory and exaltation be to Him—as described by

²¹ Al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-balāgha*, 394–396.

religion, filled a void that I felt within myself, as if I had been inspired from the beginning with the existence of a higher being to whom I could turn in times of weakness and helplessness. I came to perceive the existence of God in all beings, as if they were drawings or engravings made by a skilled artist and displayed to people in a personal exhibition. All the magnificent scenes in the heavens and the earth are indeed scenes designed with extraordinary knowledge, and they are the exhibition of God before mankind.

Through religion, I came to know a Lord who is all-knowing, powerful, loving, and kind, who created me to know Him and find comfort in Him. He loves me, is kind to me, and cares for me, and this knowledge became a source of tranquillity, serenity, consolation, and hope for me. I worship Him through the simple acts of worship He has commanded me to perform, out of courtesy toward Him, gratitude for His blessings, and fulfilment of my spiritual and inner needs.

And He has promised me His care and guardianship over all my affairs.

I hope in Him, confident that He will answer me with what I have asked for or with what is better for me. I confide in Him in my worries and hardships, and I trust in His care for me in life's difficulties, whether I expect it or not. Though I know that this life is governed by the laws of trial and striving, He blesses me in the constants of my destiny, watches over me in its expanses, and records reward for me in its straits. I also seek His help in my trials in this life, that He may ward off evil and sin from me as He has done for His righteous servants.

Religion has urged me to be rational in all matters through insight, reflection, verification, and thought. It has warned me against illusions and superstitions, forbidden me from haste and rushing, and counselled me to avoid bias toward whims, prejudices, and all other non-objective principles.

Religion has directed me to learn wisdom and continue to do so throughout life, and has encouraged me to always nurture it by taking lessons from events, heeding examples, and learning from the experiences of others.

Religion has alerted me that virtues are the laws of good in this life

and the next, and that vices are the laws of evil and ugliness in them. It has called me to truthfulness in speech, to refrain from speaking without knowledge, to fulfil promises and all commitments, to avoid harming others, to do good even to those who wrong me, to be grateful for kindness, to love good for others as I love it for myself, to dislike evil for them as I dislike it for myself, to be humble with people, to be moderate in conduct, to have purity of soul, to be fair to others, to avoid excessive and degrading attachments to material things, to avoid boasting about them and stirring up a spirit of competition among others regarding them, to observe modesty in gaze, appearance, and all actions, to be resolute where appropriate, to be as self-reliant as possible, to strive to earn lawful sustenance, to help the poor, to apologise for mistakes, to seek forgiveness for sins, to hold myself accountable, to aspire to acquire virtue, and to pardon those who err.

Religion alerts me to the importance of knowing the truth that it has taught me, so that I may care for preserving it, gaining insight into it, awakening others to pay attention to it, and alerting them to its importance with wisdom and good counsel, without shaming or coercion.

These are serious and important matters that I have learned from religion, and the responsibility remains upon me to act upon them and strive for them. I ask God Almighty for success and guidance in this.

I conclude this presentation with a noble supplication that is narrated to have been recited by Imam al-Ḥusayn (a.s.) on the day of ‘Āshūrā’, and it is one of my most beloved supplications, as it represents what I have personally experienced from God:

O God, You are my trust in every distress; You are my hope in every hardship; and You are for me in every matter that befalls me a trust and support.

How many a worry in which the heart weakens, means become scarce, the friend abandons, and the enemy gloats; I brought it to You and complained of it to You, desiring You over all others; so You relieved me of it, removed it, and sufficed me against it.

For You are the guardian of every blessing, the source of every good deed, and the ultimate object of every desire.²²

²² Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī* (Mu'assasat al-A'lamī li-l-Maṭbū'āt: 1403/1982), 4:321. It is also narrated from Imam al-Riḍā (a.s.) as mentioned in the authentic narration of al-Rayyān b. al-Ṣalt; see Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. al-Nu'mān Shaykh al-Mufīd, *al-Amālī al-Mufīd* (Kungiri-yi Shaykh-i Mufīd: 1413/1992), 273.

Chapter Two

Is There Any Doubt About God?

1. Introduction: The God Debate and Its Importance

The focus of this chapter is the existence of God as Creator and Designer of this organised, precise, and beautiful universe. This is the first step for human beings to gain insight into life, its reality, its purposes, and to identify the appropriate practical methodology for it, and correct conduct within it, because the existence of God is the first foundation of religion (*dīn*). Religion is the message of God to humanity and comprises three major tidings that transform human life.

The first of these tidings is: the existence of a divine Creator of this universe and all beings, including humanity.

The second: that this God is concerned with humanity and has sent messages through which He reveals Himself, His attributes, and His purposes; He demonstrates His care for humanity and emphasises the principles of correct conduct in this life.

The third: that human beings are eternal beings who continue to exist after physical death to encounter the consequences of their knowledge and conduct in this life, whether good or evil. God says:

So, whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it.¹

Religion itself—through examining the circumstances of the messengers and their capabilities—has included proofs of the truthfulness of the message, such as the indication from the messengers' lives before their mission that they could not have possibly produced the contents of this message on their own, such as the message's inclusion of definitive predictions about many future events², which is beyond the

¹ Q 99:7–8.

² Such as the announcement of the Romans' victory over the Persians at a

messengers' capacity, and such as the miracles that occurred for the messengers.

If these proofs of the message are established, they prove the existence of God, but proving the existence of God does not depend solely on them.

2. How the Existence of the Universe Points to the Existence of God

The discovery of the existence of God is sufficiently demonstrated by the indications of the universe and the cosmic phenomena as soon as human beings contemplate and become aware of them, and the texts of the Qur'anic message have drawn attention to this.

Among the things human beings need most is awareness and the stimulation of thought and attention. We see many things and witness many events, but we only become aware of their reality and contemplate only a few of them through inquiry, comparison, and discerning what lies beyond them.

True awareness lies in the human being paying attention to the indications contained within the scene before them, whatever it may be, and taking heed of them. Two people with comparable faculties may stand before the same scene that contains clear indications, but one of them pays attention to those indications, while the other passes them by heedlessly.

We find many examples of this state in our personal, family, and social lives. For instance, several people may witness an incident with characteristics observable to all, but some of them do not derive any indication from it regarding its cause, while others among them who are more astute may find in those same characteristics pointers leading back to the original cause. A group of people may determine a

time when the Muslims feared the Persians would defeat the Romans, where God says, "The Romans have been defeated in the nearest land. But they, after their defeat, will overcome within a few years." (Q 30:2-4). The Romans did indeed defeat the Persians nine years after the revelation of this verse.

proposal for action, and some of them immediately see it as an impractical proposal and are correct, but others may insist that this proposal is practical and unlikely to fail, because they have not managed to read into the causes behind failure well. These are matters that recur frequently in the family and society. Or a speaker may use an expression in which he alludes to his intended meaning, and the ordinary listener does not grasp the meaning he is aiming at, but the alert person notices from the formulation of the speech the allusion in it, among other examples.

One of the clearest examples of this matter is what we see in the cosmic scene before us: the heavens with their vast, expansive horizons, and the earth with the magnificence of its composition and components: a great cosmic factory prepared to receive life and living beings, with its diversity of life forms including varieties of plants and animals, along with the human being with his unique capabilities and distinctive potential among living beings.

Careful and clear contemplation on the universe and its wondrous manifestations clearly shows that it is the work of a creative hand, a brilliant mind, and an extraordinary power.

The Qur'ānic texts of the divine message have drawn attention to this in a magnificent manner.

Among the distinctive features of the Qur'ān is its unique logic of rationality, as it constantly emphasises following logic and reason, stimulates human thought in this direction, and urges observance of justice and what is right (*ma'rūf*).

It does all this by drawing human attention to the indications of the cosmic scene and elevating him to high horizons that dominate this scene, describing them in a magnificent way and stimulating human feelings with an eloquent style.

Let us first listen to one of the most eloquent Qur'ānic passages that most stimulates thought and contemplation, which appears in *Sūrat al-Ra'd*, as a general reminder of this feature. God says:

Alif Lām Mīm Rā. These are the signs of the Book. That which has been sent down to you from your Lord is the truth, but most

people do not believe. God is He who raised the heavens without pillars that you can see, then established Himself upon the Throne, and subjected the sun and the moon, each running for a specified term. He directs the affair and details the signs so that you may be certain of meeting your Lord. And it is He who spread out the earth and placed therein firm mountains and rivers, and of every fruit He made therein two kinds. He covers the night with the day. Indeed, in that are signs for a people who reflect. And on the earth are neighbouring tracts, and gardens of grapevines, and crops, and date-palms, growing in clusters and otherwise, watered with one water; yet We make some of them excel others in taste. Indeed, in that are signs for a people who understand.³

These verses draw attention to the order and creativity in a number of striking manifestations in the heavens and the earth.

3. The Scientific Evidence for God's Existence

This indication can be clarified in a scientific manner through several arguments, of which we will mention only three.

3.1 The First Argument: From Order⁴

The indication of order in the universe and created beings points to a creative originator, and it comprises two premises.

The first premise: there is no doubt that this cosmic scene contains a brilliant order, manifested on three levels.

The first level: this is the apparent level that human beings find through contemplation of each being as it stands among other beings as well as in their collective stance, finding much harmony, proportion, and magnificence in both their individual and collective existence.

³ Q 13:1–4.

⁴ For details of this argument, see al-Sistani, *al-Anbā' al-thalāthat al-kubrā, Wujūd al-ilāh*, 55.

The second level: this is the underlying level that human beings discover through magnifying and approximating instruments such as electron and optical microscopes, by which they observe the details of the visible universe, such as the parts of matter and the details of living cells, and also observe what is hidden from the eye in the depths of the seas and the horizons of the sky. These are matters apparent to human beings but with the aid of instruments.

The third level: this is the hidden level of order represented by the complex scientific laws upon which cosmic order is built, many of which have been discovered in the relevant sciences, particularly in the modern scientific revolution in cosmology, physics, chemistry, biology, and other modern sciences, and these sciences continue to reveal wonderful and profound aspects of this order.⁵

The second premise: order and systematisation point to a directing and intelligent power, because any organised action cannot exist by chance as the product of spontaneously generating factors, but must be the product of an intelligent being orchestrating them.

From this we see that archaeologists, when they uncover complex artefacts, conclude them to be traces of a human civilisation that produced them, and this meaning is self-evident according to the perception of sound reason.

The great scientists of physics, chemistry, and biology who discover these laws for the first time continue to express their wonder at this cosmic order and the magnificent, wonderful laws governing it, and perhaps this feeling is diluted in us because we receive them passively and have not been active participants in their discovery and derivation.⁶

Judges who deduce a certain truth through the methodology and evidence presented find a vitality in the proofs that others who may listen to their reasoning may not find, due to their lack of active participation in the process.

Einstein says:

⁵ Ibid., 63 ff.

⁶ Ibid., 81.

I have never found a better expression than “religious” for this trust in the rational nature of reality and of its peculiar accessibility to the human mind. Where this trust is lacking science degenerates into an uninspired procedure. Let the devil care if the priests make capital out of this. There is no remedy for that.⁷

He also said—as quoted in the same source:

My religiosity consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable superior spirit who reveals himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble minds. That deeply emotional conviction of the presence of a superior reasoning power, which is revealed in the incomprehensible universe, forms my idea of God.⁸

⁷ Albert Einstein, *Lettres a Maurice Solovine* (Gauthier-Villars: 1956), 102–103.

⁸ Some of Einstein’s letters have been cited as showing that he denied God and considered what came in the Torah to be pure myths, and this appears to contradict his other statements such as those we quoted above. What I expect is that he believed in the God of science but not the God of religion. The God of science is the one who established the universe according to complex mathematical equations which make a person feel, no matter how extensive his knowledge, that he is a small child before a vast and complex spectacle. As for the God of religion, He is—in addition to what has been mentioned—loving of good and hating of evil, concerned with humanity, and has sent messages to him conveying the instructions he must observe, which include news of humanity’s survival after death. Acknowledging God with these attributes means acknowledging religion and divine messages. So when he denied the existence of God, he meant by this what is characterised by the attributes mentioned in religion, not the fundamental existence of a Creator and Originator of the universe.

If this expectation and synthesis were not congruous, it would be expected that his position would be confused and unstable. At times he denied God in accordance with the prevailing trend among natural scientists in the modern era, believing that everything in the universe has a

Attention to cosmic order suffices to demonstrate the Omnipotent Maker and does not require specialised modern knowledge; rather, it is clearly observable. We can all sense that the universe is organised according to patterns and rules at the material, psychological, and social levels. All things—causes and effects—proceed according to its general laws (*sunan*).

Everything proceeds according to organised patterns and rules. Attention to this matter does not require knowledge so much as it requires awareness, contemplation, and careful consideration.

3.2 The Second Argument: From Change

The demonstration of the Maker through the changing of the universe. This proof consists of two premises.

The first premise: the universe is changing, because all beings evolve from one form to another. If you look at living beings, what is observable is that they proceed along a line of generation and decay. A hen lays eggs, then the egg becomes another hen, and thus the existence of “the hen” continues. If you look at non-living beings, they too evolve from one form to another in different ways—some apparent, such as the transformation of non-living materials into living beings among plants and animals, and vice versa, and others that modern

natural cause and therefore there is no need for the existence of God. At other times, he looked at the precision of the laws of the universe from the modern scientific perspective and acknowledged the Universal Intellect that created these laws.

In this too there is something that can serve as an indication of the universe’s demonstration of God’s existence. We say “indication” (*munabbih*) rather than “proof” (*dalil*) because proof from the scientific perspective is objective evidence, not the statement of some scholars, however eminent they may be.

Moreover, Einstein was a physicist, not a philosopher or logician, and the subject of God’s existence belongs to the category of philosophical and logical knowledge, albeit to the self-evident rather than complex part of it, similar to the mathematical proposition ($1+1=2$), which is a clear mathematical proposition, not a complex one.

science has revealed.

The second premise: that a changing thing must have a cause. The explanation of this is that it may initially occur to a person's mind that there is no obstacle to the existence of an infinite series of changing things succeeding one another, so let the hen be generated from the egg and the egg from a previous hen, then that hen from a previous egg, and so on without end, and there is no need for the existence of something beyond the hen and the egg that would be an original cause for them.

But what a person finds with some contemplation is that this notion is an unintelligible matter, because every link in this series, which is assumed to be infinite, is naturally caused. There is no hen in this series that you can point to specifically and say that it is caused and generated from an egg, otherwise we would have a hen that did not originate from an egg, and this would mean the series terminates with it. Likewise, there is no egg in this series that you can point to and say that it is generated from a hen, otherwise we would have an egg that did not originate from a hen, and this would mean the series terminates with it.

And if every link in this series is caused by something beyond it, then the entirety of that series is naturally caused, because the attribute of any collection follows the attribute of its parts and links. If the parts and links are characterised by an attribute, then that entire collection is also characterised by that attribute. Accordingly, if all the hens and eggs in the assumed series are caused by eggs and hens that precede them, then the totality of the series is naturally caused, so its cause must necessarily be something beyond itself.

Therefore, the series of hen and egg—which we have mentioned as an example for the sake of clarification—must have a beginning, which is neither the hen nor the egg, and accordingly there must be a cause for it beyond itself that brought the hen or the egg into existence initially.

And so it is with the material universe, since it is composed of sequential links, some of which result from others. It must have a cause beyond itself, and this cannot be dispensed with by assuming that this

series is infinite, because every link in the series is caused, so how can the entire series be independent of an external cause?

3.3 The Third Argument: From Origination⁹

The indication of the universe's origination upon a cause beyond it. This consists of two premises.

The first premise: that this material universe is originated (*ḥādīth*). The explanation of this is that there is an ancient and important question about the universe, which is: is the entire cosmos and its components something eternal and ancient with no beginning or start? Is the matter from which it is composed eternal, having existed since eternity? Are the chemical, physical, and biological laws that govern the universe, organise it, and generate millions of different beings, arranged and eternal of their own accord and not originated things?

Or are the cosmos and its components originated things that came into existence after having been non-existent?

The correct view is the second one, for the entire universe is originated (*ḥādīth*) for two reasons:

1. The universe is in constant change—as mentioned previously in the second argument.¹⁰ Matter, its parts, and whatever is composed from it are constantly changing and evolving, with no difference between living beings and other things. The evolution of many things is evident through general understanding by observing the conditions of beings that we examine closely, and modern science has clarified this by examining the precise state of matter, from the parts of the atom to the great galaxies. Matter and what is composed from it are in constant flux.

Human perception, whenever it finds something changing and

⁹ For details, see al-Sistani, *al-Anbā' al-thalāthat al-kubrā, Wujūd al-ilāh*, 259.

¹⁰ It should be noted that the idea of “the changing universe” was used in this proof first to establish the universe's temporal origin (*ḥudūth*) and then to establish its need for a cause, while in the second proof it was used to establish its need for a cause directly.

fluctuating, sees that this thing must be originated (*ḥādith*), and it cannot be eternal (*qadīm*). This meaning is something with which the human being is equipped as part of innate human consciousness (*al-waṣy al-insānī al-ḥīṭrī*). When we see something fluctuating and rotating according to its nature, we perceive that this thing came into existence at some point, and we do not accept that this thing, with its fluctuations, could be something eternal.

2. What cosmology in the modern era has concluded, therefore, is the origination of the universe through the Big Bang of extremely dense matter that exploded in a tremendous explosion and generated types of energies and galaxies with their components; and that the universe continues to consume that generated energy, and the galaxies continue to move away from one another in a regularity that expresses their emergence from energy generated by a prior cosmic explosion, despite the existence of the law of gravity between bodies.

This matter, according to the prevailing view in this science, is not eternal but rather was generated from the explosion, and for this reason they have stated that there was nothing there before the Big Bang.¹¹

It has been stated in historical biology that life is a nascent state on Earth after it became prepared for that—and it occurred approximately 4.5 billion years ago according to scientific studies—since the conditions on Earth before that were not favourable for the emergence of life on it, and this is a well-known matter.

Therefore, there is no doubt that the universe, beings, their order, and their laws are originated matters.

The second premise: every originated matter needs a cause and reason, and it is not conceivable that something should occur without a cause.

This idea is among the self-evident and clear matters that a human being perceives early on. We find that a five-year-old child, for example, when encountering a new toy, asks: who brought this toy? And if he misses a toy, he asks: where is it? And why is it not in its place?

¹¹ For further detail on this argument, see al-Sistani, *al-Anbā' al-thalāth al-kubrā, Wujūd al-ilāh*, 270 ff.

This principle represents the structure of human thought. Deductive processes in personal, family, and social life proceed from extracting the causes and reasons behind events. Similarly, scientific research always attempts to understand the causes of events occurring in various fields through induction and experimentation. Medicine, for example, searches for the causes of diseases that occur and for the results of using and consuming foods and nutrients, proceeding from the premise that everything that occurs does so from a cause and a reason.

Therefore, it is not conceivable that there should be something originated without a cause.

This is a self-evident and clear principle in human thought.

On this basis, it is clearly known that this universe, its beings, systems, and laws have a necessary cause that brings them into existence and governs them.

3.4 Summary

In light of these proofs derived from clear rationality and scientific self-evident truths, we conclude that every scene of this life represents the All-Powerful Creator. The scene of life and the entire universe is like an artist's exhibition in which he has displayed his artistic paintings, where visitors find in each painting some traces of this artist's personality, his artistic ability, and his skill in drawing and expression. Or it is like a company's exhibition of its products and manufactured goods that represent the technical capabilities of the company and those who run it. The entire universe is an exhibition of divine craftsmanship, indicating power, knowledge, wisdom, and management, manifested in wonderful and diverse types of representation, from the smallest atom and living organism among molecules and cells to the wondrous natures of animals such as ants and bees, to the magnificent beings of galaxies with their suns, moons, and planets.

There is no difference in this matter whether some of these beings came into existence through a new act of creation or whether this entire cosmos began from a single point and evolved over millions of years into this magnificent scene, because this point necessarily

contained potentials and capacities that unfolded into all this diversity, just as a peacock's egg unfolds into this magnificent creature with all the details of its splendour.

The existence of God is a clear reality manifested in the folds of every atom of the universe and every individual being and species.

From this, it is only fitting for those who are conscious of this life and insightful about it to witness God in everything within it, to deduce from things their Maker and Creator, and to look at them as they look at other scenes in the examples we have mentioned.

Here are three questions we pose to further clarify the idea:

3.5 Question One: What Is the Reason for the Absence of Any Indication of the Maker from the Human Mind?¹²

If the existence of God is so clear, then why does this indication escape human beings, such that we do not ordinarily recall God in our perception of things? Indeed, even some experts in the natural sciences such as physics, biology, and chemistry do not acknowledge this, even though we do not find an absence of indication of the agent in artistic and industrial exhibitions?

3.5.1 Why Do People Not Consider the Existence of the Creator?

The answer: the reason for this is a psychological factor, which is the effect of habituation in extinguishing the indication of things, especially in matters that dominate human life, where one needs to think on an elevated and broader level in order to perceive the indications that they contain.

We can illustrate this with a simple, accessible, and observable idea in the states of a child. We find that after a child becomes somewhat aware, he asks about matters to which he notices their novelty and occurrence, proceeding from the idea that every occurrence has a cause.

¹² For details on this question and its answer, see al-Sistani, *al-Qawā'id al-fīṭriyya al-ʿamma li-l-marifa al-insāniyya wa-l-dīniyya, al-Qā'idat al-thālitha*, 79 ff.

If he finds new clothing or a new toy, he asks who brought it, and if a brother is born, he asks: where did this newborn come from? The same applies to everything that attracts his attention, concerns him, and whose occurrence he witnesses after its absence, or whose loss he witnesses after its presence.

However, we do not find the child at the beginning of his awareness asking about the origin of his own existence, nor about the things he has always known to exist from before, such as his clothing, his room, his parents, and so forth. Indeed, if he were asked about such things by his parents, he would be surprised, as if to say: the existence of that is natural, so why the question?!

Yet there is no actual difference between old clothing and toys and what is new to him, for example, nor between the new brother and the child himself or his siblings who are his age or older than him.

The secret in this is nothing other than that he has become familiar with these things and found them ready-made, unlike novel things. He is unable to rise to higher horizons of thinking and compare new things with already existing things from the standpoint of their logical similarity.

When he grows up and his awareness grows, you would see him gradually pose these questions and would not be satisfied with his parents' evasion of answering.

The same is true if the parents were to raise these questions in his mind. You would see that his mind would become alert to thinking about these things and would rise to those horizons; so, the effect of habituation, coexistence, and mental familiarity in extinguishing the indications of things disappears.

3.5.2 Discovering the Reason Behind the Failure of Things to Indicate Toward the Creator

This is the reason that leads to man's failure to perceive the indications of the cosmos and beings toward the existence of the Almighty Maker. For man is born, grows up, and matures in the embrace of this cosmos, its order, and its system, so he is not stirred by the wondrous states it

contains, its distinctive harmony, and its cohesive order. Rather, he considers all this to be natural.

For this reason, you see that he applies the law “every occurrence has a cause” in all matters of private and public life, in scientific research, and in other areas. However, when he comes to discuss the origin of the birth of the cosmos and beings, he may allow that “something can come from nothing,” even though the self-evident reason that grasps this proposition testifies that there is no difference between one thing and another. Occurrence is something that requires a cause, and nothing will come into existence spontaneously without a cause that leads to it. This idea is utterly self-evident, but in all its other applications its indication has not been extinguished by the effect of coexistence and habituation, and for this reason man acknowledges it. Yet when he turns to the matter of the cosmos, beings, and their systems—which are greater than all the occurrences for which he considers the existence of a cause to be self-evident, even if he does not actually perceive a cause for them—he may find acceptable the idea that something can arise from nothing.

This allowance does not arise from a logical exception to the rule “every occurrence has a cause,” such that one might say “except in the original existence of the cosmos, its order, and its laws,” for this exception has no logical meaning. Rather, it arises from a psychological factor, which is the absence of awareness of the indication in this instance, as a result of coexistence and habituation. Thus, man is unable to rise from the material events whose occurrence he witnesses to a general reflection that applies to the matters he experiences.

3.5.3 The Importance of Human Awareness and Contemplation

This matter, namely, the transition from the order and occurrence of the cosmos to the existence of the Creator, depends on the extent of man’s awareness and his ability to elevate his thinking and contemplation to higher horizons, so that he recognises that all things come from a single source, and that there is no meaning in distinguishing between something past and something that is renewed in his

presence, except to the extent that there is a difference between what a child is already familiar with and what is occurs anew before his eyes.

The human being's awareness of this matter requires some awareness, attention, and discernment, and does not require vast knowledge or specialisation in a particular science, even though science is capable of deepening his vision and broadening his understanding.

Clear and sincere vision, conscious contemplation, and simple comparison between things are sufficient to lead man's mind to the existence of the Maker. Our narrative heritage mentions that a Bedouin was once asked about the source of his faith in the Creator, and he said: "Camel droppings indicate the presence of a camel, and footprints indicate the presence of a journey, so do a sky with constellations and an earth with valleys not indicate the All-Knowing, the All-Aware?!"

The transition to the existence of the Maker from the cosmos and its scenes is, in reality, an easy, accessible and simple matter that does not require difficult equations or specialised ideas.

3.5.4 The Relationship Between Awareness and Science

There remains to be discussed what we pointed to previously: that some scientists in the field of nature, such as physics, have not concluded the existence of God from this cosmos, even though others among them have seen the indication of the laws of the cosmos toward the existence of God. So how can it be said that the cosmos indicates to God in a clear manner, when one becomes aware of it?

The answer is that familiarity with the natural sciences does not necessarily produce in the investigator an ability to make things express what lies beyond them.

It is possible for some specialists in the sciences to not possess the awareness that some ordinary people may possess, because specialisation in the sciences represents only familiarity with the rules and laws of the sciences, and the ability to describe and employ them, and does

not necessarily represent awareness about their origin and source.¹³

Yes, familiarity with certain sciences and their practice, such as logic, philosophy, epistemology, and psychology, may be helpful in guiding man—not because the principles of this inquiry are a specialised subject, for it is not specialised, but rather a simple matter, as we observed in the argument of “the indication of order toward the Creator” and the premise that “every occurrence has a cause.” However, this is so that the person investigating can rise in addressing obscure matters and questions posed from a general perspective that dominates the subject, and is able to classify topics, compare them, and discover what may or may not constitute a distinction.

We need awareness of the indications of occurrences, like the awareness a judge needs in discovering the cause of a crime from hearing the descriptions and circumstances of the crime scene. It is actually much simpler than that. However, the very grandeur of the scene and its dominance over the human being is what leads to the subtlety of this indication.

The human being’s awareness may be obstructed by mental and psychological barriers against what that heightened awareness might lead to. Someone who has a strong emotional attachment to a person whose guilt has been established according to reliable and convincing indicators for ordinary, rational people will find that he does not consider those indicators sufficient to prove his guilt, and may see the judgment as hasty and unjust, as we observe in many such cases in the various contexts in our lives and in the society around us. Likewise, someone who insists on denying a matter, when its indicators are described to him, will cast doubt upon them.

Psychological barriers present themselves against acknowledging the Creator for numerous reasons, including: the barriers that arose in Europe from the beginning of the modern scientific renaissance toward the Church, due to their persecution of scientists and their conflict with the findings of science, which they thought contradicted

¹³ For details, see al-Sistani, *al-Qawā'id al-ḥuḍūriyya al-ʿamma li-l-maʿrifat al-insāniyya wa-l-dīniyya*, 98.

religion, and the Greek philosophy that was employed to protect it.¹⁴ This led to the raising of barriers among natural scientists toward religion, and consequently toward proving the existence of the Creator as God, because acknowledging His existence meant acknowledging and recognising the authority of the Church.

When the human being looks at the universe with awareness, he finds it to be an image representing God and His powers. And when he looks at himself with awareness, he feels his sense of belonging to God, and he recognises the evidence and manifestations of this belonging through inner consciousness. Just as a son, if he were to reflect upon himself and his characteristics, would find that they are an extension of his parents and their characteristics, as God says, “We will show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth.”¹⁵

3.5.5 The Divine Message and Human Contemplation

Divine messages came to the human being for the purpose of stimulating his awareness and arousing questions in his mind about the source of this universe, the beings within it, and their laws. Man has been endowed with reason and the capacity for thought, and he is a product of this environment and its laws. He is familiar with it, lives within it, and has been comfortable with it since his existence began. Therefore, in order for him to rise to the question about the origin of this scene, he needs some stimulation and arousal, so that he may think about the matter and contemplate it thoroughly. Then he finds it very clear, as if a veil has been lifted from something he has experienced but not consciously recognised.

