

THE BOOK OF REVELATIONS

*Selections from the Holy Qur'ān
with interpretations by Muhammad Asad,
Yusuf Ali, and others*

Selected and prepared by
Kabir Helminski



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Introduction

This is a sourcebook of Quranic selections and accompanying interpretations. These selections were made, above all, to highlight the fundamental spiritual principles contained in the Qur'an. If you are new to the Qur'an, we hope that this book will provide a balanced view of the Heart of the Qur'an. If you are already a student of the Qur'an, we hope that these selections will perhaps awaken a new appreciation for the universal spiritual wisdom of the Book.

The interpretations are not meant to be the final word, but rather a point of entry to the universe of meaning offered to us by Revelation. The reader will encounter a variety of viewpoints and understandings and will be encouraged to deepen his or her understanding by reflecting upon the material offered here. In some cases the interpretations offer background information that establish a context for the ayāh. In other cases one might be opened to a direct soul encounter with the words themselves.

The translations we offer remain close to the widely respected translations of Muhammad Asad, and, to a lesser extent, Yusuf Ali. Where substantive changes have been made from the accepted translations of Ali and Asad, they are in the direction of even greater faithfulness to the root meanings of the words, rather than toward freer interpretation. In other words, we have tried to take as few liberties with the text as possible. We have also made minor changes in the direction of a more contemporary idiom, yet one that is dignified and sacred without being ponderous or

archaic.

The selections are followed by one or more interpretations, with the name of the interpreter in parentheses at the end of the selection. The bibliography at the back gives more details about each author and the publications.

Any selection from the Qur'an will inevitably be somewhat subjective and, perhaps, arbitrary. Nevertheless, it is also true that certain passages have become often-quoted favorites. We apologize if some of your favorites may seem to be missing. We have done our best to include selections that touch upon the major spiritual themes of the Qur'an. May people profit from these pages and may Allah be pleased with our efforts.

~Kabir Helminski

The Selections

The Opening: Seven Often-Repeated Verses

In the Name of God, the Infinitely Compassionate, Most Merciful.

All praise is God's,

the Sustainer of all worlds,

the Infinitely Compassionate and Most Merciful,

Sovereign of the Day of Reckoning.

You alone do we worship

and You alone do we ask for help.

Guide us on the straight path;

the path of those who have received Your favor,

not the path of those who have earned Your wrath,

nor of those who have gone astray.

[*Sūrah al-Fātiḥah* 1:1-7, complete]

This *sūrah* is also called *Fātiḥat al-Kitāb* (“The Opening of the Divine Writ”), *Umm al-Kitāb* (“The Essence of the Divine Writ”), *Sūrat al-Ḥamd* (“The *Sūrah* of Praise”), *Asās al-Qurʿān* (“The Foundation of the Qurʿān”), and is known by several other names as well. It is mentioned elsewhere in the Qurʿān as *As-Sabʿ al-Mathānī* (“The Seven Oft-Repeated [Verses]”) because it is repeated several times in the course of each of the five daily prayers. According to Bukhārī, the designation *Umm al-Kitāb* was given to it by the Prophet himself, and this in view of the fact that it contains, in a condensed form, all the fundamental principles laid down in the Qurʿān: the principle of God’s oneness and uniqueness, of His being the originator

and fosterer of the universe, the fount of all life-giving grace, the One to whom man is ultimately responsible, the only power that can really guide and help; the call to righteous *action* in the life of this world (*guide us the straight way*); the principle of life after death and of the organic consequences of man's actions and behavior (expressed in the term *Day of Judgment*); the principle of guidance through God's message-bearers (evident in the reference to *those upon whom God has bestowed His blessings*) and, flowing from it, the principle of the continuity of all true religions (implied in the allusion to people who have lived—and erred—in the past); and, finally, the need for voluntary self-surrender to the will of the Supreme Being and, thus, for worshipping Him alone. It is for this reason that this *sūrah* has been formulated as a prayer, to be constantly repeated and reflected upon by the believer.