For this reason, it is stated in the words of Imam ‘Alī (a.s.) in *Nahj al-balāgha* that God sent the prophets to arouse the hidden treasures of the intellects and to draw the human being’s attention to the indications of the universe and beings pointing to the All-Powerful

¹⁴ For details, see al-Sistani, *al-Anbā’ al-thalāthat al-kubrā, Wujūd al-ilāh*, 34–35.

¹⁵ Q 41:53.

Creator. He said, describing the sending of the prophets, “So He sent among them His messengers and sent to them His prophets in succession, so that they might fulfil the covenant of His primordial nature (*fitra*), remind them of His forgotten blessings, establish the argument against them through conveyance, arouse for them the hidden treasures of the intellects, and show them the signs of His power: a ceiling raised above them, a carpet spread beneath them, means of livelihood that sustain them, appointed terms that bring them to an end, ailments that age them, and events that follow one upon another.”¹⁶

The divine messages that God has sent down through His messengers to the human being aim to assist him in coming to know the horizons of the universe and life, as well as what is hidden from his perception—according to the nature of his existence—of the existence of God, and what follows on from this life in terms of the Hereafter.

For this reason, we find that the verses of the Qur’ān are concerned with arousing the question in human beings’ minds and drawing their attention to things around them, interrogating and stimulating them, in order to perceive their significance and what lies beyond them as we observe, for example, in a remarkable instance of this in the verses of *Sūrat al-Ra’d*—and there are many similar verses in the Qur’ān. They move the human being toward horizons of contemplation and thought, and to interrogate everything around him about what lies beyond it, in a distinctive style both in content and expression that is sufficient to stimulate his mind and his transition to the All-Powerful Maker.

Therefore, it is stated in the Qur’ān that the messengers relied on the fundamental matter of convincing people of the existence of God and on the evidence of the universe, as God says, “Has there not come to you the news of those before you—the people of Noah (a.s.), ‘Ād (a.s.), Thamūd (a.s.), and those after them? None knows them but God. Their messengers came to them with clear proofs, but they put their hands over their mouths and said, ‘Indeed, we disbelieve in that with which you have been sent, and indeed we are, about that to which you

¹⁶ Al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-balāgha*, 1:23–24.

invite us, in disquieting doubt.' Their messengers said, 'Can there be doubt about God, Creator of the heavens and the earth?'"¹⁷

3.6 Question Two: What Bearing Does the Discovery of Natural Causes Have on Acknowledging the Existence of the Creator?¹⁸

Concerning the Effect of Discovering the Natural Causes of Occurrences on the Acknowledgment of the All-Powerful Maker:

Humanity has been able—especially in the modern age—to discover many of the factors influencing events and occurrences whose causes we were previously ignorant of, and which we may have attributed to the direct action of the Creator. But it has now become clear to us that their causes are natural, and man has consequently been able to achieve great industrial accomplishments in exploiting those laws and factors, as we witnessed in the great industrial and agricultural revolution. Does this weaken our faith in the Creator?

The answer: there is no doubt that the universe is built upon a whole system of causes and effects (*asbāb wa-musabbabāt*), for there are active cosmic laws (*sunan kawniyya*) that lead to results appropriate to them in all domains of the universe and life, and this is a reality generally witnessed by humanity before the modern scientific revolution.

Religion has drawn attention to many of these laws and has made the occurrence of expected results dependent upon appropriate causes, to the extent that it has established historical and social laws for general events, similar to the social principle (*qā'ida ijtimā'iyya*) mentioned in some of the noble verses cited earlier,¹⁹ which it is good to recall in the current circumstances we are living through due to their connection to the problems we are experiencing, such as the verse, "Indeed, God will not change the condition of a people until they

¹⁷ Q 14:9–10.

¹⁸ For details on this question and its answer, see al-Sistani, *al-Anbā' al-thalāthat al-Kubrā, Wujūd al-ilāh*, 38.

¹⁹ This was mentioned earlier among the verses of *Sūrat al-Ra'd* cited at the beginning of this section.

change what is in themselves.”²⁰ This principle holds that a societal event will not occur except through a societal cause and not through an individual cause, and for this reason, the existence of a righteous, wise, and sincere individual, whoever he may be, will not lead to a change in societal life and its transformation toward paths of righteousness and wisdom except to the extent that this individual is able to bring about a change in society.

Therefore, there is no doubt about the reality that the universe is built upon a system of causes and effects, and this is one of the self-evident truths (*badīhiyyāt*) of human life, except in special cases where man expects the intervention of a supernatural element (*‘unşur ghaybī*).

However, this does not negate the indication of things toward the existence of God and their embodiment of His power and creativity; because these laws and systems are all created matters (*umūr maj‘ūla*) deposited in things, and everything is fashioned upon them and would not have materialised had they not been arranged according to these laws and the structures established on their basis.

Rather, in these organised and complex laws, there is further confirmed indication of the Creator’s power and creativity, more so than if He were to directly perform every action without the mediation of factors and causes, as scientists who discover the profound physical laws upon which the universe is built find, as mentioned earlier.

The American scientist Francis Collins—the director of the Human Genome Project—expressed the genome as “God’s instruction book,”²¹ and it truly is so. Whatever the laws leading to the formation of this wondrous creation are, this creation is an expression of the brilliant, luminous, and dazzling pages of divine power.

One can contemplate this by supposing at one moment that a certain person is capable of carrying a weight, and supposing at another moment that that person has made a machine capable of carrying this

²⁰ Q 13:11.

²¹ Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (Free Press: 2006), 109.

weight. The first indicates physical power, but the second indicates very great intellectual power.

In summary, there is nothing in the operation of things according to laws and causes that negates their dependence upon the Creator, given that He remains the One who dominates them, directs them to their destination, and is capable of steering their course wherever He wills.

3.7 Question Three: How Does One Acquire This Necessary Awareness, and Then Trust in It?

Question three concerns how man should go about acquiring the awareness necessary and be able to trust in it.

The answer: every person is already equipped with a certain level of awareness, and the stimulation of this awareness and subsequent trust in it is influenced by the mental circumstances that he experiences.

For many people—those who are not accustomed to doubts and obscure details—it may suffice for them to simply contemplate on this cosmic scene and its wonders with clarity. Others may need to have the question raised in their minds about the source of all this precision, complexity, and beauty. When the question is raised before them, they will be guided to the answer by themselves, like many cases in which a teacher helps students by posing a question through which the student then moves to the answer because it stimulates thought. A person may have encountered some questions and doubts, and in addressing them he needs to remove the obstacles that hinder the occurrence of awareness in him. In this case, the person needs to rise through the question and doubt to a higher intellectual horizon and broader knowledge so that he can ensure the effectiveness of awareness in his mind and attain clear insight regarding the subject in question.

4. The Necessity of Research and Investigation²²

One of the mistakes people fall into is that they may sometimes come across some questions and doubts, but they do not follow them up and search for them in the sources where answers to them may be found. Rather, they content themselves with doubt and hesitation, and this is a state for which a person is not excused, meaning that he bears responsibility for the error he falls into, and his error in some of its effects and consequences may be a sin.

It is more appropriate for a person to search for these horizons of life and verify them, for religion has not asked a person to submit by way of mere imitation (*taqlid*) and indoctrination. Rather, it has obligated every person to discover the truth for himself in his experience in life, and the role of parents is only to advise and guide, like their role regarding the medical health system and wise social conduct.

Additionally, it is necessary for a person to use the correct means and accepted principles to verify this important matter.

Every person knows by his innate nature (*fitra*) that there are rules for researching and investigating things, and he observes these rules in other matters that concern him, such as marriage, choosing a profession, and success in his studies. Those dear students who are traveling the path of acquiring knowledge and engaged in university studies know that serious investigation into a subject has its requirements and necessities.

5. Rules for Researching and Investigating the Truth

5.1 The Rule of Giving Attention to Something According to Its Level of Importance

Among the rules of research is to give due attention to something according to its level of importance. The more important something is, the more worthy it is of attention, investigation, and exhaustive exploration of the means of researching it and verification concerning it. We

²² For details on this, see al-Sistani, *Ḍarūrat al-maʿrifat al-dīniyya*, 54 ff.

find in university studies, when preparing masters' and doctoral theses, that the researcher strives earnestly in every direction so that an aspect of the subject becomes clear to him and he is guided to something new. He may travel for this purpose and leave his homeland, family, and relatives when the subject requires it, and he seeks with effort and humility to contact everyone from whom he expects benefit in preparing this research.

The question of the existence of the Creator and His message to humanity through the sending of messengers and prophets, and what the message contains regarding the continuation of human existence after death and his encounter with the consequences of his actions in this life, is a very serious matter. Indeed, it is the most serious of all matters with which he is confronted. There is a great difference between a person who is left to live as he pleases and then perishes, and a person whose level of knowledge of the hidden horizons of life and his efforts in the pursuits of good and virtue or their opposite are recorded, and who must bear the consequences accordingly, requiting good with good and evil with evil.

Accordingly, it is not reasonable for a person to be satisfied, in deciding important matters—such as the existence of the Creator and the continuation of human existence after death—with merely examining some questions and doubts, or examining the statements of some figures and celebrities. Rather, he must be serious in this research, and it would not be surprising for a concern of this kind to keep a person awake at night and to occupy his mind and thinking, until he settles on a firm and reliable foundation, just as he would do in other fundamental concerns in life, such as marriage and study, and even in some other marginal concerns such as certain friendships.

5.2 The Rule of Proportionality Between the Questions One Encounters and the Effort Required to Address Them

Among the rules of research is also that a person's reflection on a subject should be proportionate to the magnitude of the questions he encounters. A person may be able to arrive at the correct position and

sound opinion on a subject in a simple way by means of the tools with which he is equipped, but if he is debated on this position by someone skilled in argumentation, he almost deviates from that position and loses confidence in it—not because of any deficiency or error in his initial understanding, but because he has been confronted with questions for which he does not possess adequate tools to resolve them. This requires further reflection and comparison to crystallise the correct idea and sound opinion. However, other people's confidence in the correct position is not shaken in the face of the arguments presented, due to their strong sense of its correctness and their awareness that scholarly debate can arise even regarding obvious matters.

It is notable with regard to the question of the existence of God that simple questions may be raised as grounds for hesitation and doubt about His existence, even though some research and follow-up—even if only by consulting some experts—would be sufficient to clarify the matter in a way not far from the researcher's understanding. This research does not have scope to present examples of these questions.²³

5.3 The Rule of the Necessity of Giving Attention to Maturing One's Own Position

Among the rules of research also includes a person's attention to maturing his position. A person finds in his practical life—especially those advanced in age—erroneous positions that he adopted in his youth that were not free from haste and lack of maturity. But after the accumulation of experience, he finds the error in them clear from the very evidence that appeared before, but which he did not properly comprehend. However, some people disdain to acknowledge their error and cling to the same position until the end of their lives.

Among the remarkable examples of a person becoming aware of his error and haste in his youth and not disdaining to return thereafter to the truth is the well-known British philosopher Antony Flew (d.

²³ As an example of this, see some of the questions posed by the attendees present on this matter and the answers to them, which are mentioned at the end of the chapter.

2010). Despite his Christian environment, the man cast doubt on the existence of the Creator early on and continued in that for 65 years of his life. He wrote works on the subject and participated in many debates, until he was considered the most prominent philosopher of atheism in the 20th century, and his books were considered among the leading sources in this field. However, he was distinguished by the virtue of being prepared to retract error when it was proven to him. He was not seized by pride in retracting error and submitting to the truth, and he would repeat Socrates' statement, "We must follow the argument wherever the evidence leads us."

In some of his final debates in his life, he gradually became aware of the error of his defences of atheism in the face of certain proofs of the existence of the Creator. The discovery of the human genome—which is an extremely complex and wondrous matter—helped in this.²⁴ He thus submitted to the existence of the Creator and declared this in the year 2004, acknowledging his error. His transition was not based on a faith-based and spiritual experience, for his personal inclination since he was a teenager had been far from appreciating the world of worship, finding it burdensome. Rather, it was based on intellectual conviction. For this reason, he expressed his position as having been "a journey of reason," not "a journey of faith."

What is striking about him is the spirit of truthfulness and submission to the truth. He had been the teacher of contemporary atheists, their elder and their debater, and the entirety of his legacy was in championing atheism. But when he felt his error, he submitted to the truth despite what this entailed in terms of criticism and denunciation of him in scholarly circles generally and philosophical ones particularly, to the point that it was said of him that this position of his was due to what is known as "deathbed fear." But this was a hasty and erroneous statement about him, because he did not submit to the prophethood of the messengers or to life after death, whereby this explanation could apply to him.

²⁴ See Antony Flew, *There Is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind* (HarperOne: 2008), 75 ff.

The intention is not to take his experience and his return to affirming the existence of God as proof and evidence in the matter, for among the principles of searching for truth is that a person should seek the evidence of truth for himself. Truth is not known through men; rather, men are known through truth. Whoever is brought to adopt a certain belief by the words of men will be taken out of it by other men.

Rather, the intention is to draw attention to the fact that immaturity of opinion and haste in it before sufficient awareness is attained can lead to error in sensitive, important, and fateful matters. The aforementioned scholar acknowledged that his doubt about the Creator since his youth was unnecessary haste and delusion²⁵, and for this reason he acknowledged, after his final awakening, the value of proofs whose validity he had previously doubted²⁶. Accordingly, it is not those proofs that differed, but the awareness that resulted from examining certain complexities of life, such as the human genome system, did differ.

5.4 The Principle of Detachment from One's Desires and Inclinations in the Search for Truth²⁷

Among the principles of research also includes a person's detachment from desires and inclinations that cause him to be biased toward one direction over another. For we find in our lives—from family and domestic life to social and political life—examples of a person being influenced by desires, inclinations, emotions, and initial predispositions in the positions he adopts. Therefore, when a person searches for

²⁵ He said, "I have said in some of my later atheist writings that I reached the conclusion about the nonexistence of God much too quickly, much too easily, and for what later seemed to me the wrong reasons." (Flew, *There Is a God*, 13).

²⁶ He said, "My departure from atheism was not occasioned by any new phenomenon or argument ... This was a consequence of my continuing assessment of the evidence of nature" (ibid., 89).

²⁷ For details on this principle, see al-Sistani, *al-Qawā'id al-ḥiṭriyya al-ʿamma li-l-ma'rifat al-insāniyya wa-l-dīniyya, al-Qā'ida al-tāsi'a*, 227 ff.

truth, it is necessary that he be certain on this point, because he bears responsibility for the conclusions he reaches, and this is a responsibility that becomes heavier and greater when the matter concerns important and serious affairs.

6. God's Manifestation in All Beings Is Clear

The conclusion we reach is that the existence of God is something manifested in the universe and all beings, and in the human being and all his capacities, potentials, and possibilities. The entire universe, from the smallest atom in it to the largest galaxy, is an extremely organised, ordered, and coordinated map, and in this it represents the existence of God just as the personality of a scholar is represented in his book, the personality of an artist in his artistic works, and the personality of a painter in his paintings and the pictures he has drawn. This is a truth that should not be disputed.

This concerns the objective aspect of the subject.

7. My Personal Insight into the Matter of Certainty in the Existence of God

I was guided to the existence of God in the first stage through the features of the universe and beings, with guidance from the Qur'ān. The picture of the cosmic scene and the diverse beings within it is a brilliant and astonishing picture, with its magnificence and beauty, for it speaks of an intellect and design behind it without doubt.

The Qur'ān was more than magnificent in stimulating my thought to contemplate the horizons of the sky and the scenes of the earth, so much so that I felt as if I were soaring high when I turned to thinking about those vast, great horizons. When observing them by looking at the sky in the brightness of day and in the depths of night, or by viewing through modern devices the depths of the universe, galaxies, seas, the diversity of living beings, and beautiful scenes such as waterfalls, mountains, valleys, and forests, this feeling increases in me when I recite the Qur'ān with reflection, because of the magnificence and beauty of the Qur'ān's language. For it expresses the cosmic scene from

a high horizon and makes the cosmic scenes speak in an extremely intelligent and subtle manner, selecting wonderful words in their tone that harmonises with the direction and purpose of the speech, along with the pleasant rhythm and harmonious endings that its sentences contain.

As it says in *Sūrat Qāf*, “Have they not looked at the sky above them—how We structured it and adorned it, and [how] it has no rifts? And the earth—We spread it out and cast therein firmly set mountains and made grow therein [something] of every beautiful kind, as an insight (*tabṣira*) and a reminder (*dhikrā*) for every servant who turns back [to God]. And We have sent down from the sky blessed water and made grow thereby gardens and grain from the harvest, and lofty palm trees, with arranged clusters, as provision for the servants. And We have brought to life thereby a dead land. Thus is the resurrection.”²⁸ And it says in *Sūrat al-Ghāshiyā*, “Then do they not look at the camels—how they are created? And at the sky—how it is raised? And at the mountains—how they are erected? And at the earth—how it is spread out? So remind, [O Muhammad]; you are only a reminder.”²⁹

The Qur’ānic discourse is a mature discourse of conscience, for it addresses the human intellect and stirs it in a way that fills the conscience, brings about tranquillity, and produces deep conviction.

The existence of God was the fitting explanation for this universe in its precision, beauty, and details, for it solves the puzzle that appears to anyone who contemplates the source of all this order, magnificence, and beauty.

When studying the related sciences, my knowledge of cosmic scenes that are seen through precise instruments expanded, whether concerning celestial beings—the large heavenly bodies and great galaxies whose size, grandeur, and orderly arrangement perplex the mind—or terrestrial beings, including the types of animals I had not directly observed due to their distribution across this earth, or their existence in water in the depths of the sea. Their diversity,

²⁸ Q 88:17–21.

²⁹ Q 50:6–11.

characteristics, colours, and management of their interests were extremely remarkable. Or concerning the components of a single being, such as atoms and their constituents, the elements formed from them, and the cell that forms the living being, with the complexity and beauty of its structure.

Or concerning the human soul, its capacities, and its characteristics among animals—all those attractive scenes and information made available through modern capabilities are bright, attractive images representing a wise and creative God without doubt.

Even greater than that is what modern sciences have revealed of cosmic laws organised according to mathematical equations and specific numbers with a degree of precision and perfection in the sciences of physics, chemistry, biology, and others. A kind of beauty and harmony is represented in them, even in those equations, despite the obscurity of many of them.

This discovery leaves no room for doubt about the dominance of a wise and creative Creator over this universe.

For this reason, science has become closer than ever before to acknowledging God from a purely scientific standpoint and not from a spiritual or religious standpoint. Indeed, it has become common among natural scientists, especially physicists, to prove the existence of God on the basis of the discovered laws of physics upon which the universe is built, even though they have not acknowledged religion (in the sense of the existence of a message from God to humanity)—which is expressed as the deistic approach (*al-ittijāh al-rubūbī*), meaning acknowledgment of the existence of God alone without the prophetic messages.

For this reason, I am astonished by the inclination of some young people in our societies to hesitate about the existence of God, raising simple questions whose answers are not at all obscure. Even more astonishing than that is the categorical denial of God's existence, even though there is no scientific basis for such a definitive judgment. From the standpoint of my experience in this life, I advise them to exercise greater caution in this matter and to beware of being influenced in

denying such a clear and evident matter by non-objective factors³⁰ that would not excuse a person according to the standards of scientific inquiry—such as what occurs in the name of God or in the name of religion.

I have observed that the wave of atheism has become active in recent eras during two periods, influenced by this factor:

The first: in Europe at the beginning of the modern scientific renaissance, because the Church's harsh treatment of the movement for renewal in science and the persecution of scientists due to their theories contradicting the Bible and its interpretations based on Greek sciences led to a kind of estrangement between men of science and men of religion in the West, and this remains perceptible even in the present era.

The second: in the recent period in Islamic countries and other parts of the world resulting from the barbaric and erroneous actions that have been perpetrated by some who speak in the name of God or belong to a religion. This has stirred in the souls of some people a denial of the truth of religion in an absolute sense, subsequently escalating to denying God.

I have examined what the sceptics and deniers of God's existence have raised, whether what was presented in the past in theology (*'ilm al-kalām*) and philosophy or what has been presented recently by some natural scientists. I have observed that these objections appear contrived and will not stand before the objective and intuitive perception of how the magnificence of the universe in all its apparent and hidden details indicates to the existence of God.

This has arisen from one of two matters:

The first: transgressing the general intuitive principles of human knowledge by exaggerating skepticism and denying self-evident intuitive truths (*badīhiyyāt wijdāniyya*), such as the statement: "It is

³⁰ For details on the non-objective factors that can lead to error regarding the existence of God and the truth of religion, see the conclusion of *al-Qawā'id al-fitriyya al-'amma*, 371 ff.

possible for something to occur without a cause.”³¹

The second: misusing information emerging from the natural sciences, which has led to fabricating a false opposition between science and proving the existence of God.³²

The magnificence and splendour of the universe is truly immense and astonishing, and it calls for reverence and glorification of this Almighty God, according to human nature’s admiration for perfection and its symbols, just as we find appreciation for those distinguished in science, invention, sports, and others.

Here a question occurs to every person’s mind: is there a way for the human being to reach this God, and is this God concerned with the human being—does He listen to the human being when he addresses Him, or does He turn away from him? Is this God merely a creator and maker, or does He love good and hate evil? Does He observe ethical values, or does He act as He wills from the standpoint of His absolute dominion over the universe and all beings?

Religion has indeed affirmed these attributes for God: the human being has a way to Him and He is concerned with him, loves good, and observes virtuous values.

I find all of this close at hand in my contemplations of myself from an intuitive and innate standpoint.

It is plausible that this God has ethical values that He observes, as has been related about Him in religion—that He adheres to truthfulness, fulfilment of promises, justice, and all other virtuous meanings. This is because He is a perceiving and choosing being, as indicated by His creation of the universe, and it is part of the perfection of any such being to adhere to virtuous meanings, whether in his own actions or in his dealings with other rational beings, as we find in the human being.

³¹ I have described this in *al-Qawā'id al-ḥaqīqiyya al-ʿamma li-l-maʿrifat al-insāniyya wa-l-dīniyya*, and an explanation of the example of denying the principle of “the need of the originated (*ḥādīth*) to have a cause” will come in the questions section.

³² I have addressed this in *al-Anbā' al-thalāthat al-kubrā, Wujūd al-ilāh*.

Accordingly, it is expected that God loves good and its doer, and hates evil and its perpetrator, as stated in religion, because love of good and engagement with it is an ethical value, just as hatred of evil is also an ethical value.

I expect and also hope that this God is concerned with the human being, that He communicates with him and does not disdain addressing him and hearing his intimate supplications (*munājāt*); because the human being is also a rational, choosing being with an ethical conscience, and it is in the nature of any two such beings, when one becomes aware of the other, to be concerned with him. If God has created this rational, perceiving human being, then it is expected from His wisdom that He would care for him in whatever manner He deems appropriate.

This is what I consider probable, expect, and hope for regarding this God.

But is this probability certain, this expectation true, and this hope realised? That is what the investigation into the validity of religion addresses. The focus of our present investigation has been the fundamental existence of God, but I wanted to point out that establishing the existence of a perceiving, omnipotent God paves the way, in some manner, for understanding His attributes in religion.

I conclude this investigation with other verses from the Qurʾān that draw the human being's attention to the magnificent cosmic phenomena that testify to the existence of a creative originator of the universe.

The Almighty says, "So glory be to God when you reach the evening and when you reach the morning. And to Him is all praise in the heavens and the earth, and in the late afternoon and when you reach midday. He brings forth the living from the dead and brings forth the dead from the living, and He revives the earth after its death. Thus, you will be brought forth. And of His signs is that He created you from dust; then suddenly you are human beings dispersing throughout the earth. And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquillity in them; and He placed between you affection and mercy. Indeed, in that are signs for a people who give thought. And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the

diversity of your languages and your colours. Indeed, in that are signs for those of knowledge. And of His signs is your sleep by night and day and your seeking of His bounty. Indeed, in that are signs for a people who listen. And of His signs is that He shows you the lightning causing fear and aspiration, and He sends down rain from the sky by which He brings to life the earth after its lifelessness. Indeed, in that are signs for a people who use reason.”³³

8. Questions and Answers

8.1 “Who Created the Creator?”

First question: there is a well-known objection to discovering the existence of God through the universe, which is that this discovery is based on the principle that everything has a creator. The question then arises: who created the creator of the universe, since He too is a thing and must therefore have a creator as well? Then his creator is also a thing, and so on, so matters proceed infinitely, and this is obviously wrong. Accordingly, one must acknowledge something that has no creator, so let it be this universe itself in its primordial form.

The answer: this objection mentioned is mistaken, for the argument for the existence of God is not based on the proposition that “everything,” without qualification, has a creator. Rather, there was a qualification of “thing” (*shay*) in this proposition by one of three adjectives—according to the three proofs presented earlier in the original section:

First: the adjective “ordered” (*munazzam*), so the proposition is “everything ordered has an intelligent cause.”

Second: the adjective “changing” (*mutaghayyir*), so the proposition is “everything changing has a cause.”

Third: the adjective “originated” (*ḥādith*), so the proposition is “everything originated has a cause.”

If we adopt the latter two adjectives, there is no place for the mentioned objection at all, because according to the second proof we will

³³ Q 30: 17–24.

discover from the changing universe a God who is “unchanging” (*ghayr mutaghayyir*) for the universe, so He does not move from one state to another, as stated in many religious texts, especially in the words of Imam ‘Alī (a.s.) in *Nahj al-balāgha*.

And the unchanging God is not like the changing universe, naturally, so His existence does not depend on something to bring Him into existence.

And according to the third proof, we will discover for the originated universe a God who is not originated and is eternal (*qadīm*), so He thereby has no need for a cause.

As for the first proof, which establishes the existence of God through the order of the universe, it may appear at first glance that the aforementioned objection applies to it, because we want to discover from this ordered universe a distinguished, exceptional, and unique being who has no cause—but rather is eternal—to be the maker of this ordered universe. And if it is permissible for there to be a distinct thing without a cause, then let it be this universe itself. And if that is not permissible, then the existence of a distinct God does not settle the matter, because this God also needs a distinct cause since He is distinct, and likewise His distinct cause needs another distinct cause, and this continues without end.

The answer to this is that distinction (*tamyīz*) is of two types:

First: the existence of an ordered arrangement in non-intelligent beings without an intelligent cause. This is something that reason rejects and sees that order, harmony, and systematisation are the result of intellect, knowledge, and planning. If a computer were to fall from the sky, reason would see that there is an intelligent being in the sky, just as there is a human being on earth.

And whoever examines the details of the cosmic scene knows that this universe is more complex than a computer falling from the sky many times over, but the cosmic scene is vast, distributed, and familiar, and a person needs more awareness and attention to understand and assemble it.

Second: the existence of an intelligent being with distinct characteristics and capabilities, without being brought into existence by

another intelligent being. This is something that human reason does not reject at all, because this intelligent being is inevitably the terminus of the manifestations of intellect and knowledge that we find in the universe. So how can reason judge that there is no intelligent being except behind another intelligent being?

Thus, it becomes clear that the mentioned objection is mistaken and does not refute any of the three proofs for the existence of God, which are the proof from order, the proof from change, and the proof from origination.

8.2 “Is It Possible for the Universe to Come into Existence from Nothing?”

The second question: Stephen Hawking says that it is possible to explain the existence of the universe by means of the Big Bang, and there is no need for the existence of a creator of the universe. What is your comment on this?

The answer: what is known about the Big Bang theory is that it represents the beginning of the universe, and if this is correct, then the question arises about who brought this universe into existence from the Big Bang, because every originated thing needs a cause, and this is self-evident, as has been explained earlier. So, this originated universe must have a cause.

In addition to this, the explosion occurred in a primordial dense mass that existed before the explosion, naturally, and there is no internal factor to be assumed in that mass that would necessitate the occurrence of the explosion in it. So, it must have occurred by an external factor, and that is none other than God.

And what may be reported from Hawking is not correct—that we do not know how the universe came into existence, so perhaps it came into existence from nothing, and perhaps science in the future will be able to explain that.

The reason this statement is incorrect is that the proposition: “the

impossibility of something occurring without a cause”³⁴ is a self-evident rational proposition, and there is no room for science to intervene in it, neither now nor in the future. There is a difference between the domain in which science operates—and in which it can lead to new discoveries—and the domain governed by fixed principles that determine what is possible and what is impossible.

The field of specialisation of the physicist mentioned is physics, not philosophy, and in this case the philosophical solutions he proposes will not necessarily be mature, as has been explained earlier.³⁵

³⁴ For details on this, see al-Sistani, *al-Qawā'id al-‘amma wa-l-ḥiṭriyya li-l-ma'rifat al-insāniyya wa-l-dīniyya, al-Qā'idat al-rābi'a*, 109.

³⁵ Another statement has been attributed to Hawking, which is: that it is possible for the matter of the universe to be eternal but to be gathered together, then to explode, then to contract after the explosion due to the exhaustion of the energy arising from the explosion that separates its parts, so it returns to a condensed mass, then explodes again and returns ... and so on in an endless series. However, the following should be noted regarding this: (1) This amount does not negate the indication of the universe, with its order and magnificence, of its origination—which is the first proof mentioned above for the universe's indication of the Creator—because the universe, even if at the beginning—according to the mentioned hypothesis—there was a mass that exploded and beings came into existence through evolution, that mass was naturally not an ordinary thing, but rather possessed exceptional and distinctive potentials, storing within it the factors for a precise and fruitful explosion that could lead to this magnificent universe and distinctive beings. Accordingly, that mass in itself would be magnificent, complex, and precise, and thus it is evidence for the existence of an intelligent being who brought it into existence. (2) This amount does not make the universe independent of a cause, for the reason mentioned earlier in the second proof, namely that every changing thing needs a cause behind it, no matter how many links of change there are in it. This is because: any series composed of multiple things—some of which are causes for others—terminates in a definite beginning, and it is inconceivable that it should have no beginning at all, because we ask about this series as a whole: does it have a cause or not? If it is said that it has no cause, this would contradict the fact that every

8.3 “To What Extent Are Negative Phenomena in the Universe, Such as Diseases, Compatible with Its Origination from a Purposeful Being?”³⁶

The third question: if the universe has a knowing and powerful maker, then there should not be any deficiencies or negative aspects in the universe and beings, yet we witness events that appear negative, such as earthquakes, floods, volcanic eruptions, and diseases that afflict living beings. Are these events compatible with the existence of a knowing and powerful maker of the universe?³⁷

The answer: it is perhaps possible that the Creator could have

link in its chain is caused by a link preceding it, because when several things are gathered together, each one of which is caused, the totality is naturally caused, and there is no meaning to the totality of caused things being completely independent of a cause. (3) The mentioned hypothesis may be obscure and far-fetched from a physical perspective in more than one respect, including the fact that: according to this hypothesis, the energy emitted from the Big Bang is what maintains the formation of multiple atoms and the multiplicity of their parts. If that energy were to end, the nucleus within the atom would unite with the electrons due to the constant gravitational attraction of everybody, and then the atoms would stick to one another to return to a condensed mass. Once again, this is far-fetched because the general gravitational force of a body is a weak factor, as has been established, so its influence to the described level is unlikely. From these discussions, it becomes clear that the mentioned proposition cannot refute the first proof for the universe’s indication of the Creator, which is based on the order of the universe, nor the second proof based on the change in the universe. Rather, it might be expected to refute the third proof based on the origination of the universe, by claiming that there is no evidence for its origination through the universe’s emergence from the Big Bang, given the possibility of hypothesising the repetition of the explosion and return to the original mass ad infinitum. However, this expectation is also weak, because the hypothesis is very weak.

³⁶ For details on this question and its answer, see al-Sistani, *al-Anbā’ al-thalāthat al-kubrā, Khaṣā’iṣ al-ilāh*, 220 ff.

³⁷ [Translator’s note:] This is also known as “The Problem of Evil.”

created living beings—such as plants, animals, and humans—according to an alternative system that does not expose them to disease, withering, deficiency, stubbornness, and hardship. However, it is possible that there are other considerations that make it preferable to create them according to a system in which these beings are susceptible to such things, due to what this system leads to in terms of the evolution of beings, the succession of generations, the sufficiency of resources to sustain these beings, the discovery of the benefits and properties of things, the testing of human beings, or other matters.

The question about why God created human beings—for example—in this manner rather than another is a matter that cannot lead us to a definitive conclusion.

To clarify this: there should be no doubt that this universe has a Creator characterised by wisdom, rationality, knowledge, planning, creativity, and great power, as manifested in the magnificence and complexity of beings, and this is a clear and self-evident matter.

The essence of this meaning cannot be challenged by questions or suggestions that occur to the human mind for improving creation, since human beings do not comprehend the potentialities of things, the requirements of the cosmic order, and the considerations that the Creator took into account in bringing them into existence.

The existence of the Creator and His possession of attributes such as those we have mentioned is a great self-evident truth in light of what is manifested in creation through countless aspects of order, complexity, and creativity. Whatever questions may arise about the wisdom in this or that matter, they cannot negate that perceptible power in bringing creation into existence. If we observe a building characterised by distinctive engineering in its fundamental structure and details, but questions occur to us about the reason for some of its arrangements and suggestions for improving some of its features, does this negate that the designer of this building is a capable and skilled engineer? No, rather what we might expect upon reflection is that what occurs to us and comes to our minds has not escaped him, but that he took into account considerations that we are not in a position to know.

It is necessary for a person, when reflecting on the matter of God Almighty, His attributes, and His actions, to be aware that there are two areas in this subject:

1. An area characterised by clarity, manifestness, and luminosity, which is the very existence of God and His great knowledge, power, and creativity, which are manifested concretely in the universe and beings, just as the knowledge of a scholar is manifested in his book and writings, the art of an artist is manifested in his drawings and sculptures, and the knowledge of an engineer is manifested in the buildings he has designed.

2. An area characterised by obscurity and ambiguity, such as the essence of His being, His attributes, and some of the considerations taken into account in some of His actions and creatures.

The existence of this area in the matter of God is natural and expected given the gap between His knowledge and comprehension and the level of human knowledge and understanding. Such a difference in level naturally results in the existence of an obscure and ambiguous area, and it is neither logical nor reasonable to challenge the luminous, clear, bright, and evident aspects by raising questions about the obscure and ambiguous aspects.

A person's raising of questions about areas of knowledge for which he does not possess the cognitive tools to delve into them, such as matters related to non-material realms, does not lead to the discovery of something unknown, nor will it result in challenging known and clear matters, let alone negating them.

Just as we see, for example, that when a child asks about matters beyond his comprehension, he cannot, merely by raising the question, arrive at the discovery of something new that contradicts his clear perceptions.

This is a general and clear logical principle in all fields of life.

Among the logical matters in human knowledge is the rule of judging obscure and ambiguous matters by clear and evident matters, meaning that we allow for the possibility of a solution in areas of obscurity that accords with what is represented in those clear matters, and the reverse is not valid—that we raise doubt about clear matters

on account of obscurity in other matters.

This principle is a general and wise foundation required by logic and confirmed by practice and experience, and it has easy applications in our public and private lives. When someone knows a friend who possesses good qualities and has been confident of him over a long period, and then a situation arises that appears to suggest otherwise, it is rational to assume for this single ambiguous situation a solution, even if this solution does not immediately occur to his mind. He holds fast to what he knows of his virtuous character and says: perhaps there is a solution for it.

It is essential that a person does not confuse two states: the state of something obscure and the state of something clear in affirming or negating something. Obscure things cannot be considered evidence or indicators of something specific, unlike things that contain a clear indicator in a particular direction. It is erroneous reasoning to seek to use something obscure as evidence in a particular direction.

There is no doubt that there exist phenomena in the universe that are obscure regarding the emergence of the universe from a directing intellect, but we cannot consider those phenomena as indicators pointing to the non-emergence of the universe from intellect and design, given the great planning, order, creativity, and beauty it contains, which point to a being beyond matter who brought that into existence.

With this principle we conclude the discussion in this meeting, contenting ourselves with the questions that have been presented. We ask God to grant us success in this journey and not to take us from this life until He is pleased with our progress and conduct, for He is the Sustainer of the universe and all beings in their past, present, and future.

Chapter Three

Understanding Religion

1. Introduction: Why Should We Understand Religion?

Gaining insight into the matter of religion and determining the appropriate stance toward it is necessary for each one of us, because religion informs human beings about their destiny, their ultimate end, and the consequences of their actions and behaviours—matters we must naturally verify for ourselves. It also determines the type of education and upbringing that we should practice in the family and according to which we should interact with society at large.

Gaining insight into any proposition in order to adopt it and make a decision about it is achieved through two stages:

The first stage: becoming acquainted with the essence of the proposition to ensure that it is reasonable and does not contradict the self-evident truths of reason and human conscience.

The second stage: verifying that there is sufficient proof for the proposition through objective indicators that demonstrate its truth and veracity.

Therefore, gaining insight into the matter of religion to determine the correctness of its vision occurs through:

1. Becoming acquainted with the religious proposition to ensure that its content—which is the divine message—including the tidings and directions it contains, is something reasonable according to what the human soul has been equipped with in terms of sound reason (*al-'aql al-salīm*) and moral conscience.

2. Verifying that proof exists for the correctness of attributing this content to God in a message issued by Him to humanity, which He conveyed through certain individuals whom He chose for this purpose.

In reality, comprehensive and careful reflection on the matter of religion does lead to conviction and confidence in religion, as I have

observed in my personal experience with religion,¹ because religion is nothing but a set of principles, some of which are clear and self-evident, while others appear fitting and appropriate through mature human understanding, such that when proof is established for them, they naturally lead to acceptance. Moreover, the proof of the truth and veracity of religion is established in a convincing manner through rational and mature tools, provided that a person takes care to verify them in an appropriate and suitable manner.

However, in this chapter we will limit ourselves to addressing the first matter, which is “knowledge of religion,” in order to examine the reasonableness of the religious proposition concerning existence, God, and the human being.² We hope to be granted success in discussing the second matter, which is “the truth and veracity of religion” in another section.

2. The Qur’ān’s Definition of Religion

The Qur’ān contains a general definition of religion in numerous verses that indicate that religion consists of two dimensions:

1. A cognitive dimension that human beings should be informed about, which is the existence of God, His oneness, and His attributes, then His message to humanity and the fact that the human being’s fate depends on his actions, for which he will be recompensed in another existence.

2. A legislative dimension that represents the correct conduct that one should follow, which is deposited within the human being and represents his moral conscience, guiding him to righteous deeds and virtuous values such as justice, benevolence, truthfulness, and their like. Let us see examples of this in some Qur’ānic verses. God says:

Indeed, those who have believed, and those who are Jews, and the Sabians, and the Christians—whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does righteous deeds, there shall be no fear

¹ See Chapter One; al-Sistani, *al-Anbā’ al-thalāthat al-kubrā*, 523 ff.

² For details on this, see al-Sistani, *Ḥaqīqat al-dīn*.

upon them, nor shall they grieve.³

He says, “But righteousness is [in] one who believes in God, the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets, and gives wealth, despite his love for it, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveller, those who ask, and for freeing slaves, and establishes prayer and gives alms, and those who fulfil their promise when they promise, and those who are patient in poverty and hardship and during battle. Those are the ones who have been true, and it is those who are the righteous.”⁴

God says, “They believe in God and the Last Day, and they enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, and they hasten to good deeds. And those are among the righteous.”⁵

Before defining religion and explaining the visions it presents, we must introduce the methodology we will adopt to understand religion and clarify its reality. We will rely on two matters:

1. Understanding religion in a correct and precise manner.
2. Defining religion through Islam.

3. Understanding Religion Correctly

This is because it is logically necessary, before passing judgment on something, to understand it correctly. Correct understanding of an idea represents half of objective research about it, or even most of it at times, just as incorrect understanding of it represents a fundamental obstacle to objective research about it. How often does it occur that a person passes an incorrect judgment on an idea or statement due to not comprehending and understanding it properly, and this is something that occurs in ordinary discussions even outside of scholarly research. Each of us may have numerous experiences of others judging an idea or statement of ours without comprehending and understanding it properly, or experiences of our own judgment on others’

³ Q 5:69.

⁴ Q 2:177.

⁵ Q 3:114.

statements whose error only becomes clear to us after understanding them properly. The well-known proverb applies to such cases: “He heard poorly, so he answered poorly.”

Therefore, it is necessary that we understand the religion whose veracity we wish to verify⁶ closely, and from several perspectives, some of which we mention below:

1. That we distinguish between this religion and all other things that might be called “religion,” from beliefs and ideas whose incorrectness we may clarify in many cases. The sharing of the name should not be a cause of confusion for us in our research, for the term “science” can be applied both to science based on logical methodology and objective tools and to what is known as “pseudoscience,” which resembles science in form but is in reality mere claims that are either false or superstitious.

2. That we distinguish between the fundamentals, constants and basic orientations of religion, and its changeable elements, or those that can potentially undergo change depending on differences in time and place, whether evidence for this change has actually been established or not.

3. That we distinguish precisely between the content and elements of religion and the phenomena mixed in with religion from prevailing customs and traditions, for not every custom and tradition common among the people of a religion is necessarily part of that religion according to a methodical process of deduction. Rather, many of them are local customs that gradually developed among peoples, and some of them arose to protect the teachings of religion in the social context of the people but were not originally part of it, and some of them are considered applications of the teachings of religion according to the presumed estimation of the people of a particular custom, and all of that cannot properly be considered to be part of religion in the precise sense.

4. That we distinguish between what is certainly a part of religion and the different juristic opinions (*ijtihādāt*) formed when deriving

⁶ For details on this, see al-Sistani, *Ḥaqīqat al-dīn*.

religion in theoretical matters, for juristic matters may serve as proof for some or all jurists of the law (*fuqahā' al-sharī'a*), but they are only juristic opinions in determining the viewpoint of religion, and cannot properly be considered to be the religion itself, so that religion is evaluated by means of them, and its truth or lack thereof is measured by them.

Rather, if the error of something from those juristic opinions is proven from a rational perspective after sufficient verification, that in itself would negate the correctness of that juristic opinion from the legal perspective after establishing the principle of rationality clearly in religion, as will be explained later.

4. Defining Religion Through Islam

The first thing that comes to the researcher's mind when discussing the veracity and correctness of religion is that there are many religions, so should a person research all of them—which would be a difficult matter—or some of them specifically; and which ones should a person choose? And why give preference to some over others?

The reality is that religion is applied in a general sense to the collection of beliefs and teachings related to the deity.

Religions are divided into two categories: human religions and divine religions.

Divine religions are religions built upon the existence of a message from the deity through an elite group of human individuals known as messengers, containing doctrinal and behavioural teachings for humanity.

These religions usually stand upon three important announcements:

1. The existence of the deity.
2. The deity's care for humanity, represented in that very message.
3. The existence of a spiritual dimension for humanity that remains after death to receive the recompense of its deeds.

These religions generally rely on the message and its proofs to

establish the veracity of the religion, and they hold that this announced message accompanied by clear evidence is the reliable means of connection between humanity and the deity, chosen by the deity.

As for human religions, these are religions that do not claim the existence of an announced message from the deity or deities but rather build upon establishing the deity and connecting with it through inherited and accumulated human ideas and spiritual experiences.

These religions are usually attributed to wise men who have had spiritual experiences that, in their conception, resulted in divine manifestations, and a group of people followed them, so their teachings became a followed religion. These religions generally adopt the three aforementioned principles in some manner, for in addition to acknowledging the deity, they establish the deity's care for humanity and the existence of a spiritual dimension for humanity that remains after death.

In reality, it is generally difficult for a person to trust a religion built upon purely human experiences for discovering an educational and behavioural methodology in dealing with the deity, given the vast capacity of the human soul for imaginings and illusions, as one observes through examining the various beliefs built upon human experiences and the clear excesses found in them.

Therefore, what the divine religions are built upon—the importance of the existence of a divine message that addresses all people and establishes clear evidence for them through convincing objective means—is a reasonable and appropriate principle.

Thus, all human religions fall outside the sphere of concern.

As for the divine religions that involve conveying a message from God to creation, the important ones are the three Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These are monotheistic religions, meaning they affirm the oneness of the deity in principle and are free from the mythical multiplicity of deities assumed in other religions.

It is observed that these religions share common doctrinal teachings, such as the existence of God and the hereafter, and they share a common history of religion and the messengers whom God sent to His

servants. They also share fundamental behavioural teachings, whether related to the worship of the deity—such as prayer, fasting, spiritual retreat (*i'tikāf*), and pilgrimage (*hajj*), despite differences in their specifics—or related to human rights in terms of generally adopting virtuous principles such as justice, benevolence, truthfulness, chastity, public welfare, and so forth, along with a set of detailed legislations that are considered applications of these principles.⁷

This close commonality among these religions in their teachings is evident through comparative research between them, both among themselves as well as between them and other religions.

What is striking about these religions is that the later one explicitly acknowledges the earlier one, its teachings, and its scripture. Jesus Christ, son of Mary (a.s.), according to the Gospel, acknowledges Moses and all the prophets of the Children of Israel (a.s.) after him, and acknowledges the Torah and the books of the prophets that it contains, and affirms all the teachings of the Torah, though he came to abrogate some of what had been forbidden to the Children of Israel previously.

Similarly, Islam acknowledges both Judaism and Christianity, as well as both the Torah and the Gospel—except for the distortions that occurred in them—and emphasises complete unity with them in doctrinal teachings, as well as in the fundamentals of the behavioural legislative teachings.

⁷ Yes, distortion has occurred in some sects of these religions as a result of their scriptures not being historically preserved in their original form, such as exaggeration (*ghuluww*) regarding some prophets and successors, similar to the exaggeration in the prevalent sect of the religion of Christ through the belief in the divinity of Christ and his association with God in prayer—which is an obligation shared among religions—by praising and glorifying Christ alongside God Almighty in it, which is a serious and generally unprecedented phenomenon in the history of religious legislation represented in the Torah, which Christianity acknowledges. Yes, some Jews would say that Ezra is the son of God, but this is not represented in the Torah, and it may have been an aberrant sect.

Consequently, it is valid to say that if all these religions are true, we are not actually dealing with multiple religions, but rather with multiple messages, because the sending of a new message from the deity does not mean the emergence of a new religion as long as this message affirms the previous messengers and earlier messages, and the fundamentals of their teachings. Therefore, we find that Christianity does not consider itself a religion different from the religion of Moses and the other prophets of the Children of Israel, but rather a continuation of Judaism. Similarly, Islam emphasises the unity of religion in all messages, because all of them, by virtue of being from the same deity, are based on submission to the message that comes from the deity, and the messages coming from the deity naturally do not differ in the fundamentals of their teachings, as stated in the Qurʾān.

God says, “Indeed, the religion in the sight of God is Islam, and those who were given the Scripture did not differ except after knowledge had come to them—out of jealous animosity between themselves.”⁸ And He says, “The Messenger has believed in what was revealed to him from his Lord, and [so have] the believers. All of them have believed in God and His angels and His books and His messengers, [saying], ‘We make no distinction between any of His messengers.’”⁹ And God says, “Say, ‘We have believed in God and in what was revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Descendants, and in what was given to Moses and Jesus and to the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and we are Muslims [submitting] to Him.’”¹⁰

Accordingly, the establishment of Islam means that there is one divine religion, with Islam representing the final message in it, just as its messenger, the Messenger of God, represents the final messenger in the chain of prophets and messengers from the deity, mentioned in the religious history in the Torah and the Gospel.

Based on this, the religion of Islam can represent the

⁸ Q 3:19.

⁹ Q 2:285.

¹⁰ Q 2:136.

comprehensive divine religion.

It is, thus, the worthiest of these three religions or messages to represent this one religion, and there is no avoiding research into it for anyone who wishes to investigate the truth regarding the divine religion.¹¹

¹¹ This is for several reasons. (1) This religion is the last of the religions or the three messages, so investigating any other religion before it does not suffice in place of investigating it, because if we investigate a religion that preceded it and do not establish its truth with certainty, this does not necessitate the untruthfulness of the religion of Islam. However, if we are certain of the truth of the previous religion, this does not make us independent of verifying the truth of the religion of Islam, because the truth of the religion of Islam remains a possibility, and if it is true, it must be acknowledged. This is, firstly, because it is a divine message encompassing all humanity, and is not specific to a particular people. It, therefore, concerns every rational human being on the face of the earth, and it is not proper for a person to neglect a message directed from the deity to humanity. Secondly, humanity cannot dispense with being illuminated by this message regarding the established teachings of religion—in which religions should not differ—because it will correct for humanity any distortion or misunderstanding that may have occurred in previous religions, such as the belief in the distinction of the Children of Israel in the religion of Judaism, and the divinity of Christ in Christianity. Thirdly, it is necessary to adopt the new teachings in Islam in matters where the teachings of messengers may legitimately differ, such as legislation that is subject to change, development, and completion. (2) The religion of Islam is the most reliable of the Abrahamic religions from a historical standpoint, for two reasons. The first: its book, the Qurʾān, is clearly preserved according to historical evidence, meaning that there is no doubt among observers—Muslims and others—in the history of Islam that the Qurʾān that exists and has been preserved since the compilation of the codices (*maṣāḥif*) by Uthman in the year 25 after the Prophetic migration—that is, only 15 years after the death of the Prophet (s.a.w.)—is exactly what was known, circulated, and recited in the time of the Prophet, without alteration. This distinction cannot be established for any other book such as the Torah and the Gospel, for there is no continuous

historical evidence that they are exactly what was known in the time of Moses and Jesus, and this is clear from examining the historical circumstances through which they passed. The preservation of the Qurʾān has led to the reliable establishment of important events of the prophetic mission that were mentioned or alluded to in the Qurʾān, because the Qurʾānic text was contemporaneous with the events, referring to them, mentioning them, and commenting on them. This represents a reliable record of those events and their details. The second: the familiarity with writing in Muslim circles during the time of the Prophet and its rapid spread with his encouragement, and the concern of the Muslims among the Companions (*ṣaḥāba*) and the Successors (*tābiʿūn*)—including those who did not believe in this religion and who were known to have been hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*)—with the documented transmission (*naql musnad*) of the biography of the Messenger. All of this led to great clarity regarding the events of this biography and its experiences, which helps in forming a clear and reliable picture of the reality of what occurred. (3) Examining Islam, its book, its history, and the history and biography of its Messenger in comparison with previous religions gives any fair-minded observer confidence that this religion is no less in its indicators of truth than the religions that preceded it, and there is no objective reason to exclude the truth of this religion if one accepts the truth of the religion of Moses (a.s.) and the prophets after him—as is acknowledged by both Judaism and Christianity. For Islam contains—through the Qurʾān—a complete and appropriate set of religious teachings related to the deity, religion, the history of the prophets, the directions of legislation, and important legislative details. Indeed, the Qurʾān—the inheritor of previous religions—has mentioned the teachings of the comprehensive divine religion in a manner more reliable and more consistent with reason and natural disposition (*fiṭra*) in many points, which was in fact a correction of errors that prevailed in those religions as a result of tribalism and misunderstanding, such as the belief in the distinction of the Children of Israel compared to other people in the religion of Judaism, and the belief in the divinity of Christ (a.s.) in Christianity, and the like. (4) In addition to what has been mentioned, verifying Islam is easier for one who lives in an Islamic environment and possesses an Islamic cultural background, for he lives the history of Islam and finds the traces of this history connected to the history of his forefathers, their civilisation, and their culture

5. Clarifying Religion and Defining It

After clarifying the two foundations relied upon in explaining and defining religion, we return to defining religion considering that:

5.1 Religion Built upon Three Visions

The current presentation of the content of religion, as mentioned previously, is that religion consists of two dimensions:

1. A cognitive dimension, which encompasses three principles: (1) the existence of God and His attributes; (2) the mission of the messengers sent by God to creation; and (3) the resurrection (*ma'ād*), meaning the return of the human being to life in another existence.

2. A legislative dimension, which encompasses the correct conduct for the human being.

This presentation is the correct one in our view. This can then be further clarified and elaborated upon by saying that religion is built upon a broad vision concerning three central subjects: the human being and his dimensions, God and His characteristics, and the relationship between the human being and God.

5.1.1 Religion's Vision of the Human Being

The first vision of religion concerns the human being. The human being is the locus of religion and the one addressed by it, for religion is nothing but cognitive and behavioural instructions that the human being should understand and act upon accordingly. Therefore, it naturally encompasses a vision regarding the human being, just as every integrated intellectual system in life must include a vision for the human being.

What is religion's vision for the human being and his characteristics, and is this vision mature, sound, and valid, or does it contradict

in various aspects of life. For all these reasons, verifying religion through Islam, regardless of the reality of its indicators of truth, as will be explained, is the first, safest, and most accessible option for one who wishes to search for the truth regarding religion.

the observable and known reality concerning him?

According to religion's vision, the human being is characterised by five attributes, and this is indeed an accurate and sound vision:

1. Thought.
2. The inclination toward wisdom.
3. Moral conscience.
4. Free will and the human being's ability to control his behaviour.
5. The spiritual (non-material) dimension.

5.1.1.1 Thought

This is the human being's ability to contemplate matters and to be guided through things by tending to the relationships between them and utilising these relationships to discover some things through others. This is a self-evident characteristic of the human being.

According to the Qur'ānic discourse, religion is primarily based on establishing this characteristic for the human being. It relies on the human being's capacity for thought and indeed seeks to stimulate his thinking and motivate him toward discovering the truth and distinguishing truth from falsehood, correct from erroneous. Consequently, we find that Qur'ānic verses constantly urge the human being to think, reason, listen, reflect, pay attention, and question things, as in God's words: "Have they not seen," "Have they not looked," "Have they not reflected," "for a people who reason," "for a people who think," "for a people who understand," "for a people who contemplate." This meaning is repeated in various forms throughout the verses of the Qur'ān.

This stimulation and motivation are part of the teaching for which the prophets were sent—according to what the Qur'ān mentions regarding the purpose of God's sending of messengers to humanity. The teaching of divine messages to creation was not based on delivering ready-made material for the human being to learn and memorise, but rather was built upon stimulating the human being's intellect and perception in matters he is capable of grasping directly if motivated to

contemplate and reflect upon them, as Imam ‘Alī said in the first sermon of *Nahj al-balāgha*: “... and to stir up for them the buried treasures of the intellects ...”

This shows that the first foundational approach of religion in convincing the human being of religion is to convince him on the basis of objective principles that the human being addresses with his intellect, thought, and contemplation in a comprehensive manner.

5.1.1.2 The Inclination Toward Wisdom¹²

This is the aspect that balances different options and recommends choosing the most suitable and best among them in terms of their effects in the immediate and distant future. If given a choice between two pleasant options, it chooses the more pleasant of them, and if given a choice between two bitter options, it chooses the less bitter and burdensome.

This characteristic is also self-evident for the human being.

Religion is also based on the human being possessing this characteristic.

Religion depends on the human being possessing the spirit of wisdom (*ḥikma*) and his innate appreciation for it. Indeed, it seeks to stir up this spirit in the human being, because life is built upon laws and principles, and there are different paths within it. The human being must choose the right and wise path. Hence, among the purposes of God’s sending of messengers was to teach them the Book and wisdom (*ḥikma*), as the Almighty says, “It is He who has sent among the unlettered a Messenger from themselves reciting to them His verses and purifying them and teaching them the Book and wisdom (*al-kitāb wa-l-*

¹² The difference between wisdom (*ḥikma*) and the thinking intellect (*‘aql*) is that the intellectual aspect has a theoretical function, as it discovers realities only theoretically, just as it realises, for example, that $1+1=2$. As for the wisdom aspect, it has a practical function—similar to the moral conscience—meaning that it guides toward appropriate action, as it is said, for example: if there are two paths to a goal, one easier and one more difficult, then you should choose the easier path to reach that goal.

ḥikma).¹³

This shows that the second foundation of religion in convincing the human being of it is its proceeding from the standpoint of wisdom, because human life is built upon wise laws. If the human being follows them on a straight path, he will be blessed in them and will arrive at happiness. But if he deviates from them to the right or left, he will end up in hardship and misery. Hence God says, “And [He revealed] that this is My path, straight.”¹⁴

5.1.1.3 The Moral Conscience

This is also expressed as conscience (*wijdān*). It encompasses the virtuous values that the human being should act upon and adopt as a constitution in his life, applying them to his conduct and actions, and giving them precedence over his instincts and desires. The human being is not an instinctual creature like animals, driven by the instinct to eat, drink, mate, rest, and so forth. Rather, he is equipped with higher virtuous principles according to which he should organise his life. These include justice as opposed to injustice and aggression, truthfulness as opposed to lying and speaking without knowledge, gratitude to the benefactor as opposed to denial and ingratitude, chastity as opposed to indulgence in indecency and wrongdoing, and other such virtuous qualities.

These values are further divided into two levels:

First: an obligatory level, which may be expressed as justice (*‘adl*). This includes such things as avoiding aggression against others. This level is what is represented in law, for law in the contemporary view contains only obligatory legislation.

Second: a non-obligatory level, which may be expressed as virtue (*faḍl*), and is expressed in contemporary terminology as ethics (*akhlāq*). Examples include donating money to spend on charitable and benevolent causes. In religious law, legislation at the first obligatory level is termed obligation (*wujūb*) and prohibition (*taḥrīm*), while

¹³ Q 62:2.

¹⁴ Q 6:153.

legislation at the second, non-obligatory level is termed recommendation (*istiḥbāb*) and reprehensibility (*karāha*).

The human being's possession of this characteristic is also self-evident according to general conscience, and it is generally a point of agreement among people despite their different ethnicities and religions. True, some modern researchers have deviated from this and claimed that the human being is akin to animals, being selfish by nature and completely governed by instincts, and some have argued for this claim using the theory of evolution regarding human origins. However, this claim is a grave error, which even its proponent will not follow in his practical conduct with his wife, children, friends, and employers, for he inevitably proceeds in dealing with them from conscientious values.

Religion is also based on affirming this characteristic for the human being. The Qur'an has strongly emphasised justice, equity (*qist*), good conduct (*iḥsān*), and other virtuous qualities, and has legislated numerous laws in this direction, particularly concerning the weak and oppressed classes of people or those who are frequent targets of aggression, such as orphans, women, outsiders, and enemies in war.

In addition to the above, religion has deepened the importance of this human attribute through several matters:

1. Religion has emphasised that this attribute is the fundamental constitution in human life and the primary source of legislation. Sound legislation must adopt virtuous and just values and seek them out in cases of ambiguity and confusion. Hence, the general title for legislation in religion is justice and its opposite is injustice (*ẓulm*), good conduct and its opposite is wrongdoing (*isā'a*), the recognised good (*ma'rūf*) and its opposite is the reprehensible (*munkar*), righteous action (*'amal ṣāliḥ*) and its opposite is corrupt and erroneous action, and good deeds (*ḥasana*) and their opposite evil deeds (*sayyi'a*). Indeed, these values in the religious perspective represent the causes of good and evil, happiness and misery.

2. Religion seeks to educate the human soul and human society according to these values so that they become the governing force within the human being and society.

Therefore, it is repeatedly stated in the Qur'ān that among the purposes of divine missions, alongside teaching, is purification (*tazkiya*) and the establishment of equity, as God says, "... purifying them and teaching them the Book and wisdom."¹⁵ And He says, "We have already sent Our messengers with clear evidences and sent down with them the Scripture and the balance that the people may maintain justice."¹⁶

3. Building upon this, religion has considered the alignment of its legislative direction with human nature (*fiṭra*) as a condition and indicator of the truth and veracity of religion, as the Prophet is described in reference to the proofs of his truth and veracity: "He commands them to do what is right (*ma'rūf*) and forbids them from what is wrong (*munkar*), and he makes lawful for them the good things (*ṭayyibāt*) and prohibits for them the evil things (*khabā'ith*)."¹⁷

4. Religion has extended virtuous values from the sphere of human interaction with other humans to human interaction with God, because God is the Creator of the human being and the Bestower of blessings upon him through the blessings he finds in himself and in what surrounds him in the heavens and the earth. It is therefore fitting for the human being to acknowledge God's favour upon him and thank Him for His blessings, as God says, "So remember Me; I will remember you. And be grateful to Me and do not deny Me."¹⁸ And He says, "Indeed, God is full of bounty to the people, but most of the people do not show gratitude."¹⁹ Thus, the relationship between God and the human being is also regulated according to ethical principles.

5. Beyond all that has been mentioned, the Qur'ān affirms God's commitment to virtuous qualities such as justice, truthfulness (*ṣidq*), fulfilment of commitments (*waḡā' bi-l-iltizām*), and others, as will be described in the discussion about God.

Accordingly, ethical values are not purely human values; rather,

¹⁵ Q 62:2.

¹⁶ Q 57:25.

¹⁷ Q 7:157.

¹⁸ Q 2:152.

¹⁹ Q 2:243 and 40:61.

they are governing values in any rational interaction in this existence.

What we derive from this is that correct conduct in human affairs—which guarantees his welfare and happiness in this life and the Hereafter according to the religious perspective—is that which accords with human conscience and proceeds according to the requirements of justice. This represents the fundamental constitutional principle in religion, and all other legislation branches from it, whether fixed or variable, and must be built upon observing and seeking justice.

5.1.1.4 The Free Will of the Human Being

What is meant by this is that the human being is able to control his actions and does not slide into them by compulsion according to ready-made and overwhelming factors, whether they be deposited within his essence or acquired through the social and natural environment. These factors are merely psychological motives (*dawā'ī nafsīyya*) which the human being is free to follow and respond to.

This too is a self-evident characteristic of the human being according to general human perception. Upon it branches the human being's responsibility for his actions, his deservingness of blame and punishment for his sins, and praise, commendation, and reward for his good deeds, for rational people will not excuse anyone from responsibility for his actions on the basis of the claim that he was driven to them by compulsion.

From this attribute branches the human being's capacity to develop and build himself so that he may be free from defects and reach the stages of perfection as he should, as the science of contemporary human development is built upon.

There are some researchers in the natural sciences who have denied the free will of the human being and claimed that the human being is driven to what he does according to his instincts and the influences upon him without having the ability to escape from them. This is a gross and obvious error against general conscience, and even the one who claims this will not actually apply it in his dealings with

himself and with others, for he may punish himself for his deed and reproach himself for his sin and bear responsibility for his action, just as he does the same regarding what issues from others.

Religion is based on the human being's possession of free will, and his ability to struggle against his whims, refine himself, and adorn himself with perfections and virtuous values, and on holding himself responsible for all his characteristics and actions, as God says after swearing by the natural phenomena surrounding the human being, "And [by] the soul and He who proportioned it, and inspired it [with discernment of] its wickedness and its righteousness, he who purifies it has indeed succeeded, and he who sullies it [with corruption] has indeed failed."²⁰ And He says, "Indeed, We guided him to the [right] path, whether he be grateful or ungrateful."²¹ And He says, "There has come to you enlightenment from your Lord. So, whoever will see does so for [the benefit of] his soul, and whoever is blind [does harm] against it. And [say], 'I am not a guardian over you.'"²²

And God says, "Indeed, We sent down to you the Book for the people in truth. So, whoever is guided is guided for [the benefit of] his soul, and whoever goes astray only goes astray [in violation] against it. And you are not a manager over them."²³ And He says, "Whoever does righteousness, it is for his soul; and whoever does evil [does so] against it. And your Lord is not ever unjust to [His] servants."²⁴ And He says, "And say, 'The truth is from your Lord, so whoever wills, let him believe; and whoever wills, let him disbelieve.'"²⁵

5.1.1.5 Establishing the Spiritual Dimension of the Human Being²⁶

This means that the human being is not a purely material entity, in the

²⁰ Q 91:7–10.

²¹ Q 76:3.

²² Q 6:104.

²³ Q 39:41.

²⁴ Q 41:46.

²⁵ Q 18:29.

²⁶ For details on this, see al-Sistani, *al-Anbā' al-thalāthat al-kubrā, al-Ma'ād*,

sense of matter as understood with its defined characteristics in the natural sciences such as physics and chemistry, but rather has a spiritual dimension higher than matter, integrated with the material dimension and interacting with it, such that any spiritual activity is reflected in some way materially through physical and chemical changes in the human body. Just as a person's anxiety affects chemical secretions in the brain, bodily activity also generally reflects upon the spirit, as in the effect of chemical medications on removing anxiety.

Reason and science do not rule out the existence of this attribute in the human being; rather, there are numerous rational and scientific indicators that establish it, including:

1. The clear difference between the nature of perceptions and cognitive processes, such as experience, analysis, deduction, imagination, and the like, and the chemical and physical nature of matter and its material properties such as heat, hardness, boiling, and others.

2. The chemical reactions associated with psychological cognitive activities that occur only in a specific organ, namely the brain, while these activities are consciously attributed to the very being of the entity, and consequently to himself, whereby one would say: "I rejoiced, I grieved, I perceived, I thought," and so on, and not: "My brain rejoiced ...," or perhaps: "My brain engaged in chemical activity concurrent with my joy."²⁷

3. The free will of the human being that does not accord with the nature of matter, since it is in the nature of matter to proceed according to laws and principles that lead to specific and inevitable results. If the human being's will was dependent on chemical changes in his brain, there would be no meaning to the human being's freedom to do as he wishes, along with other evidence that I have explained in the

227 ff.

²⁷ Yes, some activities that are carried out through certain bodily organs may be attributed to the being itself—as when it is said, "he struck" or "he ran." However, this attribution may, in fact, be made in view of the being's role—through its will—in bringing about these actions, so observe.

discussion on the reality of the human being.²⁸

4. The nature of human conscience and the values that it contains being a non-material nature, because it contradicts selfishness and psychological instincts. One who sacrifices for the sake of others and prefers them over himself without seeking any material gain is, in actual fact, performing an action by which he transcends material instinctual requirements and looks toward a lofty spiritual horizon.

Two notable phenomena in the human being may branch from this attribute, which is the existence of a non-material spiritual dimension in the human being, and point to it:

The first phenomenon is the human being's inclination toward what lies beyond matter: this is a noticeable feeling in human history and human communities, where we find belief in the existence of God, despite the doubts raised about His existence and the prevalence of repellent practices among some religious people, and despite the fact that it is theoretically possible to explain this feeling through other psychological explanations such as psychological projection arising from feelings of need. However, the most plausible explanation for the breadth of this phenomenon in human society may be the existence of an innate inspiration in the human constitution regarding the existence of God, as if the human being has been created with a natural disposition to feel God, to turn to Him, to address Him, to confide in Him, to pour out his concerns to Him, and to seek refuge in Him for his needs, just as a child is inspired with similar feelings toward his parents.

The second phenomenon is the human being's spiritual need for non-material matters: if the human being were a purely material entity, it would be expected that he would live in contentment and tranquillity by fulfilling material needs. However, it is noticeable in the most affluent circles and societies that they are more susceptible to psychological disorders such as feelings of distress, anxiety, and suicidal tendencies compared to poor societies, which is explained by the weakness of spiritual dimensions in them. This indicates that the

²⁸ See on this, al-Sistani, *al-Anbā' al-thalāthat al-kubrā, al-Ma'ād*, 238 ff.

human being, in addition to the material dimension, has a spiritual dimension with non-material spiritual requirements, and the human being's constitution will remain incomplete except through a kind of balance in fulfilling both material and spiritual needs.

Therefore, there is no rational or scientific objection to establishing a spiritual dimension in the human being.

Religion has indeed established this attribute for the human being and has held that the human being has an awareness of God and an inclination toward Him, as God says, "So set your face toward the religion, inclining to truth, [according to] the natural disposition (*fiṭra*) of God upon which He has created mankind. There is no alteration in the creation of God. That is the upright religion, but most people do not know."²⁹

Religion has held that the human being has a spiritual and moral need that helps him refine his material inclinations that lead to the violation of the virtuous values planted in his conscience that represent the constitution of individual and social human life. As God has said about acts of worship such as prayer and fasting, "Establish prayer. Indeed, prayer prohibits immorality (*al-faḥshā'*) and wrongdoing (*al-munkar*). And the remembrance of God is greater. And God knows what you do."³⁰ "Fasting has been prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may become righteous (*tattaqūn*)."³¹

When a person fulfils his spiritual and moral needs by being mindful of God, remembering Him, thanking Him, and caring about virtuous values, he is more likely to live in happiness and lead a good life, as has been explained in His saying, "Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while being a believer, We will surely cause him/her to live a good life (*ḥayātan tayyiba*)."³²

Rather, religion has established for the human being—as a

²⁹ Q 30:30.

³⁰ Q 29:45.

³¹ Q 2:183.

³² Q 16:97.

consequence of establishing the spiritual dimension of the human being—a matter of utmost gravity, which is the survival of the human being after death through his spiritual dimension that does not perish with the perishing of his body, and his return to life in another existence. It has considered that this worldly life is, in reality, nothing but a testing ground for the human being to gain insight and perform virtuous deeds so that he may encounter the results of his knowledge and conduct in the next life, meeting good with good and evil with its like. Through this, the human conscience has acquired great value because it represents the path leading from this life to the next life, and his deeds become seeds for happiness and misery in that life.

Religion has seen that this is what gives meaning to the creation of the human being and the universe subjugated to him and distinguishes the state of the righteous from the wicked and the aware from the ignorant, so that each is valued according to his worth. Without this, creation would be closer to play and amusement, as God says after mentioning the Hereafter, “We did not create the heavens and the earth and what is between them in play. We did not create them except in truth, but most of them do not know. Indeed, the Day of Judgment is the appointed time for them all. The Day when no guardian (*mawlā*) will avail a protégé (*mawlā*) at all, nor will they be helped. Except those on whom God has mercy. Indeed, it is He who is the Exalted in Might, the Merciful.”³³ And He says, “Indeed, those who stray from the way of God will have a severe punishment for having forgotten the Day of Account. And We did not create the heaven and the earth and what is between them in vain (*bāṭilan*). That is the assumption of those who disbelieve, so woe to those who disbelieve from the Fire. Or should We treat those who believe and do righteous deeds like corrupters in the earth? Or should We treat the righteous (*al-muttaqīn*) like the wicked (*al-fujjār*)?”³⁴ And God says, “Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day are signs for the people of understanding; who remember God while

³³ Q 44:38–42.

³⁴ Q 38:26–28.

standing or sitting or lying on their sides and give thought to the creation of the heavens and the earth, [saying], ‘Our Lord, You did not create this in vain. Exalted are You; so, protect us from the punishment of the Fire.’”³⁵

It has become clear from what we have mentioned that the very existence of a spiritual and non-material dimension for the human being is not far-fetched but rather is close according to rational, scientific, and intuitive indicators.

What remains is proving the survival of this dimension after death, the return of the human being to life in another existence as stated in religion, and his receiving the recompense of his deeds therein. This meaning may not be reached by general reason and science in a definitive and clear manner, but neither does it negate it. It is a possible and reasonable matter, and there is no obstacle to building upon it if proof of religion is established.³⁶

Considering all that we have mentioned, it becomes clear that the first four attributes that religion establishes for the human being (namely, the thinking intellect, the wise intellect, the moral conscience, and free will) are intuitive matters compatible with general human rational perception. The same applies to the fifth attribute, which is the existence of a spiritual dimension to the human being. It is plausible in its essence and in several phenomena associated with it, and there are other dimensions that reason neither reveals nor

³⁵ Q 3:190–191.

³⁶ Indeed, this may even seem plausible; this is because once the existence of a spiritual, non-material dimension of the human being is established, it means that the human being has, beyond this material body, a soul (*rūḥ*) connected to it. It is then plausible that the soul remains even after the body perishes, since there is no reason for its existence to be dependent on the body such that it would cease to exist with the body’s demise. If the human soul remains after death, then although its state is obscure from the perspective of reason, the most plausible assumption regarding it is that it will be happy or miserable proportionate to its moral conduct in this life, as stated in religion.

negates, so there is no obstacle to accepting them if proof of the truth of religion is established.

This is all concerning religion's vision of the human being.

5.1.2 Religion's Vision of God

As for the vision of religion regarding God, it comprises four matters:

1. Proving the existence of God.
2. Proving the oneness of God.
3. Proving essential perfections for God such as knowledge and power.
4. Proving moral perfections, or rather, the moral conscience for God, such as love of good and hatred of evil.

5.1.2.1 The Existence of God³⁷

There is no doubt that the idea of the existence of God as the maker of the universe is a reasonable and plausible idea in explaining the existence of the universe and beings.

Indeed, the reality is that the general human intellect is guided to this through contemplation of the beautiful and magnificent order of this universe and its beings, since order is evidence of rationality, and it is inconceivable for there to be order without a rational originator. Thus, if a complex device like a computer were to fall from the sky, we would be certain that there is a rational being who made it. And if we came upon historical buildings, machines, and tools, we would discover through them the existence of a human being at that time who brought them into existence.

On the other hand, this universe is constantly changing from one state to another. The chicken comes from the egg, and so on with all other beings. Did this changing chain come into existence without a cause for it? And how could that be when every link in it is an event

³⁷ See Chapter Two, and in greater detail, al-Sistani, *al-Anbā' al-thalāthat al-kubrā, Wujūd al-ilāh*.

caused by a preceding link? How could the totality of caused things resulting from a cause be independent of a cause beyond them? Is the description of the whole not dependent on the description of its parts? If there is a group composed of several white things, the group would naturally be white, and it would not be feasible for it to be black, despite the whiteness of each one of those things.

Therefore, the human intellect can arrive—by investigating this universe and its beings—at the existence of God. However, the human being's immersion within this context can make this indication faint to his consciousness, so one needs to remove the dust of habituation from his mind and compare this orderly state of being with other orderly contexts that one sees, to conclude that they must inevitably have a rational cause behind them.

The role of religion in guiding the human being to the existence of God has been to stimulate human thought in this direction in an experiential manner, by drawing attention to the magnificence of the universe, the order within it, and the changing of states, so that one may be able to deduce the existence of the Creator from investigating them, as we find this clearly, magnificently, and beautifully in many Qur'ānic verses.

This indication has remained valid even after the age of science, because it draws upon the general rationality with which the human being is equipped and which is part and parcel of his being and his reliance in thinking about things.

Indeed, modern science has only confirmed the findings of the innate intellect in proving God by discovering that the universe is built upon laws, equations, and mathematical formulae that would not exist were it not for a mathematical mind behind it that has engineered the universe from the constituent parts of the atom to the great galaxies that surpass imagination in their size.

Religion has been truly wise and magnificent in guiding the human being to the existence of the Creator, in explaining the order of the universe and the magnificence of created beings, and in bringing the human being out of confusion and hesitation regarding this important matter.

If modern science has fallen into some confusion and hesitation because of the sceptical methodologies that became prevalent within science as a reaction to the philosophers' exaggeration in claiming the rationality of certain matters—which led to hesitation regarding some of the findings of sound general rationality—it has not settled on that. Rather, many natural scientists have acknowledged the inherent indication of the universe toward the existence of God.

5.1.2.2 The Oneness of God

The oneness of God as the originator and orchestrator of the universe, as stated in religion, is also a reasonable idea, and indeed a preponderant one from the rational perspective;³⁸ for the human being, through his innate contemplation of the universe, will not find anything indicating to more than one maker of this universe and all created beings, for the entire universe and all beings are in magnificent harmony and wonderful integration.

Religion—in guiding the human being to the oneness of God—has drawn attention to this fact and directed human attention to this wonderful harmony.³⁹

³⁸ For details, see al-Sistani, *al-Anbā' al-thalāthat al-kubrā, Wujūd al-ilāh*, 39 ff.

³⁹ God says, “Is He [not best] who created the heavens and the earth and sent down for you rain from the sky, causing to grow thereby gardens of joyful beauty which you could not [otherwise] have grown the trees thereof? Is there a deity alongside God? [No], but they are a people who ascribe equals [to Him]. Is He [not best] who made the earth a stable abode and placed within it rivers and made for it firmly set mountains and placed between the two seas a barrier? Is there a deity alongside God? [No], but most of them do not know. Is He [not best] who responds to the desperate one when he calls upon Him and removes evil and makes you successors of the earth? Is there a deity alongside God? Little do you remember. Is He [not best] who guides you through the darkneses of the land and sea and who sends the winds as good tidings before His mercy? Is there a deity alongside God? Exalted is God above whatever they associate with Him. Is He [not best] who begins creation and then repeats it

The human being has been afflicted with the assumption of multiple gods, due to multiple factors, such as tribal loyalties that led people to assume a god specific to them who would protect them against their enemies, for example. At one time, he assumed spiritual beings mentioned by religion, such as angels, to be gods; at another time, he assumed some human beings who ruled society to be gods; and at yet another time, he assumed some inanimate objects, such as statues that he himself fashioned, to be gods.

However, religion refuted all of that and pointed out that the universe has only one God, and that there is nothing other than God Almighty that can be a god. The material things that were deified are in the same state as all their counterparts, just as all human beings are of one type, and there is no meaning to some deifying others. As for spiritual beings, they are not observable to the human being, so there is no way to prove them for them to deserve deification.

The argument of religion for the oneness of God has remained valid in the age of science because it is built upon general rationality. Indeed, modern science confirms this oneness, because it highlights the complete harmony of the universe and its laws, and shows that what might be taken as grounds for proving multiplicity, such as natural disasters, for example, is based on the very natural laws upon which the development and perfection of nature are based.

The declaration of the oneness of God by religion is truly sound and wise, and if all people had held fast to it, they would have been spared many of the errors and superstitions into which they fell.

Some religions have been afflicted by the infiltration of polytheism (*shirk*) into them, such as the deification of Christ in Christianity, and the deification of the Prophet and his Household by deviant sects in Islam. However, the Qur'ān has emphatically affirmed the oneness of God, condemned the deification of human beings and idols, and pointed out the incompatibility of all that with sound rationality in

and who provides for you from the heaven and earth? Is there a deity alongside God? Say, 'Produce your proof, if you should be truthful.'" (Q 27:60–64).

numerous texts.

5.1.2.3 Essential Perfections of God

God's fashioning of this vast, great, and ordered universe and His creation of the magnificent and vast array of beings indicates distinctive perfections of God, such as knowledge, power, and choice. The greatness of the universe requires a maker characterised by comprehensive knowledge and supreme power; and an action that springs from knowledge and power is naturally a free and voluntary act, as is the case with the human being.⁴⁰

This argument, like the arguments of the original existence of God and His oneness, has remained valid in the age of science. Indeed, science has revealed additional dimensions of God's knowledge and power by uncovering that the universe is built upon precise mathematical equations and formulae.

It is true that science reveals the existence of the universe with all its details through evolution from an initial state, such as a mass that underwent an explosion from which all this cosmic order emerged. However, this does not negate the dependence of this magnificent state upon God, because the formation of that mass and the magnitude of the explosion that occurred in it were instrumental to the nature of what came into existence through the explosion, and this requires knowledge on the part of God who brought it into being. Physicists have mentioned that the explosion which gave rise to the cosmic state of matter was extremely precise, because any variation in it from what actually occurred, even by a tiny fractional proportion, would have led to an entirely different state of being.

Moreover, God's knowledge of all the details, particulars, and outcomes of matters is reasonable, possible, and not far-fetched, and religion has stated this explicitly. Once the proof of the truth and veracity of religion is established, all of this is subsequently established with certainty.

⁴⁰ For details, see al-Sistani, *al-Anbā' al-thalāthat al-kubrā, Wujūd al-ilāh*, 85 ff.

5.1.2.4 God's Possession of Moral Conscience

This subject is extremely important for the human being regarding God. If God is knowledgeable, powerful, and acting on his own volition, is He a lover of good and a hater of evil, and characterised by moral conscience, or is He merely a powerful maker who does not possess any moral attribute?⁴¹

Science does not establish this attribute for God, because it looks at nature, which is the creative act (*fi'l takwīnī*) of God, and nature represents God's knowledge, power, and governance, but gives no indication of a moral commitment on God's part.

However, through religion, from God, we see His affirmation of this attribute for Himself. He loves justice, kindness, gratitude, truthfulness, faithfulness, and their like, and He hates injustice, wrongdoing, lying, treachery, and their like.

Just as He is characterised by those virtuous values in relation to His own actions and is committed to them while avoiding their opposites, He observes justice and avoids injustice. He never says anything but the truth, never breaks His promise, and He appreciates those who thank Him, cares for those who seek His care, responds to those who ask Him, and shows mercy to those who seek His mercy, as all of this has been stated explicitly and clearly in numerous Qur'ānic verses.

This notion appears close to human conscience, because every rational, powerful, and freely acting being has a place and context for morality, and moral commitment is an attribute of perfection for it, just as its opposite is an attribute of deficiency, as is the case with human beings. Therefore, it is part of God's perfection that He loves good deeds and hates wrongdoing, and He is more deserving of these attributes than human beings because of His knowledge, power, and self-sufficiency. One would not expect Him to be unconcerned about reprehensible acts such as injustice, lying, treachery, and the like.

Moreover, He is the One who created the human being and placed within him this magnificent moral conscience, so how could He

⁴¹ For details, see *ibid.*, 183 ff.

Himself not be characterised by this attribute?

Therefore, the teachings of religion appear close to human conscience.

This removes the erroneous beliefs prevalent among some religious communities that God does whatever He wills because He is the owner of everything, and His actions are only subject to His dominion and possession.

This attribute of God is extremely important, for it opens the door to the relationship between God and the human being according to the teachings of religion, as will be explained.

These are the reports of God about Himself according to His message about creation that has come down to us in religion. What is notable is that they are sound and sensible reports that are generally supported by reason, science, and conscience, and there is nothing in them that causes doubt or implausibility.

5.1.3 Religion's Vision of the Relationship Between God and the Human Being

As for the vision of religion regarding the relationship between God and the human being: it is the very focus of God's message to the human being in religion.⁴² In fact, this message itself is a manifestation of God's interest in the human being, for it represents His care for him, His guardianship over him, and his special status with Him among His creatures.

This relationship includes several matters:

1. God's care for the human being.
2. The relationship of God to humanity being akin to that of parents to their children.
3. The organisation of the relationship between God and the human being according to moral principles and mutual rights.
4. God's right over the human being.

⁴² For details, see *ibid.*, 167 ff.

5. The human being's right toward God.
6. God's assistance to the human being through a message to him.
7. God being the guardian of observing values in this life.
8. The human being's responsibility for the consequences of his actions in this life.

5.1.3.1 God's Care for the Human Being

God cares for the human being with special care considering that He has distinguished him with a thinking intellect, through which he can be guided to God and to the advantages of this material universe, whereby he can harness the potentials of this universe for himself and draw benefit from them. He has also distinguished him with a moral conscience through which he can interact with God with appreciation and gratitude, and deal with his fellow human beings with justice and kindness. Thus, He made him His vicegerent (*khalifa*) on His earth⁴³, as God says, "I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me,"⁴⁴ and He says, "We have certainly honoured the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred them over much of what We have created,

⁴³ As He says, "And [mention, O Muḥammad], when your Lord said to the angels, 'Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority (*khalifa*).' They said, 'Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your praise and sanctify You?' He said, 'Indeed, I know that which you do not know.' And He taught Adam the names—all of them. Then He showed them to the angels and said, 'Inform Me of the names of these, if you are truthful.' They said, 'Exalted are You; we have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Indeed, it is You who is the Knowing, the Wise.' He said, 'O Adam, inform them of their names.' And when he had informed them of their names, He said, 'Did I not tell you that I know the unseen [aspects] of the heavens and the earth? And I know what you reveal and what you have concealed.'" (Q 2:30–33).

⁴⁴ Q 51:56.

with [definite] preference,”⁴⁵ and, “It is God who has made the sea subservient to you so that ships may sail upon it by His command and that you may seek of His bounty and that you may be grateful. And He has subjected to you whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth—all from Him. Indeed, in that are signs for a people who give thought,”⁴⁶ and, “Do you not see that God has subjected to you whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth and amply bestowed upon you His blessings, [both] apparent and hidden? But of the people is he who disputes about God without knowledge or guidance or an enlightening Book [from Him].”⁴⁷

This care is entirely appropriate from an intuitive perspective, given that God is wise and measures everything by its just measure. Thus, His creation of the human being endowed with spiritual and material dimensions and capacities entails that He should have a care for him that befits him and is proportionate to these magnificent dimensions and capacities.

5.1.3.2 The Relationship of God to the Human Being

According to this care, the relationship of God to the human being, by way of approximation, is akin to that of parents to their children. Parents love the existence of their child before he/she even comes to be; then they cause him to come into this world, and they are attached to him because he is from them and an extension of them, and they do whatever is in their power to make him happy and care for him. By his nature, the child has a feeling of need for his parents and their affection, and by their constitution, the parents respond to this feeling with love, affection, and care.

Thus, does God love to bring the human being into existence as a distinguished creature. So, He brought him into existence and implanted in him an attachment to God, and continued to love him after bringing him into existence, and determined to respond to him

⁴⁵ Q 17:70.

⁴⁶ Q 45:12–13.

⁴⁷ Q 31:20.

through this attachment to Him according to what His wisdom dictates in making the condition of the creation befitting the attribute of the Creator, and that is a match that human intuition finds acceptable.

5.1.3.3 The Regulation of the Relationship Between God and the Human Being According to Moral Principles

This characterisation of God and of the human being requires that their relationship operate on the basis of moral principles. Despite the vast difference between their stations, each is a rational, capable, and freely acting being, and is therefore naturally endowed with moral conscience. Whenever two rational beings perceive one another and are able to interact—whether well or poorly—their engagement is governed by what this conscience dictates in light of their shared rational nature, as well as any additional bond between them such as that between parents and children.

This conscience delineates mutual rights between God and the human being on the basis of their rational nature and the bond between them through creation and the bestowal of blessings, as Imam ‘Ali (a.s.) said:

God, glory be to Him, has established for me a right over you through the authority over your affairs, and you have over me a right like that which I have over you. Right is the most expansive of things in description, and the narrowest of them in fair dealing. It does not run for anyone except that it runs against him, and it does not run against him except that it runs for him. And if it were for anyone that it should run for him and not run against him, that would be exclusively for God, glory be to Him, apart from His creation, because of His power over His servants, and because of His justice in all that the vicissitudes of His decree have encompassed. But He, glory be to Him, has made His right over the servants that they obey Him, and has made their recompense upon Him the multiplication of reward, as a favour from Him and an expansion through what He is worthy of in increase. Then He, glory be to Him, has made from His rights other

rights, which He has made obligatory for some people over others, so He has made them equivalent in their aspects, and some of them necessitate others, and some of them are not deserved except through others.⁴⁸

Accordingly, God's dealings with the human being proceed according to the requirements of justice, benevolence, and grace, as He has declared in the Qur'ān in many verses previously mentioned. Likewise, the human being must deal with God in accordance with what God's right over him requires by virtue of creation and the bestowal of blessings.

5.1.3.4 The Right of God Over the Human Being

The right of God over the human being is that the human being should acknowledge Him as the Creator of the universe and of humanity, and as the Bestower of both manifest and hidden blessings. This acknowledgement is required as an expression of proper conduct toward Him in all aspects of one's condition, and as gratitude to Him for His bestowal of blessings. From the moral perspective, it is reprehensible for the human being to neglect this acknowledgement, or to associate with Him in divinity (*ulūhiyya*) those who have no involvement in anything whatsoever, or to disregard knowledge of His message and of what He has lovingly conveyed to humanity. Such behaviour constitutes a great injustice (*ẓulm*), as God says, "And when Luqmān said to his son while he was exhorting him, 'O my son, do not associate anything with God. Indeed, association is a great injustice.'"⁴⁹ And after describing His blessings upon the human being, God says, "And He gave you of all that you asked Him. And if you should count the blessings of God, you could not enumerate them. Indeed, the human being is very unjust and very ungrateful."⁵⁰

God is in no need of the human being's action and gratitude, as

⁴⁸ Al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-balāgha*, Sermon 216.

⁴⁹ Q 31:13.

⁵⁰ Q 14:34.

becomes evident when. One reflects upon the vast dimensions of His power and majesty. Rather, it is the human being who needs to know God and to acknowledge His right and His generosity. As noted previously, the human being's welfare and happiness, according to the laws upon which he was created, depend on acting in accordance with moral conscience through observing proper conduct and fulfilling rights. Thus, the human being's knowledge of God, submission to Him, and gratitude for His kindness lead to spiritual felicity in this life and complete happiness in the next life. Conversely, denial and neglect lead to distress and spiritual misery in this life and to comprehensive distress in the Hereafter. Ignorance resulting from incapacity deprives the human being of the merit that arises from insight and gratitude to God, as He says, "And We did not wrong them, but they were wronging themselves."⁵¹

5.1.3.5 The Right of the Human Being Over God

The human being has a right over God, just as God has a great right over the human being, for rights between two beings are always reciprocal, not one-sided, as mentioned in the words of Imam Ali (a.s.). At the very least, neither party should wrong the other through mistreatment, transgression, or harm. When an additional bond exists between two beings, it naturally extends from both sides—whether the bond is identical for each, such that its requirements are the same, as in the bond of humanity or brotherhood (where one human being is connected to another by the bond of humanity, and the other is equally connected by that same bond; or where one is a brother to another, and the same applies in return)—or whether the bond differs between them, as in the case of parents and children. The bond from parents' side is that of fatherhood and motherhood, while the bond from the children's side is that of sonship. Thus, the requirements arising from the bond differ somewhat, yet each party holds a right over the other. The father and mother have a right over the children by

⁵¹ Q 2:57 and 7:160.

virtue of parenthood, and the child has a right over them by virtue of sonship. Each of these rights includes kindness toward the other in their weakness and need, and an appropriate emotional manner of treating them, even if the particular forms of kindness differ according to what is suitable for each.

The human being has two relationships with God.

First: he is a rational being who finds happiness in certain things and harm in others. He acquires possessions through his effort after God's favour upon him in creating him and subjugating creation for his benefit, such as wealth he earns through agriculture, trade, or other activities. He, therefore, has entitlements in himself and in what he acquires, and observing these is part of justice.

Second: the human being is a creature of God, for He brought him into existence by His will and volition, created him in need of the limbs and faculties with which He endowed him, and placed him in need of the blessings He subjugated for him. Thus, as we mentioned earlier, he is like a child in relation to his parents. This requires God's care for the human being, just as parents care for their child with food, drink, education, upbringing, and all the necessities of life until he becomes self-sufficient. Yet the human being is never, in any state, independent of God.

This care is realised by God on the material level through the blessings and capacities He has bestowed in accordance with the environment in which He placed the human being. Surrounding him are various blessings such as water, air, plants, animals, the sun, the moon, and other things.

Religion—through the Qur'ān—has demonstrated that God truly cares for His creation with justice, and indeed with favour and kindness.

As for justice, He does not wrong His servants in the slightest. Rather, He deals with them in equity in this life and the next, as He repeatedly emphasises in Qur'ānic verses whenever He mentions the recompense of wrongdoers. Part of justice is that He is truthful with His servants and fulfils what He has promised and threatened regarding reward and recompense, without compelling them to it, as He says,

“Indeed, His promise is ever fulfilled,”⁵² and He says, “The promise of God—God does not fail in His promise,”⁵³ and He says, “Indeed, God does not allow the reward of the doers of good to be lost,”⁵⁴ and He says, “And God would not allow your faith to be lost. Indeed, God is kind and merciful to mankind,”⁵⁵ and He says, “Indeed, those who believe and do righteous deeds will have a reward uninterrupted.”⁵⁶

Among the manifestations of His kindness and favour is His concern for the education and upbringing of humanity through the prophets and messengers, as He says, “It is He who has sent among the unlettered a Messenger from themselves reciting to them His verses and purifying them and teaching them the Book and wisdom.”⁵⁷

Another aspect of favour is His commitment to Himself to take charge of the human being in this life when he recognises Him and desires His guardianship. God treats him with affection and mercy: He listens when the servant speaks to Him, appreciates his courtesy in remembering Him, inspires him with wisdom when he turns toward Him, responds when he calls upon Him, and aids him in his hardship when he seeks His help—according to the laws of this life upon which God has established the order of the universe and the human being. He says, “Is He not [best] who responds to the desperate one when he calls upon Him and removes the evil?”⁵⁸ And He says, “And when My servants ask you concerning Me, indeed I am near. I respond to the invocation of the supplicant when he calls upon Me. So let them respond to Me and believe in Me that they may be rightly guided.”⁵⁹

Among the aspects of His favour to the human being is that He considers what the human being does as a debt (*dayn*) and promises to

⁵² Q 19:61.

⁵³ Q 39:20.

⁵⁴ Q 12:90.

⁵⁵ Q 2:143.

⁵⁶ Q 41:8.

⁵⁷ Q 62:2.

⁵⁸ Q 27:62.

⁵⁹ Q 2:186.

repay it, even though the human being and everything he possesses belong to God and were created by Him. Yet He has considered it a debt as an acknowledgement of the human being's effort in acquiring it and of His own promise to reward him for it. He says, "Who is it that will lend God a goodly loan so He may multiply it for him, and he will have a noble reward?"⁶⁰ Many other verses convey this meaning. Of the same kind is His commitment to thank whoever does something for His sake, as He has repeatedly described Himself as thankful (*shākir*) or most thankful (*shakūr*).

Thus, God becomes a support and aid for the human being in this life: a source of consolation, comfort, hope, expectation, inspiration, and guidance.

5.1.3.6 God's Assistance to the Human Being Through a Message to Him

In accordance with what has preceded regarding God's care for the human being and the commitments He has taken upon Himself to toward him, God has assisted the human being in coming to know Him and submitting to Him, in understanding the dimensions of his own existence, and in affirming the principles of good and evil in this life, by sending a message from Himself to His servants to acquaint them with these crucial matters. The purpose of His sending messengers to humanity is to acquaint them with Himself and with His love for His creation, to affirm the existence of a spiritual dimension within the human being that endures after death, and to demonstrate the effect of their actions on their happiness or misery after this life, according to the principles upon which He established human existence.

This message is, in essence, necessary for the human being so that he may understand these horizons clearly and plainly, prepare himself for this test and race in life, and attain his station in the next life.

⁶⁰ Q 57:11.

5.1.3.7 God as Guardian Over the Observance of Values in This Life

God, according to His station and attributes, is the guardian over the observance of values in this life, just as a father is concerned with upholding values within the family. He encourages good deeds through praise, appreciation, and reward, and discourages bad deeds through warning, reproach, punishment, and retribution. Consequently, God is the protector of just rights and the caller to virtue. He esteems every virtuous trait and every righteous deed, and He warns against every bad trait and every wrong deed, as is evident in most Qur'ānic verses.

5.1.3.8 The Human Being's Responsibility for the Consequences of His Actions in This Life

Since God has granted the human being free will, this necessarily entails holding him responsible for his actions. Thus, each person will have a rank in the next life in accordance with his insight and conduct in this life, as He says, "And for all there are degrees according to what they have done, and that He may fully recompense them for their deeds, and they will not be wronged."⁶¹ And He says, "And God created the heavens and the earth in truth, and that every soul may be recompensed for what it has earned, and they will not be wronged."⁶²

At first glance, a person might think that the recompense of the Hereafter, as described in the Qur'ān, and before it the Gospel and the Torah, its reward and punishment exceed what worldly deeds deserve, whether good or bad. However, the Qur'ānic verses emphasise the proportionality between actions in this life and the recompense in the Hereafter, because the system through which worldly deeds generate otherworldly recompense resembles the system of sowing and harvesting. In view of this emphasis in the scriptures, the human being cannot assert definitively that there is no proportionality; rather, at most, this matter remains obscure to him, because the recompense

⁶¹ Q 46:19.

⁶² Q 45:22.

does not pertain to this life, where proportionality would be easy for the human being to assess, but to the world of the Hereafter, which is an obscure realm whose nature differs from that of worldly life.

It is not unlikely that the human being will seek clarification on this point from God in the next world, for the scene of the Hereafter, according to the emphases of the Qur'ān, is a scene of justice built upon just scales and solid evidence. There will be exchanges between God and the human being regarding his responsibility for his actions in worldly life. Thus, there is no doubt that in that life a person may ask God about the proportionality between worldly deeds and the magnitude of the recompense.

This represents the religious vision concerning the relationship between the human being and God, and it is a reasonable vision overall. Indeed, it contains multiple emotional and ethical dimensions. Yet there are ambiguous and obscure aspects in some of its details, and therefore, it remains contingent upon establishing proof that a message from God to His creation has indeed been issued.

This completes the clarification of the religious vision regarding the human being, God, and the relationship between them according to the Qur'ān, without any embellishment or distortion.

This vision is not contradicted by science or reason in any of its aspects. Rather, science, reason, and human conscience affirm many of its elements, such as the existence of God, His oneness and perfection, and the human being's possession of the five characteristics: thought, ethics, wisdom, free will, and a spiritual dimension.

The remaining aspects are not incompatible with rationality; rather, they remain plausible pending proof. And convincing proof has, in fact, been established for them through the indicators of the truth of religion, as we have clarified in other studies.⁶³

⁶³ For details, see al-Sistani, *al-Anbā' al-thalāthat al-kubrā, Risālat Allāh ilā l-insān*.

6. A Reflective Description of Myself in This Life

Ever since I gained insight into myself regarding the matter of existence, God, and the human being, and came to understand this vision through the Qurʾān, I have found that the picture represented in this vision is reasonable, intuitive, and fitting—one that has not worn out and will not wear out in the wake of the development of the natural and human sciences.⁶⁴ Rather, it is a vision that pulsates with life, drawing from the foundations of sound rationality that represent the constants of human experience, serving as a guide that alerts and reminds the human being. It penetrates deeply into a person's conscience, emotions, and inner sensibilities, filling his spiritual dimension and meeting his spiritual needs, which he requires now more than ever.

So, reflect upon this vision in its various aspects and reconsider it in its interconnected parts, and you will find how close it is to reason, conscience, and human feeling.

The human being is a thinking being endowed with free will and a spiritual dimension, equipped with an inclination toward wisdom and with a conscience containing the values of virtue and justice, so that these values may serve as the fundamental constitution upon which he acts in this life. His insight and conduct within it will determine his rank, so that he may attain what corresponds to it in the world of the Hereafter.

God is the Creator of this organised and precise universe and these magnificent beings, and He is the logical explanation for their

⁶⁴ Some schools of thought in certain natural and human sciences may deny some aspects of this worldview, such as the school that denies that the human being has free will, or the one that denies noble moral values to him, or the one that completely denies the existence of a spiritual dimension to the human being. However, these schools either confront clear self-evident truths according to general human understanding, such as the denial of values and free will, or they present certain scientific manipulations as if they were established facts, which is a very erroneous matter.

existence. He is one God—as indicated by the unity and harmony of the universe—and it is invalid to associate any other being with Him, whether human, stone, or idol. Polytheism is but a superstition fashioned by the vulnerabilities of the human soul. God is characterised by encompassing knowledge and supreme power, as manifested in what the human being observes of the features of this material universe. Moreover, He is characterised by virtuous ethics, for He loves goodness and justice, and hates evil and injustice.

As for God's relationship with the human being, it is a relationship of care, concern, compassion, and affection. He loved the human being before creating him, so He created him and honoured him, granting him reason, conscience, and all the other distinguishing capacities, favouring him over many of His creatures with a special favour. His relationship with the human being is akin to that of parents with their children, and all are like members of a single family. The relationship between Him and the human being is governed by ethical principles and mutual rights. God has the right over the human being that he should seek Him and come to know Him, acknowledge Him, and investigate His message to him, and that he should deal with Him with gratitude, praise, and appreciation for His position in having created him and bestowed blessings upon him. The human being has the right before God that He should deal with him with justice, grace, and goodness. God has aided the human being, through His grace, with a message He sent to him, guiding him to the features of existence, the laws of life, and the dimensions of human existence. Then He Himself became the guardian over the human being's observance of values in this life, encouraging him toward them and warning him of the consequences of neglecting them. After granting him free will, He made the human being responsible for his actions, so that he may receive the recompense for them and attain his rank accordingly.

God—how perfect is this picture of existence, and how excellent is His explanation of the universe, and how harmonious is His exposition of the dimensions of existence, God, and the human being, and how beautiful are existence, the universe, and the human being according to this vision. For it combines rationality with responsiveness to inner

feeling, and the soul yearns to seek it, verify it, and then act in accordance with it.

Indeed, it contains great seriousness concerning the human being—such that a person may fear and find difficult—because it transforms the human being, who expects his annihilation through death, into an eternally immortal being, and it transforms this life from a frivolous, transient, and irresponsible life into a serious life in which he is tested in his insight and conduct, so that he may attain his rank in the eternal life. It elevates virtuous values from mere psychological sentiments that a person savours into laws governing happiness and misery.

Yet nothing in this seriousness, or in the effort and commitment it requires, excuses the human being from rejecting this vision and abandoning its verification.

Let the human being bear his responsibility in this life as the price of what he has been granted of intellect and thought. Let him verify the truth and then act upon it with firm resolve that does not weaken and with determination that does not waver.

Let us conclude this study with a Qur'ānic verse that conveys the essence of religion. God says, "Say: 'Come, I will recite what your Lord has forbidden to you: that you associate nothing with Him, and be good to your parents, and do not kill your children out of poverty—We will provide for you and them—and do not approach indecencies, whether outward or inward, and do not kill the soul that God has made sacred, except by right. This He has enjoined upon you, that you may use reason.'"⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Q 6:151.

Chapter Four

Why Investigate Religion?

1. Introduction

The first question that comes to a person's mind when speaking about religion and examining its truthfulness and validity is: why must we investigate the matter of religion in the first place?

The answer to this question is generally clear, because religion is God's message to humanity, and it contains momentous tidings that transform the horizons and dimensions of human life. It gives human life an entirely different purpose by pointing to the existence of a God Who is concerned with humanity, Who deserves to be known, thanked, and treated with reverence, and with Whom the human being can connect, converse, and place hope. This bestows upon life a new spiritual dimension accompanied by hope, solace, and inspiration. From another very important perspective, religion encompasses the eternal survival of the human being after death, when he meets the consequences of his insight and conduct in this life.

1.1 Verses from the Qur'ān

The Qur'ān has emphasised the importance of seeking religion and warned humanity against the consequences of neglect, aversion, and obstinacy toward these great tidings, reminding us of these meanings in magnificent language:

God says, "Say: 'I am not an innovation among the messengers, nor do I know what will be done with me or with you. I only follow what is revealed to me, and I am only a clear warner.' Say: 'Have you considered: if it is from God and you disbelieve in it, and a witness from the Children of Israel testifies to something similar and believes while you are arrogant—indeed, God does not guide the wrongdoing people.'"¹

¹ Q 46:9–10. The point of evidence in this is His statement: "Have you

And He said, “We sent Noah to his people, saying, ‘I am a clear warner to you, that you worship none but God. Indeed, I fear for you the punishment of a painful day.’ But the eminent among those who disbelieved from his people said, ‘We do not see you but as a man like ourselves, and we do not see you followed except by those who are the lowest of us at first thought. And we do not see in you over us any merit; rather, we think you are liars.’ He said, ‘O my people, have you considered: if I should be upon clear evidence from my Lord while He has given me mercy from Himself, but it has been made unapparent to you, should we force it upon you while you are averse to it?’”²

Despite the clarity mentioned above, it remains important to characterise this significance in a scholarly manner, based on the general rational principles that form the structure of sound human conduct.

Explaining this characterisation, along with clarifying those general innate principles, benefits the rational person in his steps and decisions in life overall, even beyond matters related to religion. It reminds him of the features of the correct methodology embedded in his nature for dealing with all matters, and it strengthens within him the spirit of rationality, wisdom, and sound judgment, so that he may test his steps and positions before undertaking them. And if he fails to observe them when proceeding in his affairs, then afterwards he may learn from his mistakes and missteps.

Therefore, I hope that the brothers present and others who encounter this study will reflect upon it from a general rational standpoint, and not merely for the purpose of adopting a sound position regarding religion alone.

1.2 Research Methodology

We divide the research on this topic into an introduction and two

considered...” where He draws attention to the fact that if the religion is proven to be true, what will you do then, having denied it.

² Q 11:25–28. The point of evidence in this is His statement: “Have you considered...” with the explanation previously mentioned in the verse from *Sūrat al-Aḥqāf*.

investigations:

1. The Introduction: a brief definition of religion.
2. The First Investigation: concerning the importance of epistemological inquiry into the truthfulness and validity of religion according to the general innate and rational basis for epistemological concern with things.
3. The Second Investigation: concerning the necessity that inquiry into religion be objective and appropriate to the importance of religion according to the general rational correlation between the significance of something and the level of investigation appropriate to it.

This investigation includes a reminder of several important and fundamental epistemological points that should be taken into account in the context of inquiry.

2. Introduction to the Definition of Religion³

When discussing any idea for the purpose of assessing the importance of inquiry into it and evaluating it, it is necessary to have a correct understanding of that idea. This is a self-evident and clear matter.

This principle naturally applies to religion, especially since religion is a message from God to humanity. This message has been accompanied by other texts, many of whose establishment or interpretation relied on a degree of reasoning (*ijtihad*) and conjecture according to the tools available at the time. These texts—presented under the headings of elaboration, explanation, and clarification—are narrated from the Messenger and his Household (a.s.) as having been delivered in the context of explaining the primary text and its limits. Thereafter came intellectual and jurisprudential reasoning centred around the text, producing multiple understandings of the implications of this message, as well as multiple views on the extent of the authority (*hujjiyya*) of the secondary texts. Then came impressions, customs, and general

³ For details on this, see Chapter Three.

and specific traditions that gathered around the primary message, the secondary texts, and the reasoning that developed around them. These emerged either as applications of the principles and rulings derived from them or as a means to safeguard and preserve them. In this way, many details and numerous social manifestations of religion took shape.

In light of this, it became necessary to identify the fundamental principles and religious orientations that represent the constants of religion and its broad, clear contours—those that constitute the basic educational and legislative constitution of religion.

It can be said briefly that religion consists of reports (*anbā'*) and legislation (*tashrīāt*).

As for the reports, they are three major matters relating to existence, God, and humanity. These are called the principles of religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*)⁴, which are:

1. The existence of God, His oneness, and His perfective and moral attributes: this report includes—alongside the affirmation of God—first, His oneness (*tawhīd*) and the negation of multiple gods in existence; second, His essential perfective attributes such as power and knowledge; and third, the moral conscience of God, to which belongs the principle of justice (*adāla*) in religion—a principle that several Muslim scholars add to the principles of religion. This principle represents the religious view of the explanation of the material universe and the order, regulation, and beauty manifested within it, through affirming the existence of a non-material dimension and clarifying the reality and characteristics of that dimension as they pertain to humanity.

2. The message of God to humanity, which represents the religious view of God's care for the human being; this message is the most prominent expression of this care and includes additional significant meanings relating to the scene of the relationship between God and humanity.

⁴ It may also be referred to as creed (*aqīda*) because of the obligation to believe in it, but the obligation to believe itself falls in the category of religious legislation.

3. The survival of the human being after death, so that he returns to God in another form of existence to receive recompense for his conduct in this life: this principle presents the religious view of the human being as possessing two dimensions: a material dimension and a spiritual-moral dimension. It also includes other characteristics of humanity: the power of thought, wisdom, moral conscience, and free will, through which a human being bears responsibility for their actions and behaviours.

As for legislation, it consists of obligations. Some of these are cognitive—namely knowing the three major reports—and these are also known as creed (*‘aqīda*). Others are behavioural: specific practices and abstentions called religious rulings (*aḥkām shar‘īyya*) or religious law. These are based on the principles of human conscience, meaning that human conscience represents the innate law (*qānūn fiṭrī*) with which humanity is equipped to be a judge over its behaviour and actions. This conscience is what determines appropriate conduct for human beings—whether in their relationship with God, the Creator of the universe and humanity; in social dealings with their own kind; or in their relationship with themselves.

Consequently, we find that religion consistently calls to righteous action (*‘amal ṣāliḥ*) as opposed to corrupt action, to the recognised good (*ma‘rūf*) as opposed to the reprehensible (*munkar*), to the good (*ḥasan*) as opposed to the bad (*sayyi‘*), to right guidance (*rushd*) as opposed to error (*ghayy*), to justice (*‘adl*) as opposed to injustice (*ẓulm*), and to good conduct (*iḥsān*) as opposed to wrongdoing (*isā‘a*). In detail, it emphasises the observance of innate rights (*ḥuqūq fiṭriyya*) such as the right of humanity, fatherhood, motherhood, sonship, kinship, neighbourliness, commitment, and others. It also emphasises adherence to all other virtuous principles such as truthfulness (*ṣidq*), chastity (*‘afāf*), and the like.

These meanings form the basis of the legislation that regulates the relationship between one human being and another.

They also regulate the relationship between humanity and God, for God has a right over humanity by virtue of having created them and bestowed blessings upon them. Thus, human beings must observe the

requirements of proper conduct, reverence, and gratitude toward God. From this follows the necessity for the human being to know God, submit to Him, take care to learn His message, and respond to it.

Likewise, the human being has a right in relation to God that can be likened to the right of children regarding their parents. God deals with humanity with justice, truthfulness, and fulfilment of promises, and with appropriate care.

As for the human being's right over himself, it is that he should deal with himself wisely according to the laws of his nature: not harming himself, observing the values with which he is endowed, adhering to the wisdom to which he has been guided, and responding to his natural instincts while observing the values that must be observed. There are cases in which the situation is similar from the innate perspective, and in such cases legislation is provided in accordance with the pursuit of justice and the common good.

This is a brief description of the reality of religion.

Accordingly, the discussion falls under the two aforementioned investigations.

3. The Importance of Epistemological Investigation into the Truthfulness and Validity of Religion

The first investigation concerns the importance of investigating the truthfulness and validity of religion.

The investigation into the truthfulness and validity of religion is indeed extremely important, as previously mentioned, because it concerns a matter of great seriousness.

This importance is grounded in the innate criterion for wise and necessary epistemological concern with things.⁵

Human beings are naturally motivated in their desire to learn about and know things by instincts and dispositions within their psychological makeup. These instincts call them toward activities compatible with them, while they disregard concern for other matters that do not

⁵ For details on this, see al-Sistani, *Ḍarūrat al-maʿrifat al-dīniyya*.

stimulate these instincts and dispositions to investigate.

However, the issue at hand relates to wise and appropriate epistemological concern that the human being must exercise as a creature endowed with reason, conscience, wisdom, free will, and the ability to control behaviour.

Is there an epistemological pursuit toward which reason directs the human being? Why is this so? And what should the human being strive to learn and verify? This is the general question upon which the epistemological concern of the rational person is based.

In reality, there is no doubt that the human being, according to general rational intuition, is endowed with an inner guidance that enables him to determine the criterion for epistemological and behavioural concern. The role of this investigation is thus limited to describing this criterion as a reminder and alert for the rational person, and it does not truly constitute a new epistemological contribution for the investigator.

3.1 The Effects of Epistemological Investigation

Epistemological pursuit has two effects from which it is never free, namely:

1. Attaining the reality that the human being seeks to know, along with the resulting positive effects of achieving benefit or preventing corruption and harm: from this perspective, acquiring knowledge must be pursued according to the judgment of reason, whenever attaining this reality is a wise and virtuous matter. We express this by saying that there is an innate connection between epistemological concern with things and behavioural concern with them, meaning that whenever particular a particular action is important, the knowledge that assists in carrying out that action is also important.

This occurs in two cases:

The first is when knowledge is valuable in itself, as in a person's knowledge of their parents. This knowledge brings happiness to the person just as it brings happiness to the parents, who love to be known by their children. Thus, it fulfils their right and constitutes a wise and

virtuous action.

The second is when knowledge is a prerequisite for wise and virtuous behaviour. A person may at times be able to observe wisdom and virtue without needing investigation and knowledge or any costly complications, such as when they suspect harm in a certain unnecessary action and thus avoid harm, or when they suspect that firing a shot at random could violate someone's right because it might strike a person, and although they could investigate whether anyone is present or not, they refrain from shooting and thus avoid wrongdoing. In such situations, one can dispense with investigation.

However, a person may sometimes be unable to perform a wise or virtuous action without prior investigation and knowledge, for example when they must visit a friend to fulfil their right but do not know the location of their house. In that case, they must inquire in order to find out the location of their house and carry out the visit.

A person may be able to attain the intended reality without acquiring knowledge, through caution and vigilance. But caution in such matters may come at a high cost, and so it becomes wise to obtain the necessary knowledge to avoid that cost. This is the usual case.

Knowledge may also assist in generating sufficient motivation, as it strengthens a person's will and commitment through the certainty and conviction that knowledge produces.

In such situations, it is preferable—or even obligatory—for the person to seek knowledge in order to accomplish wise and virtuous behaviour.

2. Excuse in the case of error or failure to reach reality: one who investigates a matter and errs is excused according to innate logic. Likewise, one who investigates a matter and does not reach a conclusion they can trust is not obligated to act upon it, unless the matter is so serious that it must be observed based on possibility alone.

These are two inevitable outcomes of cognitive pursuit (*sa'y ma'rifi*): either attaining reality or being excused with regard to it.

Whoever investigates their innate or legal duty in a given matter and attains it achieves the benefit of that duty and its positive effects. And if they err and conclude that the duty does not apply to them,

rational people would consider them excused and they are not held responsible for their error. The same holds when no duty becomes established for them even though the matter is possible, except when the matter is of such importance that caution is obligatory merely on the basis of possibility.

This is a clear and tangible idea in our lives. For example, if your father asks you to bring him something specific, such as his car, and you search for it, find it, and bring it to him, you have succeeded and deserve praise and thanks for what you have done. If you search diligently but do not find it, you are excused for failing to bring what was asked, because your effort excuses you. And if you are uncertain whether a car you see belongs to your father, you are similarly excused, since you are not obligated to bring the car merely on the basis of possibility that it might be his.

Therefore, a person's cognitive pursuit results in either attaining reality or being excused regarding it.

Accordingly, we can conclude from what has preceded that a human being needs cognitive engagement with things according to innate rational logic.

3.2 Levels of Appropriate Behavioural and Cognitive Engagement with Things

We have established that the necessity of cognitive engagement with things is derived from the necessity of behavioural engagement with them.

Accordingly, the required level of cognitive engagement is derived from the level of behavioural engagement. Thus, what is more important to know is determined by what is more important to do.

From the innate perspective, behavioural engagement with things occurs on two levels:

1. An obligatory level, which is when reason judges that neglecting engagement with something is reprehensible, making such neglect blameworthy among rational people and warranting wise legal prohibition. The degree of obligation naturally varies according to the

importance of the matter; the more important something is, the more emphatic the obligation to engage with it.

2. A non-obligatory level, which is when innate reason recommends engagement with something but does not judge neglect of it to be reprehensible. In such cases, a person is praiseworthy among rational people for undertaking engagement yet is not blamed for neglecting it. This level also has degrees, beginning slightly above the zero point of preference—where reason is neutral regarding engagement or non-engagement—and ending at the first degree of the obligatory level.

This classification of levels of engagement is self-evident. There are matters which, if we fail to engage with them on our own behalf or on behalf of others, result in reproach and blame, such as neglecting serious diseases that can be treated at their onset, or neglecting harms caused to others by our actions.

There are also matters where engagement is good but neglecting them is not blameworthy, such as a person's neglect of what may lead to contracting some minor harmful illness through lack of prudence, or neglecting to perform benevolent acts through charitable spending, or offering assistance, which are not rationally obligatory.

Law—in its contemporary sense—is concerned specifically with the obligatory level of matters that must not be neglected; therefore, it does not include provisions concerning mere preference.

As for the innate position, social custom, and religious legislation, they address both levels. Human conscience, for example, approves of some matters with obligatory approval and others with non-obligatory approval. Customary etiquette is likewise situated between preferred and obligatory. Similarly, religious rulings consist of two types: obligatory rulings, such as obligation (*wujūb*) and prohibition (*tahrim*), and non-obligatory rulings, such as recommendation (*istihbāb*) and reprehensibility (*karāha*).

It therefore becomes clear that behavioural engagement has two levels: obligatory and preferred, and that each naturally has multiple degrees.

It follows from this that the human being's cognitive engagement

with things likewise occurs on two levels: obligatory and preferred, each with its own range of degrees.

3.3 The Foundations of Innate Behavioural and Cognitive Engagement with Things

Behavioural engagement with things, according to the innate principles with which the human being is endowed, is built upon two interconnected foundations:⁶

1. An ethical foundation.
2. A wisdom-based foundation (*ḥikmiyya*)⁷.

These two foundations constitute the rational basis for cognitive engagement with things, in accordance with what was stated previously: that the basis of cognitive engagement is the very same as the basis of behavioural engagement that follows from it.

3.3.1 The Ethical Foundation of Behavioural and Cognitive Engagement and Its Application to Religion

The first foundation is the observance of the rights of others and refraining from transgressing against them. This is a self-evident, value-based foundation and is the source of all religious and human laws.

From the standpoint of this foundation, it is correct to say that the more something violates the rights of others, the more blameworthy and reprehensible it is, and the more emphatic and necessary it becomes to avoid it. Causing harm to others is reprehensible, and the greater the harm, the more severe the wrongdoing. Thus, killing another person, severing one of their limbs, or torturing them is extremely reprehensible.

⁶ The connection between them is that ethical norms (*al-sunan al-akhlāqīyya*) are the norms of righteousness and happiness according to reason that views happiness in a comprehensive and inclusive manner (see al-Sistani, *Ḍarūrat al-marīfat al-dīniyya*, 19).

⁷ In reference to wisdom (*ḥikma*).

This foundation also applies to religion, because God is a rational being⁸ who created the human being and bestowed upon him countless blessings, both within himself and in what surrounds him, so that he might know Him, appreciate His beneficence, and thank Him for it. It is therefore reprehensible for the human being to respond to God by neglecting to know Him, or by denying Him and disavowing His favour and beneficence, as God says, “Say to My servants who have believed that they should establish prayer and spend from what We have provided them, secretly and publicly, before a Day comes in which there will be no exchange, nor any friendships. God is He who created the heavens and the earth and sent down water from the sky and brought forth thereby fruits as provision for you and subjected for you the ships to sail through the sea by His command, and subjected for you the rivers. And He subjected for you the sun and the moon, continuous [in orbit], and subjected for you the night and the day. And He gave you from all you asked of Him. And if you should count the favour of God, you could not enumerate them. Indeed, mankind is [generally] most unjust and ungrateful.”⁹

Although God is not diminished in any way by the human being’s ingratitude for His beneficence, this does not mean that such behaviour is not reprehensible. Knowing God, acknowledging Him, and thanking Him, even in general terms, is a right that belongs to God, and it is a great right by virtue of His being the One who created the human being in the first place, and by virtue of the immense blessings He has bestowed upon him. Denying Him, therefore, is reprehensible.

A person can understand this intuitively by considering a similar attitude from a child toward his father: if the child neglects to know

⁸ Note: The use of the term “intellect” (*‘aql*) regarding the Divine is metaphorical and expansive, not literal. What is meant by it is the capacity for knowledge and understanding. The reason for choosing this expression—despite its expansiveness—over the expression “knowledge” (*‘ilm*) is that if “knowledge” were used, it would only indicate actual knowledge, not the capacity for knowledge.

⁹ Q 14:31–34.

him, acknowledge him, and thank him for his efforts, the child recognises this as reprehensible, even if the father does not depend on the child's attention in order to deserve such acknowledgment.

There is no difference in the value or importance of a right whether its possessor is God or another human being. The fact that the possessor of the right is God does not nullify or diminish that right. Rather, the establishment of a right and its degree depend on the sources from which that right arises and on the bonds upon which it is built. The bond of creation and immense beneficence necessitates an especially emphatic right.

3.3.2 The Wisdom-Based Foundation of Behavioural and Cognitive Engagement with Things and Its Application to Religion

The second foundation is observing what wisdom requires (*muqtaḍā l-ḥikma*), meaning that the human being should consider what achieves his happiness in a comprehensive and inclusive manner, encompassing the present, the near future, and the distant future.

From the standpoint of this foundation, it is correct to say that the more closely something pertains to a person's happiness or misery, the more important it is.

A person's marriage is an important matter, because the two spouses live their lives together; therefore, each must make a concerted effort to choose the other well, in order to secure greater, more abundant, and more lasting happiness.

A person's work and profession are likewise important, because human beings spend their lives practicing them and earning their livelihood through them. Therefore, one must choose a suitable profession, one in which they are in harmony and find happiness throughout their life. Avoiding deadly matters is also important, for they may lead a person to lose their life or suffer permanent disability, resulting in great distress.

The level of importance something has for a person's happiness or misery depends on its role in both, qualitatively and quantitatively. By *quality* is meant the degree of the happiness-inducing event or the

event that detracts from happiness; by *quantity* is meant how long this event continues and persists. Some events, for example, must be avoided because they are intensely painful, even if brief, while others must be avoided because, although their pain is slight, it persists for a very long time.

This principle applies to the matter of religion, because religion is the most important issue in a person's life, and therefore, most deserving of knowledge and careful investigation.

This is for two reasons:

1. Religion teaches that a person's happiness or misery after this life—an eternal duration—is tied to their insight and conduct in this life. Accordingly, every human action has an eternal effect on a person's everlasting life, making this life an opportunity for serious effort, testing, and examination, rather than mere amusement or indulgence.

According to religious accounts, this effect is not insignificant either qualitatively or quantitatively. The effects of deeds in the Hereafter resemble the effects of beneficial and harmful substances on the human body. Just as the entrance of a germ through unhealthy food—food a person failed to avoid—may cause severe and prolonged illness, while avoiding it ensures lasting immunity and vitality, so too do righteous deeds and erroneous ones have positive or negative effects in this manner. How immense is the meaning of eternity! For whenever a person contemplates it, its significance is never exhausted, its depth never fully grasped, and its reality remains wondrous.

2. True religion helps a person attain happiness in this life by securing the spiritual and moral dimensions within the human being; and it likewise contributes to securing the foundations of material happiness in an appropriate way.¹⁰

To explain this: happiness consists in a person's feeling of comfort, tranquillity, serenity, and stability.

It is of two types:

¹⁰ For details on this, see al-Sistani, *Ittijāh al-dīn fi manāḥī l-ḥayā, Miḥwar al-dīn wa-l-sa'āda*, 371.

1. Moral happiness, achieved by fulfilling the spiritual needs of the human being.
2. Material happiness, achieved by fulfilling the material and instinctual needs of the human being.

Religion plays a fundamental role in fulfilling some of the moral needs, just as it has a reliable and sound role in fulfilling another portion of those needs, as well as in contributing to the fulfilment of material needs in an appropriate manner.

As for the role of religion in fulfilling moral needs, it is clarified by noting that the moral needs of the human being are of two types:

The first type: the human being's need to rise somewhat above the material world and its attachments in order to maintain balance in those attachments. This is a notable spiritual need of the human being. Within the human being lies a spiritual aspect that includes a subtle feeling and attraction toward a higher being. This feeling may underlie what has been observed throughout the depths of history concerning humanity's orientation toward the divine, belief in religion, and practice of religious rituals.

It may also provide an appropriate explanation for what social studies and research indicate regarding the higher prevalence of psychological conditions, such as anxiety, depression, and similar disorders, in materially affluent societies compared to poorer or middle-class ones. These conditions point to a spiritual void experienced by the human being despite the fulfilment of material needs. Religion, through its inclusion of belief in a God who is concerned with the human being, fulfils this need, thereby securing a sense of happiness in them and filling their spiritual void.

The second type: the human being's need for moral matters. According to psychological studies and the findings of contemporary human development science, the human being requires—alongside material matters—a set of moral matters. These include rationality, virtuous ethics, the qualities of wisdom and contentment in life, beneficial hopes, and companionship. The need for these meanings and the inclination toward them is part of the human constitution, just as is

the inclination toward material matters.

Religion plays a fundamental role in fulfilling these needs in two respects:

The first respect: what is achieved through belief in God and in the human being's survival after death.

The deity who oversees the human being is, according to religion, characterised by rationality, virtue, and wisdom. He values these qualities in the human being and blesses the rational, virtuous, and wise stance. He also values the spirit of contentment and independence from material things as a lofty and refined human quality, and He represents a source of hope for the human being through His assistance, goodness, and care. Above all, He is an inseparable companion to the human being, present in all their states, hearing their intimate prayers and complaints, and aware of their anxieties and concerns.

As for the human being's survival after death being contingent upon their beliefs and righteous deeds, this nourishes the spirit of rationality, virtue, and wisdom, because it enables a person to free themselves from immediate material dependencies and rise to a clearer horizon of contemplation, reflection, and striving toward virtue. The fact that one's survival after this life depends on one's qualities and deeds means that these qualities find their proper positive effects in the Hereafter, which encourages the rational, virtuous, and wise orientation in this life.

Likewise, the idea of survival after death encourages beneficial contentment with respect to material matters in life, because this life is then not a pasture for indulgence and enjoyment, but an opportunity for testing and demonstrating competence, like an examination for students. What matters in it is sound insight and virtuous conduct, and this naturally inclines the human being toward beneficial contentment. Such contentment is further aided by many laws (*sunan*) linking this world and the Hereafter.¹¹

¹¹ Examples of this include the following: (1) What has been narrated concerning the lightness of reckoning (*ḥisāb*) for the deprived. What is meant by this is that whoever had a lesser share of the blessings of this life will

As for the role of belief in survival after death in creating beneficial hope, it arises from two aspects:

1. Survival after death is itself a natural hope for the human being. When a person contemplates the idea of their complete annihilation at death, they experience a strange and painful emptiness within themselves, in a manner that defies description. Inner consciousness testifies to this for those who reflect on it. Hence, a person looks their loved ones who have died—such as their parents, friends, and

have a lighter reckoning in the next life. Whoever was deprived of a blessing in this life—whether due to incapacity, or in observance of wisdom or virtue—will have that counted in his favour in the Hereafter. Thus, the wealthy and the poor will not be equal tomorrow, nor the capable and the incapable, nor the one who possesses and the one who lacks. A person's reckoning in the next life—where the scales of justice will be established for the Day of Resurrection—proceeds on the basis of both what he was given and what he did, and his rank is determined in light of that. This may be understood from His saying: “Then you will surely be questioned that Day about the blessing” (Q 102:8). And from Imam ‘Alī (a.s.) is his saying: “Travel light so that you may catch up” (al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-balāgha*, 62, Sermon 21), and “In its lawful [acquisition] there is reckoning, and in its unlawful [acquisition] there is punishment” (ibid., 106, Sermon 82). (2) What has been narrated in religion concerning the reckoning tomorrow of the one who possesses blessings, with regard to the extent to which he shared them with others. For example, if someone was wealthy, he will be held accountable for the extent of their care for the poor, the needy, and orphans who fall within their attention—whether spending on them or neglecting to do so—will be accounted for. Hence, it is narrated from the Prophet (s.a.w.): “Creation are the dependents of God, and the most beloved of creation to God is the one who benefits the dependents of God and brings joy to a household” (Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi* (Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya: 1407/1986), 2:164). In another *ḥadīth*: “Whoever does not show mercy will not be shown mercy” (al-Ṭūsī, *Tahdhīb al-aḥkām*, 2:32; Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 9 vols. (Dār Ṭawq al-Najā: 1422/2001), 8:7). (3) Religion further teaches that for every hardship a person endures in this life, there is relief they will find tomorrow.

prominent scholars—as if they continue to survive, and they wish them goodness and happiness. This is known even among non-believers.

2. Belief in survival after death provides hope for happiness in the Hereafter for a person who wishes to remain steadfast in virtuous action, or who lives in poverty and deprivation in this life, or suffers injustice from which they cannot escape; for religion indicates that all of these may be causes of happiness and reduced hardship in the Hereafter.

These are some of the roles of belief in God and the Hereafter in generating beneficial contentment and beneficial hope.

They also have roles in helping the human being avoid harmful forms of contentment and harmful hopes that impair rationality, wisdom, and virtue, or that restrict material happiness for no wise reason, as will be explained.

It might be expected that belief in God and the Hereafter would make a person accepting of injustice or neglectful of building this life, relying on God to change his circumstances or on the reward of the Hereafter.

This is a mistaken impression of religion. God created the human being in this world to be His vicegerent in it¹²—to develop it, build it, and benefit from it¹³—not to neglect or withdraw from it. He also loves the oppressed person who confronts the oppressor and refuses submission when wisdom requires it. He says, “Indeed, God will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves.”¹⁴

In the movement of Imam al-Ḥusayn (a.s.), there is an example of

¹² See Q 2:30.

¹³ As God says concerning the words of some of the prophets: “And to Thamūd [We sent] their brother Ṣāliḥ. He said, ‘O my people, worship God; you have no deity other than Him. He has produced you from the earth and settled you (*ista‘marakum*) in it, so ask forgiveness of Him and then repent to Him. Indeed, my Lord is near and responsive’” (Q 11:61).

¹⁴ Q 13:11.

the proper way to confront an oppressor.

The second respect: religious discourse in the Qur'an encourages these matters in a distinctive way.

The Qur'an is filled with exhortations toward rationality, reflection, contemplation, learning, observation, insight, verification, and similar meanings. It constantly encourages virtuous morals through such terms as the good (*ma'rūf*), the good deed (*ḥasana*), righteous action (*'amal ṣāliḥ*), justice (*'adl*), equity (*qist*), truthfulness (*ṣidq*), and chastity (*'afāf*). It likewise discourages blameworthy vices such as the reprehensible (*munkar*), the evil deed (*sayyi'a*), oppression (*ẓulm*), injustice (*jawr*), lying (*kidhb*), and speaking without knowledge. It also encourages the adoption of wisdom through knowledge of the patterns of life (*sunan al-ḥayāt*), drawing lessons from them, and being admonished by what they entail, to the extent that it makes wisdom the very purpose of sending the prophets.

The Qur'an also calls to contentment, explains the extent of its effect on a person's happiness in this life, calls to optimism and hope, and forbids despair and pessimism. It also calls to forms of companionship grounded in natural bonds such as sonship, fatherhood, kinship, neighbourliness, and the like.

Religion forbids harmful forms of contentment, harmful hopes, and harmful company.

Thus, the prominent role of religion in spiritual happiness becomes clear, in addition to its role in inner happiness.

As for the supporting role of religion in fulfilling material happiness in this life, its explanation is as follows: material happiness is achieved—as previously mentioned—by fulfilling the human being's instinctive desires in a moderate manner, without excess or deficiency. This is what religion encourages in all such desires: food, drink, parenthood, survival, beautification, engagement in beneficial activity, the means of well-being and health, care for rest and sleep, social dignity, and knowledge. As God says, "Marry such women as seem good to you,"¹⁵ and, "Your wives are a tilth for you, so come to your tilth

¹⁵ Q 4:3.

as you wish, and send ahead for yourselves.”¹⁶ And, “Spend in the way of God, and do not cast yourselves with your own hands into destruction.”¹⁷ And the Exalted says, “O Children of Adam! Put on your adornment at every place of worship, and eat and drink, but do not be excessive. Indeed He does not like the excessive. Say, “Who has forbidden the adornment of God which He has brought forth for His servants, and the good things of [His] provision?””¹⁸ alongside other Qur’anic verses and traditions narrated from the Prophet and his Household (a.s.).

It is mistaken to imagine that religion causes human suffering in this life or increases suffering by restricting human freedom.¹⁹

The most important causes of human suffering in this life arise in part to the fact that life itself is established upon the mixture of good and evil, the desirable and the undesirable, happiness and suffering. Another part is that certain sufferings are necessary for the rational, wise, and virtuous course of life. This course naturally entails a degree of hardship, even as it opens other doors of happiness, as previously described. It is known that this course is necessary for the human being whether religion exists or not.

Mistaken understandings of religion arise from misreading its texts, being influenced by unsound personal temperaments, inability to distinguish between religious teachings and restrictive customs, or lack of wisdom in prioritising and balancing benefits and harms.

These are the roles of religion in achieving happiness, and they include both individual and societal happiness. Individual happiness refers to the happiness of the person adhering to religion, and societal happiness refers to the well-being of other members of society.

The role of religion in attaining spiritual and material happiness has already been explained.

¹⁶ Q 2:223.

¹⁷ Q 2:195.

¹⁸ Q 7:31–32.

¹⁹ For details on this, see al-Sistani, *Ittijāh al-dīn fī manāḥī l-ḥayā, Miḥwar al-dīn wa-l-sa’āda*, 447.

This establishes that religion also contributes to societal happiness, because these two forms of happiness are observably interconnected—as confirmed by human development science and social studies—in a close relationship. The happy individual is found in the happy family and the happy society, just as the happy society is composed of individuals who live in happiness.

If you reflect on the qualities mentioned earlier, you will find that many of them are social qualities, such as virtuous social values, social companionship, and the like.

Moreover, religion has urged the making of others happy as an essential objective for the human being, and statistical studies show that most charitable donations and benevolent acts in the world arise from religious motivations.

Therefore, it is very important for every mature person—from the rational, wise, and ethical perspective—to be concerned with religion in a practical way, and in a cognitive way by striving to investigate the matter of religion.

3.4 The Innate Basis for the Necessity of Investigating Religion for Those Who Doubt the Truth of Religion

It may initially appear that what has been presented thus far establishes only the necessity of cognitive concern with religion for those who already trust in its truth and validity, and who perceive its importance from the ethical and wise perspectives. Such a person must, accordingly, concern themselves with investigating religious teachings in order to know them and act upon them.

However, this does not seem—at first glance—to establish the necessity of investigation for those who do *not* trust in the truth and validity of religion, since such individuals have not perceived the existence of anything important that would rationally oblige them to investigate it. Rather, they merely regard religion as *possible*, and, as they may claim, mere possibility has no binding force.

Yet this view is mistaken. The importance of a matter does not demand concern with investigating it only when it is certain; it often

requires concern when it is merely *possible* as well. This is generally evident from the innate rational perspective. Consequently, we observe that doubt about something prior to investigating it does *not* excuse a person, in the eyes of rational people, for the error they might fall into due to ignorance of that matter. Rather, a person must conduct the necessary investigation and act upon its outcome.

This issue is governed by two rational principles:

3.4.1 The First Principle: The Innate Triple Equation Principle That Governs Human Consideration of Possible Matters, and Its Application to Religion

A triple equation²⁰ that governs human consideration of interests, rights, and harms in cases of possibility. This equation resembles mathematical equations, and its three elements are:

1. The level of probability of harm, right, or benefit: probability includes what is below 100% within the range of human perception, extending down to zero.
2. The level of expected and possible harm, right, or benefit.
3. The cost of avoiding harm or of observing the right or benefit: if the probability is significant and the level of possible harm is not small, and the cost of avoiding it is not great, the human being chooses to avoid the harm.

The levels of these three elements compensate for one another. This means that the stronger the probability of harm, the lower the level of expected harm with which a person is satisfied in choosing to avoid it, and the more willing they are to incur a higher cost to prevent it. The reverse is also true: the greater the expected harm, the lower the probability with which the person is satisfied in choosing to avoid it, and the more willing they are to incur a higher cost to prevent it. Likewise, the lower the cost of preventing the harm, the weaker the probability, and the lower the expected harm with which one is

²⁰ For details on this, see al-Sistani, *Ḍarūrat al-maʿrifat al-dīniyya*, 28.

satisfied in choosing to avoid it.

This principle is well known in economic life, such as among merchants. Merchants consider three elements when undertaking any commercial transaction:

1. The level of probability of profit and loss.
2. The level of expected net profit.
3. The cost required to obtain that profit.

If the probability of profit is significant, the expected profit is suitable, and the cost and effort required to obtain that profit are acceptable, they proceed with that transaction; otherwise, they refrain.

The levels of the elements of this equation also compensate for one another in commerce, in the manner described earlier. The stronger the probability of profit, the lower the profit margin with which a merchant is satisfied in undertaking the step, and the more willing he is to accept a higher cost. Conversely, the greater the expected profit, the lower the probability with which the merchant is satisfied in proceeding, and the more cost he is willing to accept. And the lower the cost of obtaining the expected profit, the weaker the probability and the lower the level of profit with which he is satisfied in moving forward.

This equation is an innate equation that represents the structure of wise human behaviour in all areas of life. In every expected benefit, expected harm or possible right, a person compares the level of probability with the level of the benefit, harm, or right, and with the cost that must be paid, in order to determine whether a decision is wise or unwise.

This principle applies to the matter of religion. It follows that a person is not excused for falling into error due to doubting the truth of religion without completing the process of investigation and inquiry. This is because the level of possible harm, benefit, and right expected on the assumption that religion is true is extremely great and exceedingly serious, previously explained.

3.4.2 The Second Principle: The Innate Principle of the Value of Probability *Before* Investigation and Its Application to Religion

This is the principle that probability possesses established value *before* investigating a matter whose certainty would require concern.²¹ This, too, is a rational and innate principle that we all practice in our daily conduct, though it requires careful formulation.

Its meaning is that a given level of probability may have *no* value once a person has investigated the possible indicators and found nothing to establish the matter. However, that *same* level of probability requires caution and precaution *before* investigation and inquiry have been undertaken.

Take, for example, a case where you intend to travel and the probability of danger on the journey from a particular cause is only 3%. If you examine the indicators of danger and the probability does not increase, you may ignore it due to its weakness, and rational people

²¹ The difference between this principle and the first principle is that the value of probability (*iḥtimāl*) in this principle grows in view of the possibility of removing it through investigation and inquiry. But its rational value in the first principle grows according to the importance of what is probable and the scarcity of the cost of attending to probability.

These two principles—the triple equation and the value of pre-investigative probability—may converge in a single case, such that attending to the probable matter becomes obligatory according to both principles. They may also diverge. For example, there may be a matter that requires concern if it is certain; in that case, concern for it becomes obligatory based on its probability before investigation, according to this second principle. Yet concern does not become obligatory after investigation, when the probability weakens, because its level of obligation is not sufficiently established for the first principle to apply. Conversely, we may have a matter about which investigation has been completed without yielding confidence in its establishment, but which is dangerous, and where the cost of attending to it is not great. In that case, concern for its probability was obligatory before investigation according to the first principle, but this second principle no longer applies because the condition of pre-investigative doubt is no longer met.

would not blame you if harm occurred, since such a low probability is not of the kind that must be heeded. However, if you do *not* investigate those indicators of danger and proceed with the journey and then suffer harm, you would be blameworthy—so long as you could have become aware of those indicators had you investigated them.

Thus, we observe that a specific level of probability is not considered if a person's situation has settled upon it *after* investigation and inquiry, yet it *must* be considered before investigation. It is as though the value of probability before examination does not depend on the magnitude of the probability itself, but rather on the potential value of the knowledge or confidence (*iṭmi'nān*) that investigation would produce.

Because of this principle, a rational person must acquaint himself with the laws of life and legislative regulations that may concern him, for doubt before learning and inquiry does not excuse a person—even if the probability is weak. This is a well-known principle among the legal theorists (*uṣūlīyyūn*), who base it on general rationality and emphatic textual evidence.

By applying this principle to religion, it becomes clear that we must strive to verify the truth of religion through sufficient and appropriate investigation, rather than settling upon initial doubt or contenting ourselves with superficial acquaintance that does not—according to innate and rational judgment—match the importance and gravity of religion. Inadequate investigation is tantamount to no investigation at all.

From this, it becomes evident that the one who doubts the truth of religion, and whose error happens turns out to be mistaken—because religion is, in fact, true—is not excused, and bears responsibility for that error.

It is as though this is what several Qur'ānic verses allude to when urging people to consider the message of prophethood with the expression: "Have you considered if this message is true?" Some of these verses we cited earlier, among them His words, the Exalted: "Say, 'Have you considered: if it is from God and you disbelieve in it, who is more

astray than one who is in extreme dissension?”²²

4. The Necessity of Ensuring That the Investigation of Religion Is Objective and Befitting the Importance of Religion

The second discussion concerns the necessity—within epistemic concern—that the investigation of religion be objective and appropriate to the significance of religion.

We have already established that epistemic engagement with religion through investigation and inquiry is necessary, so that a person may arrive at the correct truth about it, benefit from its positive effects, and be excused if he errs in the conclusion he reaches.

However, it must be noted that the value of epistemic investigation and the legitimacy of its results, according to the sound innate logic with which the human being is endowed, is conditional upon two requirements.

4.1 The First Condition: The Necessity of Ensuring that the Investigation of Religion is Objective and Befitting the Importance of Religion

The investigation must be objective, proceeding in general from rational and logical starting points.

The rationale for this condition is that human thought can be influenced by psychological obstacles that prevent it from reaching the truth, such as desire for a particular outcome, emotional reaction to a specific situation, or hostility toward a certain party. These factors can transform of a person’s thinking from objective and sound to temperamental and biased thinking, referred to in contemporary psychology as “wishful thinking” (*al-tafkīr al-irti‘ābī*). This phenomenon is well known and widely observable. In family, social, political, and intellectual disputes, for example, we often see people deny a truth because its implications conflict with their personal inclinations or desires.

When a person approaches an issue based on a preconceived desire or passing emotion, he will not be persuaded by the truth, but will

²² Q 41:52.

instead employ his intellectual capacities—comparison, classification, analogy, other mental operations—to defend his preferred position.

In such a situation, the person's thinking has no rational value. He is blamed for allowing unsuitable impulses to influence his perception, and he is not excused for the error into which he falls as a result.

This matter is self-evident and universally acknowledged among rational people. Each of us recognises, for instance, that if a judge errs against someone due to bias toward the opposing party, then the judge has acted unjustly.

Therefore, according to the innate law, the value of knowledge and epistemic investigation applies only when the investigation is conducted on an objective basis.

A person who investigates objectively, therefore, is worthy of appreciation for his effort in seeking to perceive the truth. If he is correct, he obtains its positive effects; if he errs, he is excused and bears no responsibility for the error.

The Qur'an draws attention to the necessity of researching with objectivity and detachment from desires, and to avoid disputation based on falsehood. God says, "Is he who is upon clear evidence from his Lord like those to whom the evil of their deeds has been made attractive and who follow their desires?"²³ And He says, "And among the people is he who disputes about God without knowledge or guidance or an illuminating scripture."²⁴ And, "They are nothing but names you have named them—you and your forefathers—for which God has sent down no authority. They follow only assumption and what their souls desire, though guidance has already come to them from their Lord."²⁵

4.2 The Second Condition: The Necessity of Adequate Verification in Epistemic Investigation and Its Application to Religion

The second condition for the value and excusability of epistemic

²³ Q 47:14.

²⁴ Q 22:8.

²⁵ Q 53:23.

investigation is that it must include *adequate* verification of the subject. At times a person who seeks epistemic knowledge falls into negligence, indolence, and haste, and does not examine a matter with the adequate and appropriate level of scrutiny that it requires.

This condition, too, represents an innate, self-evident, rational principle that all people recognise. If a judge hastens in passing judgment between someone and his opponent, neglecting to examine the evidence that establishes the truth, the person will regard the judge as unjust and consider his judicial ruling devoid of epistemic value.

Negligence and haste never excuse a person from responsibility for the consequences of the error into which he falls, according to the innate law.²⁶

The degree to which “haste” (*al-tasarruʿ*) in forming an opinion is deemed blameworthy according to innate logic varies according to the sensitivity of the subject under investigation.

The matter becomes apparent when we consider that investigation of a subject of concern has several levels, the most fundamentals of which are three:²⁷

1. A person may investigate a matter with *minimal* effort. If he fails to reach a result, or if indicators suggest that the matter is not established, he stops there and proceeds as though the possible reality is in fact absent.

²⁶ The Qurʾān has warned against negligence in matters of religion and learning its precepts when someone’s emigration from a particular environment becomes necessary due to religious persecution there, as God says, “Indeed, those whom the angels take [in death] while wronging themselves—[the angels] will say, ‘In what [condition] were you?’ They will say, ‘We were oppressed in the land.’ They [the angels] will say, ‘Was God’s earth not spacious [enough] for you to emigrate therein?’ For those, their refuge is Hell—and evil it is as a destination. Except for the oppressed among men, women, and children who cannot devise a plan nor are they directed to a way” (Q 4:97–98).

²⁷ This classification of levels of inquiry is preliminary, for each level in turn has multiple ranks, each of which has its appropriate place according to the level of importance of what is being investigated.

2. He may engage in deeper verification, expending great effort and labour—extending the scope, method, and duration of the investigation.

3. He may go beyond this to the point where verifying the subject becomes a preoccupation dominating his mind, heart, and concerns. He may even travel for its sake of investigating it and endure hardship until he reaches a result in which he finds reassurance and confidence.

Accordingly, the question arises: what is the correct criterion for determining the level of investigation appropriate to any given matter?

We are all confronted with matters that we wish to verify in our personal, familial, and social lives. We may suspect that we are suffering from an ordinary or serious illness. We may suspect that our actions are being observed by someone before whom it is inappropriate to behave freely, due to feared negative consequences. We may also suspect that certain behaviours we engage in could have significant future effects on our personal, family, or social lives, potentially leading to serious harm such as psychological collapse, family disintegration, or social downfall. In such situations, the question naturally arises: what level of investigation is appropriate for us with respect to these and similar matters?

In reality, this is governed by an innate principle embedded in the human mind and acknowledged by all rational people when they consult themselves: *the level of investigation appropriate to a matter corresponds to the level of importance of that matter*. The more important, serious, and consequential something is, the more verification it requires. It is impermissible to abandon it and turn away from it before reaching the level of epistemic concern that befits its seriousness.

If a person falls short of this, he bears responsibility for the outcome according to rational people, and he has no excuse for the consequences that befall him.

Accordingly, it is mistaken to—as we sometimes do—that people vary in their concern for investigating matters merely according to temperament and instinct. One may expend great effort on something trivial, while neglecting something vital to his future, such as choosing

an appropriate spouse or finding suitable work from which he can earn a living.

By this principle, it becomes clear that the innate rational requirement is that a person's effort to verify the truth and validity of religion be serious and diligent, given the immense importance of religion. This is because the *possibility* that religion is true implies the possibility that the human being, in this life, is living through a test in which he is monitored, his level of insight and his actions are recorded, and he will receive good for good and the like for evil in an eternal life where the effects of deeds are magnified, just as a small germ causes fatal illness, or a single seed produces a fruit-bearing tree.

The Qur'ān describes this reality: God says, "And present to them the example of the life of this world: it is like rain which We send down from the sky, and the vegetation of the earth mingles with it, and then it becomes dry remnants scattered by the winds. And God is ever, over all things, Perfect in Ability. Wealth and children are the adornment of the worldly life. But the enduring good deeds are better to your Lord for reward and better for hope. And the Day We will cause the mountains to move, and you will see the earth laid bare, and We will gather them and not leave behind any one of them. And they will be presented before your Lord in rows: 'You have certainly come to Us just as We created you the first time. But you claimed that We would not appoint you for a meeting.' And the record will be placed, and you will see the criminals fearful of what is in it, and they will say, 'O woe to us! What is this book that leaves nothing small or great except that it has enumerated it?' And they will find what they did present. And your Lord does injustice to no one."²⁸

And He says, "And you are not in any state, nor do you recite any portion of the Qur'ān, nor do you do any deed except that We are witness over you when you are engaged in it. And not absent from your Lord is even the weight of an atom within the earth or within the heaven, nor anything smaller or greater, but that it is in a clear

²⁸ Q 18:45–49.

record.”²⁹

And the Almighty says, “And We place the scales of justice for the Day of Resurrection, so no soul will be treated unjustly at all. And if there is even the weight of a mustard seed, We will bring it forth. And sufficient are We as accountant.”³⁰

Accordingly, a person’s concern with searching for the true religion ought to be his foremost preoccupation in this life. His effort in reaching a conclusion—one for which he bears full responsibility, whether correct or mistaken—must be careful and serious, befitting the gravity of religion and its momentous message concerning God and the Hereafter. Neglecting this level of concern renders him negligent and fully responsible for his actions should his error become evident.

4.3 Manifestations of Negligence in Verifying the Matter of Religion

We observe numerous manifestations of negligence in verifying the matter of religion: whether due to being influenced by desires and impulsive emotions, or due to neglect and haste in forming conclusions.

Among these manifestations are the following:

1. Many of the issues raised to cast doubt on religion arise from simple questions with extremely easy answers—questions whose solutions become clear with a measure of serious reflection and investigation. It is unreasonable for a person to be satisfied with such questions and to stop at them when deciding upon the truthfulness and validity of religion. I have personally verified³¹ this matter directly by examining the common objections in their well-known sources and reflecting upon them, and I have found that these objections generally do not meet an acceptable level of presentation or intellectual rigour.

Consequently, it becomes evident to any observer that, were it not for certain secondary factors—such as emotional reactions to manifestations of extremism in the discourse and conduct of some who

²⁹ Q 10:61.

³⁰ Q 21:47.

³¹ See al-Sistani, the series *Manhaj al-Tathabbut fi Sha’n al-Dīn (The Method of Verification in Matters of Religion)*.

dominate contemporary media; the political failure of certain politicians who invoke religious language; and desires that are restrained by religious principles which protect human values—these objections would not have appeared in the first place.

2. A person may compare the effort he expends in examining any other matter that he considers important or serious—one that plays a decisive role in his life, such as marriage, university graduation, academic success, employment, social standing, family stability, and similar concerns—with the effort he has expended in gaining insight into the matter of religion.

Such a comparison allows a person to discern whether the intellectual effort he has devoted to researching religion is adequate, and whether it is proportionate to the seriousness of the subject of religion.

4.4 Some Important Rational Principles in the Context of Research and Investigation and Their Application to the Search for Religion

There are accessible rational points that rational people naturally observe in matters they care about, researching and investigating them in an appropriate manner. Here we mention two of the most important:

1. Many subjects appear obscure, confusing, or a source of doubt and hesitation when viewed from a distance. However, when one approaches them closely, a light emerges through which the truth can be discerned. Each of us experiences this in the field of knowledge with which we are familiar, in contrast to fields with which we are not. A person clarifies many matters in the area he knows well, while his colleagues regard the same matters with ambiguity or hesitation because they are not closely engaged with them; and the situation is reversed in fields with which he is unfamiliar.

This is a general principle with clear applications in each of our lives. One may find that some people experience confusion and hesitation regarding trust in certain individuals we know closely, based on things they have merely heard about them. Yet we, due to our

proximity—through kinship, marriage, friendship, or other relationships—perceive clearly that the person is trustworthy.

This idea applies equally to religion.

When a person views religion from a distance—considering the totality of what is attributed to it in terms of teachings and legislation, the totality of what is counted as its heritage and history, and the totality of what has been attached to it in terms of juridical opinions (*ijtihādāt*), customs, habits, and traditions—the matter becomes obscure. If a single aspect of this totality appears ambiguous to him, he generalises that ambiguity to everything else. This may tempt him to rely heavily on what appears to him in criticism or objection without allowing these thoughts to mature sufficiently.

However, when he approaches religion closely, he becomes capable of classifying its teachings and information according to their proper ranks, evaluating each matter according to its appropriate measure. He distinguishes between what is certain and what is the product of juridical reasoning according to its ranks, and between what is erroneous or unsupported by evidence. Through this, he recognises the extent to which religious discourse—especially the Qurʾān—emphasises rationality, reflection, and moral conscience, which establish fundamental and stable parameters for everything that can legitimately be part of religion, and which draw attention to the contexts of texts and events, and their conditions.

Likewise, when a person gains close familiarity with religion up close, he becomes aware that the standards and information upon which he relied in criticising religion are themselves varied: some are certain, others that are juridical with their respective ranks, and still others are erroneous because there is no proof for them; yet haste had led him to rely on all of them equally.

This allows a person to obtain a true, or nearly true, picture of religion, and the initial darkness he initially perceived begins to dissipate.

The situation with religion is at times similar to that of many controversial figures in history and society, around whom there exists a large body of claims, documents, indicators, and narratives, such that one cannot trust anything about them unless he approaches the

matter closely.

Accordingly, it is not appropriate for a person to judge the matter of religion from a distance; rather, he must come close to it in order to determine the degree of evidence established for it.

2. A person may find, regarding a particular idea, clear and evident indicators that establish it, alongside obscure and ambiguous points that might suggest something contrary to it, though without doing so clearly. In such a case, sound rational logic requires giving weight to the clear and evident indicators that establish the idea. It is not appropriate to suspend judgment about the idea due to obscure aspects, for what is obscure cannot overturn evidence that is clear and definitive.

This principle may be expressed as the principle of weighing indicators and information, or the principle of giving precedence to the clear over what is ambiguous—using the terminology found in the religious texts.³²

The meaning of this principle is that contradictory indicators arising within a single subject should not simply be placed in opposition. Rather, they must be sifted and evaluated with attention to the epistemic weight of each one, such that the clear and evident indicators are upheld to the exclusion of others.

This intellectual principle is universally applied across the sciences. A researcher does not suspend judgment on an established idea merely because some confusing points remain. We act similarly in ordinary life. If we know a friend to possess a quality such as generosity or lack of selfishness, and we encounter an ambiguous situation involving him, we assume the best and consider a plausible explanation for the ambiguity. We do not treat such situations as contradicting those confirmed qualities we have witnessed in him.

A methodological conclusion follows from this. A researcher investigating any subject seeks first to examine the clear and evident indicators regarding it. If this produces confidence, he need not occupy himself with the confusing and obscure aspects that may admit a

³² For details on this, see al-Sistani, *al-Qawā'id al-ʿamma li-l-maʿrifat al-insāniyya wa-l-dīniyya, al-Qā'ida 4*, 91.

reasonable explanation. How could he, when such obscure aspects may be endless? In nearly every subject that a person contemplates—apart from strictly mathematical and geometric operations—questions and ambiguities arise for the researcher at the outset. Yet, he does not concern himself with them once he has examined the clear indicators. For example, if a person has clear evidence of someone's sound position regarding a particular matter through close acquaintance or confirmed interaction, he does not concern himself with later points of ambiguity arising from unclear behaviours or circulating rumours about him.

This principle applies equally in matters of religion. Alongside clear indicators of the truth and validity of religion, there exist ambiguous or obscure matters and texts. These should not be treated as challenges to the truthfulness and validity of religion.

The correct method for investigating the truth and validity of religion is to seek out clear and evident points without pursuing every ambiguous point—which only increase with the passage of time—and then halt or suspend conclusions until all such ambiguities are enumerated and resolved, for that task has no end.

Proper grounding of issues and the establishment of a sound approach to reasoning about them are fundamental conditions for producing objective research that yields solid, correct, and reliable results, far removed from futile or barren argumentation.

Let us conclude this discussion with appropriate instructive Qur'ānic verses: God says, "But as for those who disbelieved, 'Were My verses not recited to you, but you were arrogant and became a people of criminals?' And when it was said, 'Indeed, the promise of God is truth and the Hour—there is no doubt about it,' you said, 'We do not know what the Hour is. We assume only assumption, and we are not convinced.'"³³

³³ Q 45:31–32. The point of evidence here is the warning against falling into a state of neglect or turning away from matters of religion on the pretext that we do not know its truth, nor possess certainty about it, but only hold conjecture (*ẓann*) regarding it.

And God says, “Respond to your Lord before there comes a Day from God for which there will be no repelling. You will find no refuge on that Day, nor will you have any possibility of denial. But if they turn away, then We have not sent you as a guardian over them; your duty is only to convey.”³⁴

³⁴ Q 42:47–48. The point of evidence here is the condemnation of turning away and the warning against it.

Chapter Five

How Does Religion Guide Humankind?

1. Introduction

Among the cognitive priorities that every mature person should attend to in this life is the serious investigation into the matter of religion, by which we mean whether there exists a message from God in which He discloses Himself, His attributes, and His care for humanity, and in which He explains that human beings have been created in this life to cultivate insight and virtuous, wise conduct, so that each person may attain their due rank in another existence.

This is because cognitive concern with things—according to the innate logic (*manṭiq fiṭrī*) with which humanity is endowed—must correspond to the importance and gravity of the matters under consideration. There is no doubt that religion, in the aforementioned sense, is an extremely important and grave matter. Indeed, it is the most momentous of all matters for human beings. For what could be more momentous than the possibility that this life is, for humanity, an opportunity for testing for another life, and that every step a person takes in it—whether small or great—is recorded and shapes their final evaluation in another existence?

Accordingly, if a person does not give religion the cognitive concern proportionate to its gravity, they bear responsibility for their actions if the path they follow proves to be mistaken, and they will not be excused according to the principles of innate logic.

Therefore, there is no doubt that cognitive concern with religion is necessary and essential.

However, a question naturally arises in this context: how does one verify the truthfulness and validity of religion, and what methodology should one adopt in order to reach this goal?

This question divides into two further questions:

The first is: what methodology should one adopt in verifying the

truthfulness and validity of religion?

The answer in general terms is clear. This methodology is the same rational methodology (*manhaj 'aqlānī rāshid*) that rational people employ in verifying all other important aims and goals they pursue. There is no distinct cognitive methodology reserved specifically for verifying religion. The human being is constitutionally equipped with rational and intuitive tools through which they verify things, and they use these tools across their various domains of concern in this life. They should therefore employ these very tools in sound investigation of religion.

The second is: what methodology has religion itself adopted in its discourse when calling humanity to believe in it and have faith? Has religion followed an objective and sound methodology in this context, or something else?

This is an extremely important question, because the methodology a speaker adopts in persuading the addressee is one of the most significant indicators for evaluating a discourse positively or negatively. If the discourse relies on a rational and coherent methodology, arguing on a reasonable and fair basis, this is an indication of the truthfulness of the discourse. But if it relies on stirring emotions, inflaming feelings, or arguing without substance, this casts doubt on its truthfulness and undermines confidence in it.

The answer in general terms is that the prophetic religious discourse represented in the Qur'ān—according to what becomes evident through study and reflection—does indeed follow an objective and sound methodology in persuading humanity and calling them to faith in God Almighty, and in the prophetic message. It is a discourse directed to reason rather than emotion, one that continually enjoins reflection and contemplation and urges reliance on convincing proof and sufficient evidence.

1.1 Examples from Verses of the Qur'ān

The Qur'ān makes clear that the purpose of the divine messages is to enlighten humanity and draw them out of the darkness of illusion and superstition, so that they may attain insight regarding the great

questions of life: “A Book which We have revealed to you so that you may bring humanity out of darkness into light, by the permission of their Lord, to the path of the Mighty, the Praiseworthy.”¹

God also says, “Is one who was dead and We gave him life and made for him a light by which he walks among the people like one whose likeness is in darkness from which he cannot emerge? Thus, it has been made pleasing to the disbelievers what they were doing.”²

The Qur’ān establishes, in a most emphatic and remarkable manner, the principle that one must follow proof (*burhān*) and evidence (*dalīl*) in any claim. It therefore calls upon humanity to test the truthfulness of the new message and its contents by comparing them to the prevailing beliefs that contradict it, on the basis of determining what accords with proof and reliable evidence. God says, “O humankind, there has come to you a proof from your Lord, and We have sent down to you a clear light.”³ And He says, “And whoever invokes besides God another deity for which he has no proof—his reckoning is only with his Lord. Indeed, the disbelievers will not succeed.”⁴

The Qur’ān also draws humanity’s attention to the fact that a reflective examination of the wonders of the universe and scenes of the cosmos, and making them “speak,” is sufficient to provide clear evidence of the existence of God. As God says, “And it is He who spread the earth and placed therein firmly set mountains and rivers; and from all the fruits He made therein two mates; He causes the night to cover the day. Indeed, in that are signs for a people who reflect. And within the earth are neighbouring plots and gardens of grapevines and crops and palm trees, growing several from a root or otherwise, watered with one water; but We make some of them exceed others in [quality of] fruit. Indeed, in that are signs for a people who reason.”⁵

These examples illustrate the Qur’ānic methodology in guiding

¹ Q 14:1.

² Q 6:122.

³ Q 4:174.

⁴ Q 23:117.

⁵ Q 13:3–4.

humanity.

The purpose of this chapter is to clarify this subject in greater detail, so that it may assist the researcher in gaining insight into the matter of religion.

1.2 Research Methodology

We shall discuss the subject in two investigations, corresponding to the two preceding questions.

First, we shall describe the sound method—according to the perspective of human rationality—that religion ought to follow, if it is true, in order to persuade people generally of its truthfulness.

Then, secondly, we shall examine whether religion, according to the contents of the divine message (the Qurʾān), has in fact adopted that sound method in convincing humanity.

2. Defining the Correct Method of Persuasion That Religion Ought to Follow if It Is True

With respect to the first investigation, it is observed that the sound method for persuading humanity of the truthfulness and validity of religion is the intuitive method that rational people ordinarily follow when seeking to convince others of the educational and moral truths they have attained. There is no special method of persuasion that applies uniquely to religion.

2.1 Types of Discourse

To clarify this, discourse directed at others may be aimed not at persuading them, but at other purposes such as disputation, denigration, or argumentative victory. In such cases, the speaker allows himself to employ any means that will secure advantage over his opponent, including forms of attack and sophistry.

Discourse may also be directed at another for the purpose of persuasion, and this takes two forms:

The first form is rational, wise, and principled discourse: speech that addresses the intellect and, in its efforts to persuade, discuss, or

critique, relies on activating awareness, stimulating thought, prompting objective contemplation, and drawing upon the sound human practices of reasoning. It distances itself from personal inclinations, emotions, and reactions, and avoids faulty methods such as lying, accusation, or exaggeration.

The rational character of such discourse does not preclude it from being eloquent, for eloquence need not entail false embellishment or artificial flourish. It may instead consist in presenting the strengths of the argument through well-chosen semantic elements and words that possess an effective phonetic and linguistic impact.

The second form is non-rational discourse. This is discourse that employs any means or method that might succeed in persuading others, including sophistry (*mughālaṭa*)—argumentation that uses deceptive or erroneous reasoning whose flaws the speaker expects will remain concealed from the addressee. Similar to this is the emotional method, by which the discourse relies on inflaming feelings, stirring instincts, and rousing particular inclinations. This encompasses what is termed in contemporary language populist or mobilising discourse.

2.2 Characteristics of Rational Discourse

Rational discourse rests, in its tools and content, upon three pillars. The first pillar is epistemological and intellectual rationality. This consists in directing speech to the intellect and proceeding from general rational knowledge and experience. It develops the spirit of reasoning and sound, objective thought within the addressee regarding the subject under discussion, and calls for elements that assist in sound thinking, such as verification, comparison, and inquiry, while urging the exclusion of psychological obstacles to sound judgment—such as whims, inherited traditions, prejudices, or preconceived inclinations.

Rational discourse presents claims—within the scope accessible to the addressees, even if only by way of guidance—are enlightened and sound, such that the discerning addressee perceives in them the light of reason and the mark of truth. Its argumentation is based on objective, intuitive tools that instil confidence and engender firm and deep

conviction in any recipient who is sincere with himself and genuinely seeking truth.

The second pillar is wisdom-based rationality (*al-‘aqlāniyya al-ḥikmiyya*), which means that the discourse proceeds from a spirit of wisdom (*ḥikma*)⁶ and addresses that spirit within the human being, arousing his disposition towards wise judgment. Wisdom consists in attentiveness to the diverse laws and realities of life—at the personal, social, historical, and psychological levels—through which human life operates, and in taking these laws into consideration when formulating the instructions and counsels contained in the message.

Accordingly, rational discourse must be wise discourse, both in its content—so far as accessible to the addressees—and in its tools and etiquette. Its method must be a wise one, suited to addressing doubt, hesitation, anxiety, or obstinacy within the addressees in accordance with the requirements of eloquence (*balāgha*), which scholars define as the conformity of speech to the requirements of the situation.

The third pillar is ethical rationality. This requires the discourse to observe the principles of moral conscience and to awaken and stimulate these principles within its audience. Thus the discourse becomes ethical both in substance—by adopting ethical principles as the foundation of the message, acknowledging them where they are clear (which lies within the scope of general human conscience) and seeking them where they are obscure—and in the methods it employs, which must adhere to these ethics: truthfulness, consistency, verification, fulfilment of commitments, and all other sound ethical tools. It must avoid practices such as lying, inconsistency, betrayal, hypocrisy, and all other corrupt methods, refusing to justify them under the pretext that “the end justifies the means.”

⁶ The difference between wisdom and knowledge is that knowledge consists of correct and sound ideas, whereas wisdom is the attentiveness to those ideas and the act of taking them into account in the course one follows. For example, knowing that smoking is harmful constitutes knowledge; taking that information seriously and striving to train oneself to quit smoking constitutes wisdom.

These three rationalities are the pillars that must be observed in the sound method of persuasion in the context of teaching and education. They represent different yet complementary and necessary dimensions of rationality.

The first is epistemological and intellectual rationality, which is the primary necessity, because sound knowledge and rational culture form the fundamental basis of any proper guidance.

The second is wisdom-based rationality (*al-‘aqlāniyya al-ḥikmiyya*), which is also necessary, for it is part of human rationality to attend to the requirements of wisdom (*ḥikma*), order, harmony, and appropriateness among things and events.

The third is ethical rationality, which is likewise necessary, for it is part and parcel of rationality to observe virtuous values that accord with human nature (*fiṭra*) and provide it with calm, reassurance, and deep conviction.

These three forms of rationality must be embodied both in the tools of persuasion and in the content of the discourse.

In the tools of persuasion, the following should be observed:

1. Persuasion must be based on objective and rational logic, without resorting to rhetorical provocation or manipulative psychological techniques.
2. The wise principles in general social persuasion must be observed, with attention to the implications of the tools used and their immediate and long-term effects on the mentality of society and its manner of receiving ideas.
3. The principles of virtue must be upheld in the practice of persuasion.

As for the content of the discourse, it too must be built upon these three pillars. When the sender of the message is rational, wise, and virtuous, the observance of rationality, wisdom, and virtue must be reflected in the content of his message and in the teachings it conveys. Its content should therefore be illuminating and radiant, elevated by the light of truth, the dignity of wisdom, and the purity of conscience,

calling its audience to accept what lies beyond their immediate knowledge in the most excellent manner.

The same applies to God; for these qualities befit God alone, and it befits Him to enjoin what they require in His teachings to humanity.

This is the method followed by rational and mature people when persuading others of the truths they must recognise and heed. Fair-minded leaders follow it when persuading their communities of the common good. We find an example of this in Imam ‘Alī’s discourse to the public when persuading them of his decisions regarding war and peace, the limits of the ruler’s rights and the subjects’ entitlements, and the obligation to treat people fairly in what is owed to and expected from them. Successful fathers likewise follow it when persuading mature children of what their personal and social interests—present and future—require in the form of wise decisions, prudent guidance, relevant testimony, and sound warning.

3. Did Religion Follow the Aforementioned Rational Method of Persuasion?

The second inquiry concerns the method that religion—more precisely, God’s message to humanity—adopted in guiding human beings and persuading them of this divine message. Did religion rely on the intuitive, rational method discussed above, or not?

This question arises because religion necessarily followed a particular path in persuading humanity, a path reflected in its texts and history. What, then, is the method religion relied upon in persuading human beings? What tools and approaches did it employ, and are these methods rational and intuitive?

We previously noted, in general terms, that when a researcher examines the Qur’ānic discourse in presenting the teachings and legislation of religion and in addressing prevailing beliefs and customs, he finds that this discourse is rational. It relies on objective thinking, draws on wise human principles in persuasion, and observes virtuous values in argumentation and proof. In this way, it proceeds according to a clear intuitive method.

However, some confusion may arise regarding this matter, which

makes further clarification necessary.

The confusion stems from an impression some may have that the method used in the divine messages to persuade humanity of religion was not the intuitive method familiar among rational and mature people in their efforts to persuade others. Rather, they imagine it was based on presenting unseen tidings (*anbā' ghaybiyya*) and devotional legislation (*tashrī'āt ta'abbudiyya*) that human reason cannot grasp, coupled with two elements:

First: miracles (*khawāriq*) beyond human capability, presented as proof of the messenger's connection to God, who possesses miraculous power.

If we observe the message of Moses (a.s.), represented in the Torah, we find it associated with miracles—such as the staff turning into a serpent, the sea being parted, and the earth being struck with the staff so that twelve springs gushed forth—all as described in the Qur'an.⁷

If we consider the message of Jesus (a.s.), represented in the Gospel, we find it associated with acts such as forming from clay the likeness of a bird and breathing into it so that it becomes a living bird by God's permission; healing the blind and the leper, reviving the dead by God's permission; and informing people of what they ate and what they stored in their homes—all as described in the Qur'an.⁸

And if we consider the message of the Prophet of Islam, represented in the Qur'an, we find that it is based on Qur'an's challenge to the Arabs, who were unable to produce anything like it in its structure and rhetorical expression. As the Almighty says, 'And if you are in doubt about what We have sent down upon Our Servant, then produce a chapter like it and call upon your witnesses besides God, if you are truthful.'⁹ And the Exalted said, 'Or do they say, "He invented it"? Say, "Then bring forth a chapter like it and call upon whomever you can besides God, if you are truthful."¹⁰

⁷ Q 7:160.

⁸ Q 3:49 and 5:110.

⁹ Q 2:23.

¹⁰ Q 10:38.

Second: the use of promise and threat in an extraordinary manner—whether worldly (such as promises of victory or threats of devastating punishment descending from heaven) or otherworldly (such as the promise of Paradise and the severe warning of Hellfire).

According to this impression, religion did not rely in persuading people of it on the conformity of its teachings to reason, nor on the harmony of its legislation with the requirements of wisdom and the human moral conscience. Rather, it relied exclusively on miracles (*khawāriq*).

This is the impression that may arise in the mind of some researchers regarding the method by which religion seeks to persuade people.

However, this impression is mistaken and results from receiving religion indirectly—from observing the condition of ordinary people—rather than receiving it from its primary source, namely the Qur’ānic discourse, which is the very text sent by God. When viewed through the lens of common practice, it may appear at first glance¹¹ that many people receive religion merely as unseen tidings (*anbā’ ghaybiyya*) and devotional legislation (*tashrī‘āt ta‘abbudiyya*) that must be believed on account of the miracles (*khawāriq*) supporting them and the promises and threats attached to conforming or failing to conform to them.

Yet when we examine the Qur’ānic text itself, we find that it relies on the intuitive method for persuading humanity of religion through its three aforementioned pillars. The concepts related to these pillars—reasoning, wisdom, and ethics—are presented in the Qur’ān with striking emphasis and frequent repetition. They form the very structure of its doctrinal and practical teachings and constitute the thread that runs through every part of its discourse, as will be clarified.

As for the reliance on miracles (*khawāriq*)—the most prominent of which, in Islam, is the Qur’ān’s unparalleled rhetorical character—this reliance did not replace the conformity of the religion’s teachings

¹¹ In reality, this view of people’s conditions is a superficial one and not accurate, for deep reflection and contemplation on people’s conditions leads to their being influenced in accepting religion by innate and intuitive factors.

and its methods of persuasion with the requirements of sound reason, wise judgment, and a living moral conscience. Rather, miracles served as a necessary component in many historical contexts to establish the Prophet's true connection to God, for God is the source of miraculous power. The deniers of the messengers would challenge the prophets to prove their connection to God by means of tangible, material evidence,¹² and thus it became necessary to display such proof before the wider public.

Likewise, the promises and threats concerning the afterlife were not introduced as methods of persuasion. Rather, their mention was grounded in two considerations:

1. To explain the order that has been decreed for human life: that this life is an opportunity for choice, after which every person will arrive at the place suited to their deeds. The relationship between one's deeds and their consequences in the Hereafter is like the relationship between sowing and harvesting, where something small thing yields abundant and ever-increasing results; or like the relationship between germs and disease, where a minute organism leads to chronic or fatal symptoms.

2. The human can never dispense with encouragement and motivation when being guided toward the wise and virtuous path. This is one of the general and observable laws of life. As a result, systems that guide human beings are naturally supported by consequences, for it is not fitting to treat the doer of good and the doer of evil alike. Rather, the doer of good must be encouraged "for the onlookers," and the wrongdoer must be warned against wrongdoing.

Accordingly, what appears in the Qur'ānic discourse of promise

¹² As stated in the Qur'ān about Pharaoh concerning Moses, "He said, 'If you have brought a sign, then produce it, if you are truthful.' So he threw down his staff, and behold, it was a clear serpent. And he drew out his hand, and behold, it was white" (Q 7:6–7). Regarding the people of the Prophet, God said, "And they say, 'O you upon whom the message has been sent down, indeed you are mad. Why do you not bring us the angels, if you are among the truthful?'" (Q 15:6–7).

and threat—alongside its language of rationality, sound judgment, wisdom, and virtuous values—serves to motivate human being to search earnestly and reflect deeply upon the message. It encourages them to respond to this rational and ethical discourse despite the difficulties of the path, such as the persecution of believers at the hands of those who deny the message. It also dissolves the psychological barriers that obstruct faith, barriers that in many cases can only be overcome through the presence of genuine fear and assured hope.

Let us now clarify this point by examining the place of each of the three aforementioned pillars of sound discourse within the Qur'ānic text.

3.1 Reliance on the Pillar of General Cognitive Rationality

As for the first pillar—the reliance on general cognitive rationality and its activation within the human being—it constitutes the primary foundation of Qur'ānic discourse. We observe that the Qur'ān's method of persuasion rests upon sound rational and objective logic, free from rhetorical provocations or subtle psychological manipulation. It demands that the human being engage his conscience and intellect when considering the contents of this new divine message.

The Qur'ānic text is clearly characterised by this quality. Its argumentation proceeds through reason, proof, and clear evidence, stimulating in the human being the habits of thinking, reflection, and sound judgment. It prohibits being swayed by disputation, sophistry, or psychological manipulation, as illustrated earlier through examples of its argumentation.

The manifestation of general rationality in the Qur'ān appears through its emphatic insistence on several matters:

1. The human being must listen attentively to various statements concerning important and serious matters, and then, through reason, choose the truest and most fitting among them. The Qur'ān says, “So give good tidings to My servants, who listen to speech and follow the best of it. Those are the ones God has guided, and those are people of

understanding (*ulū l-albāb*).¹³ This is a very inspiring and remarkable verse. Related to this category are the verses that urge attentive listening to the divine message and deep reflection upon it, such as: “Will they not listen?” (*a-fa-lā yasma‘ūn*), “that you may listen attentively” (*li-taṣghā*). Among them, too, are verses describing some recipients as turning away or deaf to this discourse.

2. Reliance on proof, clear evidence, and illuminating arguments in the belief that one accepts for himself. The verses concerning this are numerous,¹⁴ several of which have been cited previously.

3. The necessity of emphasising reasoning (*ta’aqqul*) and thinking. The Qur’ān encourages these capacities through a wide range of expressions: “Will they not reason?” (*a-fa-lā ya‘qilūn*), “Will they not think?” (*a-fa-lā yatafakkarūn*), “Will they not reflect?” (*a-fa-lā yatadabbarūn*).

This also includes verses calling for contemplation of events and their implications, drawing out meanings from phenomena, comparing between things, and to probing their essence: “Will they not look?” (*a-fa-lā yanẓurūn*), “Do they not see?” (*a-lā yarawna*), “Will they not perceive?” (*a-fa-lā yubṣirūn*).

4. The human being must remember the knowledge he has acquired. Remembrance (*tadhakkur*) refers to being mindful of what one has found and known and taking heed of it. The Qur’ān explicitly stresses this: “Will you not remember?” (*a-fa-lā tadhakkarūn*), “Will they not remember?” (*a-fa-lā yatadhakkarūn*), “Is there any who will remember?” (*fa-hal min muddakir*).

5. The human being must avoid disputation based on falsehood: fabricated arguments or contrived doubts. “And We have certainly diversified in this Qur’ān for the people from every kind of example, but man has ever been, of all things, most prone to dispute.”¹⁵

¹³ Q 39:17–18.

¹⁴ These are all the verses that mention the terms “proof” (*burhān*), “clear evidence” (*bayyina*), “light” (*nūr*), and other such terms that belong to the same category.

¹⁵ Q 18:54.

This Qur'ān emphasises this even when addressing stubborn opponents. God instructs the appropriate method when addressing the People of the Book: “And do not dispute with the People of the Book except in the best manner, except for those who commit injustice among them, and say, ‘We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you. And our God and your God is one; and we are Muslims in submission to Him.’”¹⁶ Disputing “in the best manner” means conducting debate in accordance with truth, free of sophistry and fanaticism.¹⁷

6. Drawing attention to the obstacles that impede sound perception—whether objective or emotional. These include blind loyalty to the ways of one’s forefathers, refusal to accept the truth upon encountering it, and changing one’s correct position for misguided reasons,

¹⁶ Q 29:46.

¹⁷ The verse advises Muslims to explain to the People of the Book, in their debates with them, that they in no way reject the truth affirmed by the People of the Book regarding the God they worship, nor do they doubt on the truthfulness of the previous messengers and the revealed scriptures. They worship the very same God, and affirm the prophets and books that preceded them, Yet a new messenger has now come, confirming those before him and their scriptures, and presenting compelling proofs of a new message from God. Accordingly, they are left with no legitimate option but to submit to him just as they submitted to the earlier religion, for it is not right to differentiate between messengers within the domain of religion. This is a method of disputation (*mujādala*) or debate that appears fair and seeks the truth, standing in contrast to methods of disputation rooted in falsehood (*jadāl bi-l-bāṭil*). For example, if Muslims were to say that we do not believe in the God you believe in because He favours you (the Children of Israel) over us (the Arabs), and we do not trust the messengers you believe in and the scriptures you claim were sent to them, but we believe in the God who sent us our messenger and the Book He sent to us. Such a claim would simply mirror the very sectarianism and fanaticism expressed too them by the People of the Book—“We believe in what was revealed to us” (Q 2:91). This would be a reciprocal fanaticism rather than a fair-minded quest for truth.

all of which distort the value and impact of the truth within the human conscience and preoccupy a person with the worldly blessings he enjoys. These themes appear frequently in the Qur'ān, as in the verse: "And when it is said to them, 'Come to what God has revealed and to the Messenger,' they say, 'Sufficient for us is that upon which we found our fathers.' Even though their fathers knew nothing, nor were they guided?"¹⁸ And God said, "And We will turn away their hearts and their eyes just as they refused to believe in it the first time. And We will leave them in their transgression, wandering blindly."¹⁹ And, "That is because they believed, and then they disbelieved, so their hearts were sealed over, and they do not understand."²⁰ And He says, "No! Rather, their hearts have been stained by that which they used to earn."²¹

These are examples of the general Qur'ānic instructions regarding the method that religion recommends for verifying its truth.

If we examine the practical implementation of these principles, we find that the Qur'ān indeed relies on these general rational principles in establishing the truths it proclaims, refuting the prevalent beliefs of its time, and guiding toward appropriate and wise legislation.

Examples of this include:

1. Refuting the claim of the People of the Book that Paradise belongs exclusively to them. Their assertion lacks any proof for such an extraordinary privilege over all other peoples and nations, even though all share equally in humanity. God says, "And they say, 'None will enter Paradise except one who is a Jew or a Christian.' These are their wishful thoughts. Say, 'Produce your proof, if you are truthful.'"²²

2. Demolishing the claim that anything else possesses divinity alongside God, on the basis that there is no evidence whatsoever for such divinity. God says, "Say, 'Have you considered what you invoke besides God? Show me what they have created of the earth, or do they

¹⁸ Q 5:104.

¹⁹ Q 6:110.

²⁰ Q 63:3.

²¹ Q 83:14.

²² Q 2:111.

have a share in the heavens? Bring me a scripture before this or some remnant of knowledge, if you are truthful.”²³ And He says, “And whoever invokes besides God another deity for which he has no proof—then his reckoning is only with his Lord. Indeed, the disbelievers will not succeed.”²⁴ And also, “Is He who originates creation and then repeats it, and who provides for you from the heaven and earth—is there a deity with God? Say, ‘Produce your proof, if you are truthful.’”²⁵

3. Refuting the justification offered by some polytheists for their polytheism and their erroneous prohibitions, which they claimed were permitted by God—on the grounds that had God willed otherwise, He would have prevented them. The Qur’ān shows this argument to be mere disputation based on falsehood (*mujādala bi-l-bāṭil*) and devoid of knowledge or insight. Otherwise, every falsehood and sin occurring in life would, by the same reasoning, be deemed legitimate simply because God did not stop it. Exalted is He above that. He says, “Those who associated with God will say, ‘If God had willed, we would not have associated anything, nor would our fathers, nor would we have prohibited anything.’ Likewise did those before them deny until they tasted Our punishment. Say, ‘Do you have any knowledge that you can produce for us? You follow not except assumption, and you are not but falsifying.’”²⁶

4. Critiquing the belief of the disbelievers in the divinity of certain things, which they inherited from their forefathers and followed with fanatical loyalty, without any evidence or proof. “These are nothing but names you have named—you and your forefathers—for which God has sent down no authority. They follow only assumption and what their souls desire, though there has already come to them guidance from their Lord.”²⁷

What becomes evident through these examples is the Qur’ān’s

²³ Q 46:4.

²⁴ Q 23:117.

²⁵ Q 16:64.

²⁶ Q 6:148.

²⁷ Q 53:23.

objective, rational, and fair-minded standard in its critique of ideas, its examination of them, and its comparison between them.

These are only a few examples among dozens found in the Qur'ān.

Thus, anyone who reflects on the Qur'ān finds that its discourse is emotionally resonant while grounded in rationality at its core, in its stimulation, and in its motivational force—so much so that this quality shines through hundreds, if not thousands, of Qur'ānic verses.

Every idea relating to God, humanity, legislation, the cosmos, or other beings is articulated in the Qur'ān through a language that is at once emotive and rational.

3.2 The Qur'ānic Discourse's Reliance on the Foundation of Wisdom

As for the second foundation of mature discourse—its reliance on wisdom (*ḥikma*) in directing and orienting discourse—this constitutes the second pillar of the Qur'ānic discourse. The Qur'ānic argues through a wise method, pursuing wisdom in its tools and in its content, whether in matters of belief or legislation.

Regarding the tools of persuasion, the Qur'ān observes the principles upon which human existence is built, including humanity's natural inclination to recognise wisdom and respond to wise speech. Hence it repeatedly describes the Qur'ān as “the wise” (*al-ḥakīm*). God says, “These are the verses of the Wise Book.”²⁸

It likewise enjoins that the call to others be conducted with wisdom, as God says, “Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is rightly guided.”²⁹

The Qur'ān's concern with observing wisdom appears in several ways: first, it praises wisdom and encourages it by invoking the term, its derivatives, and similar expressions. Second, its method of explanation and clarification—of phenomena, events, and legislation—is

²⁸ Q 31:2 and 10:1.

²⁹ Q 16:125.

extremely abundant, whether through explicit explanatory particles such as *lām* and *kay* (particles used to indicate purpose), or through descriptive commentary indicating causality (*‘illiyya*). Third, it elucidates the relationships between things in a manner that reveals their harmony, consistency, and order.

As for the religion’s proceeding on a wise basis in belief: this is evident in its account of God, glorified be He—as wise, His wisdom encompassing all His actions in bringing the cosmos and its beings into existence, and in creating and guiding humanity.

Regarding God’s being characterised by wisdom, it is clear in the religion that this attribute befits Him; for the divine attributes of knowledge, power, and comprehensive mastery—as they appear in the visible cosmos—naturally entail wisdom. Wisdom is itself a manifestation of the perfection of knowledge and rationality. God says, describing God with wisdom and indicating that this quality is what renders the content of the divine message wise: “The revelation of the Book is from God, the Exalted in Might, the Wise.”³⁰ And He says, “And indeed, you receive the Qur’ān from one who is Wise and Knowing.”³¹

Concerning the creation of the cosmos and beings, religion states that God created the heavens and the earth for a specific purpose toward which they lead, and not for amusement or in vain. That purpose becomes manifest through the existence of the Hereafter, as God says, “And We did not create the heavens and the earth and what is between them in play. We did not create them except in truth, but most of them do not know. Indeed, the Day of Judgment is the appointed time for them all.”³²

He likewise created humanity for a specific purpose: to be His viceroy (*khalīfa*) upon the earth, so that human beings may come to know what the world contains, benefit from it, find evidence of His existence, and recognise His right and His blessings. God says, “And when your Lord said to the angels, ‘Indeed, I will make upon the earth

³⁰ Q 46:2.

³¹ Q 27:6.

³² Q 44:38–40.

a vicegerent (*khalīfa*).”³³ And He says, “We have certainly created humanity in the best of stature.”³⁴ And He says, “Indeed, We created humanity from a sperm-drop mixture that We may test him (*nabtalīhi*); and We made him hearing and seeing. Indeed, We guided him to the way, be he grateful or be he ungrateful.”³⁵

He also created the beings surrounding humanity, subjugated (*musakhkhar*) to human use, so that human life may be ordered through them and benefit derived from them. He said, “And He has subjected to you whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth—all from Him. Indeed, in that are signs for a people who give thought.”³⁶ And the Almighty says, “And He has subjected to you the night and the day and the sun and the moon, and the stars are subjected by His command. Indeed, in that are signs for a people who reason.”³⁷

Moreover, God has placed in the distant horizons and the heavens signs that point to the far-reaching purposes of the material cosmos. He says, “It is God who has created seven heavens and of the earth, the like of them. [His] command descends among them so you may know that God is over all things competent and that God has encompassed all things in knowledge.”³⁸

Regarding the manner in which things come into being, God has created everything according to precise calculation and determination (*taqdīr*). He established the various laws (*sunan*) of the cosmos—psychological, social, and historical—upon wise, harmonious, and fitting foundations and principles; and He brought beings into existence according to a proportionate and purposeful pattern. God says, “Who perfected everything that He created.”³⁹ And He says, “Indeed, all

³³ Q 2:30.

³⁴ Q 95:4.

³⁵ Q 76:2–3.

³⁶ Q 45:13.

³⁷ Q 16:12.

³⁸ Q 65:12.

³⁹ Q 32:7.

things We created with determination (*qadar*).”⁴⁰ And He says, “He said, ‘Our Lord is He who gave each thing its form and then guided [it].’”⁴¹

In the realm of life’s unfolding events, God has determined these events in accordance with the laws of creation and in accordance with the nature of worldly life, which is marked by the intermingling of good with evil and prosperity with adversity. This exists in order to test humanity and observe the nature of his response to various situations he encounters, so that his rank may be determined accordingly. God said, “And We test you with evil and with good.”⁴² And also, “And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient.”⁴³ And He says, “Who created death and life to test you [as to] which of you is best in deed—and He is the Exalted in Might, the Forgiving.”⁴⁴ And He says, “And We will surely test you until We make evident those who strive among you and the patient, and We will test your affairs.”⁴⁵

In this regard, God has observed, even in responding to humanity, including the prophets and the chosen ones, the limits appropriate to the laws of the cosmos, to the phenomena of life, to the welfare of the human species, to the needs of the social environment, and to the character of the one who asks. As He says, “And whoever is mindful of God, He will make a way out for him. And will provide for him from where he does not expect. And whoever relies upon God, then He is sufficient for him. Indeed, God will accomplish His purpose. God has already set for everything a measure.”⁴⁶

Regarding the creation of humanity and God’s dealings with him: religion states that the human being is a rational being who perceives

⁴⁰ Q 54:49.

⁴¹ Q 20:50.

⁴² Q 21:35.

⁴³ Q 2:155.

⁴⁴ Q 67:2.

⁴⁵ Q 47:31.

⁴⁶ Q 65:2–3.

wisdom and its opposite, and that he has been charged with pursuing wisdom in accordance with the laws that He has established for his existence and for the beings around him. This is the traversable path in life and the straight path (*ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*) in it, as He says, “And, [moreover], this is My path, which is straight, so follow it; and do not follow [other] ways, for you will be separated from His way. This He has instructed you that you may become righteous.”⁴⁷ And God says, “Then is one who walks fallen on his face better guided or one who walks erect on a straight path?”⁴⁸ And He says, “And they had been guided to good speech, and they were guided to the path of the Praiseworthy.”⁴⁹

Regarding the guidance of humanity: God sent His message to humanity with a specific wisdom, namely, to draw human beings’ attention to the horizons of all existence and to the dimensions of their own being. The purpose of the message was to urge humanity toward knowledge, wisdom, and moral refinement. He chose messengers to whom He gave the Book and wisdom, that they might inspire people in this direction. God says, “Just as We have sent among you a messenger from yourselves reciting to you Our verses and purifying you and teaching you the Book and wisdom and teaching you that which you did not know.”⁵⁰

As for religion’s operation on the basis of wisdom in legislation, it is stated that God observed the requirements of wisdom in the nature of legislation, making it suited to humanity’s psychological and social constitution, and determining it in accordance with the overall welfare of the species in this life and the next. He says, explaining that divine legislation embodies wisdom, “That is from what your Lord has revealed to you of wisdom.”⁵¹ And He says, explaining that life is built upon wise laws, the comprehension and mindful application of which

⁴⁷ Q 6:153.

⁴⁸ Q 67:22.

⁴⁹ Q 22:24.

⁵⁰ Q 2:151.

⁵¹ Q 17:39.

lead to abundant good, “He gives wisdom to whom He wills, and whoever has been given wisdom has certainly been given much good. And none will take heed except those of understanding.”⁵² And He says, explaining that the overall content and fundamental purpose of the messages is wisdom, “And when Jesus brought clear proofs, he said, ‘I have come to you with wisdom and to clarify for you some of that over which you differ, so fear God and obey me.’”⁵³ And regarding this, He also says, “It is He who has sent among the inhabitants of Mecca a Messenger from among themselves, reciting to them His verses, purifying them, and teaching them the Book and wisdom, although they were before in clear error.”⁵⁴

Accordingly, wisdom, according to the Qur’ān, permeates all existence—from the deity who presides over the cosmic order, to the imperceptible spiritual beings, to the material cosmos and its diverse laws and beings—through the wisdom and harmony that God has embedded in their structure and creation.

3.3 The Qur’ānic Discourse’s Reliance on the Foundation of Virtuous Values

As for the third foundation of sound discourse, it is the reliance upon virtuous values—both in content presented and in the tools of persuasion employed. This is a third pillar of the Qur’ānic discourse.

The Qur’ān argues according to a virtuous method and operates through virtuous principles in its means of persuasion and in the substance of its message, whether in matters of belief or legislation. Its guiding movement proceeds according to the requirements of justice and the obligations of truthfulness. Accordingly, it repeatedly and emphatically stresses the meanings of justice and truthfulness.

Among the passages that uphold justice and command it is His saying, “Indeed, God commands justice and good conduct.”⁵⁵ And He says,

⁵² Q 2:269.

⁵³ Q 43:63.

⁵⁴ Q 62:2.

⁵⁵ Q 16:90.

“So to that invite, and remain steadfast as you are commanded and do not follow their inclinations but say, ‘I have believed in what God has revealed of the Book, and I have been commanded to do justice among you. God is our Lord and your Lord. For us are our deeds, and for you are your deeds. There is no argument between us and you. God will bring us together, and to Him is the destination.’”⁵⁶ And He says, “And when you speak, be just.”⁵⁷ And He says, “We have already sent Our messengers with clear proofs and sent down with them the Book and the balance that people may maintain justice.”⁵⁸

As for the passages that uphold truthfulness and command it is His saying, “And the word of your Lord has been fulfilled in truth and justice.”⁵⁹ And He says, “And the one who has brought the truth and believed in it—those are the righteous.”⁶⁰ And He says, “And say, ‘My Lord, cause me to enter in truth and to exit in truth, and grant me from Yourself a supporting authority.’”⁶¹ And He says, “And who is more truthful than God in statement?”⁶²

The depth of religion’s concern for ethical values becomes evident through its extensive mention—hundreds of times—of both positive and negative moral concepts in the Qur’ānic discourse. Among these are: justice and injustice, equity and oppression, common decency and indecency, lewdness and righteousness, corruption, goodness and evilness, good conduct and wrongdoing, transgression, reproach, harm, patience, forbearance, pardon, restraining anger, forgiveness, truthfulness and falsehood, speaking without knowledge, denial, disbelief, submission to truth (which is faith), hypocrisy, ostentation, good-nature and meanness, immorality, gratitude, arrogance and humility, purity and its opposite, prayer, almsgiving, piety, truth and

⁵⁶ Q 42:15.

⁵⁷ Q 6:152.

⁵⁸ Q 57:25.

⁵⁹ Q 6:115.

⁶⁰ Q 39:33.

⁶¹ Q 17:80.

⁶² Q 4:87.

falsehood, correctness and error, sin, obedience and disobedience, charitable spending and miserliness, stinginess, withholding, lending, along with many other terms.

These ethical principles are observed in the Qurʾān both in its tools of persuasion and in the content of its discourse regarding belief and legislation:

As for their observance in the tools of persuasion, we find the Qurʾān proceeding in accordance with the meanings of truthfulness, steadfastness, and faithfulness, while avoiding erroneous tools such as lying, duplicity, vacillation, inconsistency, and compromise.

This quality is evident throughout the Qurʾān, especially when its discourse is studied in the chronological order of revelation, from *Sūrat al-ʿAlaq* and *Sūrat al-Qalam* to *Sūrat al-Tawba* and *Sūrat al-Māʾida*. One observes a discourse that moves from principles that are explicit, transparent, and constant, without evasion, concealment, contradiction, or deviation—whether during the period of persecution and oppression in Mecca, or during the Medinan period, threatened by raids from surrounding tribes, through to the conquest of Mecca in the eighth year of the Hijra, and subsequently during the period of stability for the Messenger and the believers until his death in the tenth year of the Hijra. Had the Qurʾān been falsehood or fabrication, it would not have exhibited such consistency, as He says, “Then do they not reflect upon the Qurʾān? If it had been from other than God, they would have found within it much contradiction.”⁶³ And He says, “So do not obey the deniers. They wish that you would soften, so they would soften.”⁶⁴

As for the importance of ethical principles in religious belief, according to the Qurʾān, the moral conscience (*al-ḍamīr al-akhlāqī*) is the universal order (*al-niẓām al-ʿāmm*) by which God and all rational and volitional beings beneath Him operate. It is not something exclusive to humanity; rather, it is originally an attribute of God Himself, who has instilled its likeness within rational beings endowed with free

⁶³ Q 4:82.

⁶⁴ Q 68:8–9.

will.

God—the Creator of the universe and all beings—is characterised by moral conscience. He adheres to justice, common decency, and loyalty; He speaks truth and truthfulness; and He avoids injustice, the reprehensible, and falsehood.

He requires that His servants interact with Him according to the requirements of merit and justice, in recognition of the right He possesses over them through His act of creation and the bestowal of His blessings. This requires seeking Him, being concerned with knowing Him, submitting to Him, and dealing with Him with proper conduct, reverence, and gratitude.

Likewise, He requires that His creatures deal justly with one another, observing the rights and duties He has placed among them, and respecting the bonds and connections He has established between them.

He has taken care to guide them to Himself through His messengers, providing them with what assists them in this, and has clarified for them the dimensions of this life and the path to be followed within it. This was the basis for the obligation of sound belief (*al-i'tiqād al-rāshid*) in religion: in God, His messengers, and the Hereafter.

As for the role of ethical principles in divine legislation (*al-tashrī' al-ilāhī*), in reality, these principles represent the fundamental constitution of the divine law (*al-sharī'a*), arising from the fact that they are embedded in human nature (*fiṭra*). God created the human being equipped with moral conscience along with freedom of choice, by which he is capable of transgressing moral limits. He made the contents of the conscience the very law by which one must act and whose bounds one must observe. He encouraged good deeds by rewarding them and even bestowing additional favour upon those who perform them, and He deterred from evil deeds by threatening punishment for them.

This is a description of the Qur'an's reliance on universal rational intuition (*al-ʿaqlāniyya al-wijdāniyya al-ʿamma*) in its three forms when addressing the human being.

This feature of the Qur'ānic discourse is precisely what renders it

an intuitive discourse that profoundly affects and moves the human soul when recited with attention and careful listening. The human being has been created with an innate appreciation for rational knowledge, wisdom, and morality, and his convictions are shaped by them. The Qur'ān reaches the highest degree in this respect, expressed with exquisite eloquence through its selection of appropriate words and its harmonious and beautiful composition.

The Qur'ān is distinguished by two features: one concerning its character—namely, its intuitive nature with its three dimensions—and another concerning its eloquence, manifested in its selection of words suited to their meanings and its precise placement of meanings in their proper contexts.

For example, if we consider the *basmala* that begins *Sūrat al-Ḥamd*, as well as the openings of other Qur'ānic chapters, we find that it begins with “In the name of God” (*bismi Allāh*), without any partner attributed to Him in divinity. This subtly signals the notion of divine unity (*tawḥīd*) in accordance with rationality. It then goes on to describe God with the attribute of mercy (*rahma*), and this attribute points to the moral conscience of the deity, for His view of the human being is one of mercy, compassion, and tenderness. God's mercy toward humanity accords with wisdom, since mercy is a necessary element in teaching and nurturing the human being, just as the attribute of mercy is necessary in parents for raising and educating their children.

As for the rhetorical excellence of the verse, it lies in the grandeur of beginning the chapter with “In the name of God, the One, the Unique” (*bismi Allāh al-wāḥid al-aḥad*), and in the gracious choice to highlight mercy in an emphatic form at the very opening of the chapter, due to its powerful effect in stirring the spirit of hope and expectation within the human being.

These considerations are replete with meaning, even if only by way of allusion and suggestion. The human being receives them upon reciting the text, though sometimes only in a general intuitive way, especially when he is familiar with other Qur'ānic passages that explicitly articulate these meanings. For certain expressions in one part of

the Qurʾān influence how the listener receives other expressions, when they all share the same foundations and the same spirit of their divine Author.

4. A Question and Its Answer

Someone might ask: it is natural for any discourse to claim rationality, wisdom, and morality in order to persuade its audience—even if, in reality, it follows the paths of disputation and rhetoric in its approach, as was the case with Pharaoh, about whom God says: “And Pharaoh said, ‘Let me kill Moses and let him call upon his Lord. Indeed, I fear that he will change your religion or that he will cause corruption in the land.’”⁶⁵ And He says, “Pharaoh said, ‘I do not show you except what I see, and I do not guide you except to the way of right conduct.’”⁶⁶

Response: this observation is correct in principle. Nevertheless, we must distinguish between discourse that merely adorns itself with claims of rationality and right guidance while in fact working to extinguish the spirit of rationality in its audience—through argumentation, obstinacy, and rhetorical provocation—and that ignores objective indicators, and discourse that genuinely proceeds from rationality, breathes it, stimulates rational reflection in the addressee, and demands that he weigh claims by the scales of reason and wisdom. Contemporary listeners readily distinguish such differences in domestic and international political discourse: between speech that decorates itself with slogans such as “human rights,” “social justice,” and “combating corruption” and speech that is genuinely committed to these principles.

If you were to contemplate the words of Imam ‘Alī (a.s.) in *Nahj al-balāgha*, for example—in his arguments against opponents, in his instructions to governors over the provinces, or in his general counsel to the people—you would find that they belong to the latter category. They are intuitive discourses rooted in rationality, wisdom, and justice

⁶⁵ Q 40:26.

⁶⁶ Q 40:29.

in a profound and emphatic manner, and they proceed from these qualities.

The same is true of the Qur'ān. In its arguments, it proceeds from rationality, justice, and wisdom in a deep and emphatic manner.

Imam 'Alī (a.s.), in his sermons, followed the Qur'ānic method, as becomes evident through careful comparison between his words and the Qur'ān—as I have observed directly.

This method appears in all the moments where religion seeks to persuade, and it is a matter that must be treated in more detailed examination.

In my own experience with religion, I was deeply influenced by the rationality of the Qur'ānic discourse. I found it to be an intuitive and convincing discourse that presents its content in a remarkably rational manner and pursues wisdom and virtuous principles in an emphatic way. In this book, and in all my other studies of religion, I have followed the traces of the Qur'ān and its method in calling and persuading.

Let us conclude this chapter with Qur'ānic verses that remind us of the illuminating role of divine messages for those who believe in them and warn of the consequences of turning away from them. God says, “Indeed, this Qur'ān guides to that which is most upright and gives good tidings to the believers who do righteous deeds that they will have a great reward. And that those who do not believe in the Hereafter—We have prepared for them a painful punishment.”⁶⁷ And He says, “There is no compulsion in religion. The right course has become distinct from error. So, whoever disbelieves in false deities and believes in God has grasped the most trustworthy handhold with no break in it. And God is Hearing and Knowing.”⁶⁸ And He says, “And God increases in guidance those who go aright, and the enduring good deeds are with your Lord better in recompense and better in yielding fruit.”⁶⁹ And He says, “I will turn away from My signs those who are

⁶⁷ Q 17:9–10.

⁶⁸ Q 2:256.

⁶⁹ Q 19:76.

arrogant upon the earth without right; and if they should see every sign, they will not believe in it. And if they see the way of right guidance, they will not adopt it as a way; but if they see the way of error, they will adopt it as a way. That is because they denied Our signs and they were heedless of them.”⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Q 7:146.

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