“The Opening” was one of the earliest revelations bestowed upon the Prophet. Some authorities (for instance, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib) were even of the opinion that it was the very first revelation; but this view is contradicted by authentic Traditions quoted by both Bukhārī and Muslim, which unmistakably show that the first five verses of *Sūrah* 96 (*Sūrah al-ʿAlaq*, “The Germ Cell”) constituted the beginning of revelation. It is probable, however, that whereas the earlier revelation consisted of only a few verses each, “The Opening” was the first *sūrah* revealed to the Prophet in its entirety at one time: and this would explain the view held by ʿAlī. (Asad, p. 1)

Guidance for the God-Conscious

Alif. Lām. Mīm.¹

*This Divine Writ—let there be no doubt about it—
is meant to be a guidance for all the God-conscious,
who believe in the existence
of that which is beyond the reach of human perception,
and are constant in prayer,
and spend on others out of what We provide for them as sustenance;
and who believe in that which has been bestowed
from on high upon you, O Prophet,
as well as in that which was bestowed before your time:
for it is they who in their innermost are certain of the life to come!
It is they who follow the guidance which comes from their Sustainer;
and it is they, they who shall attain to a happy state!*

[Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:1-5]

The second *sūrah* starts with a declaration of the purpose underlying the revelation of the Qurʾān as a whole: namely, man's guidance in all his spiritual and worldly affairs.

A guidance for all the God-conscious: the conventional translation of

¹ The mystical letters: Preceding about a quarter of the Qurʾānic *sūrahs* are combinations of letters sometimes referred to as “openings” (*fawatih*). They are always pronounced individually. Though various theories as to their meaning exist, their true meaning rests in the Mysterion. As Abū Bakr, close companion of the Prophet and the first of the Caliphs to guide his community after his passing, said, “In every Divine Book there is mystery—and the mystery of the Qurʾān is indicated in the openings of some of the *sūrahs*.”

muttaqī as “God-fearing” does not adequately render the *positive* content of this expression, namely the awareness of His all-presence and the desire to mold one’s existence in the light of this awareness. The interpretation adopted by some translators, *one who guards himself against evil* or *one who is careful of his duty*, does not give more than one particular aspect of the concept of “God-consciousness.”

Beyond the reach of human perception: al-ghayb (commonly, and erroneously, translated as “the Unseen”) is used in the Qurʾān to denote all those sectors or phases of reality which lie beyond the range of human (sense) perception and cannot, therefore, be proved or disproved by scientific observation or even adequately comprised within the accepted categories of speculative thought. These include, for instance, the existence of God and of a definite purpose underlying the universe, life after death, the real nature of time, the existence of spiritual forces and their inter-action, and so forth. Only a person who is convinced that the ultimate reality comprises far more than our *observable* environment can attain to belief in God and, thus, to a belief that life has meaning and purpose. By pointing out that it is *a guidance for those who believe in the existence of that which is beyond human perception*, the Qurʾān says, in effect, that it will—of necessity—remain a closed book to all whose minds cannot accept this fundamental premise.

And spend on others out of what We provide for them as sustenance: provision of sustenance applies to all that may be of benefit to man, whether it be concrete (like food, property, offspring, etc.), or abstract (like knowledge, piety, etc.) The “spending on others” is mentioned here in one breath with God-consciousness and prayer because it is precisely in such selfless acts that true piety comes to its full fruition. It should be borne in mind that the verb *anfaqa* (literally, “he spent”) is always used in the Qurʾān to denote spending freely on, or as a gift to, others, whatever the motive may be.

That which was bestowed before your time: this is a reference to one of the fundamental doctrines of the Qurʾān, the doctrine of the historical

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continuity of divine revelation. Life—so the Qur^{ān} teaches us—is not a series of unconnected jumps but a continuous, organic process: and this law applies also to the life of the mind, of which man's religious experience (in its cumulative sense) is a part. Thus, the religion of the Qur^{ān} can be properly understood only against the background of the great monotheistic faiths which preceded it, and which, according to Muslim belief, culminate and achieve their final formulation in the faith of Islam. (Asad, pp. 3-4)

Their Hearts and Hearing Are Sealed

*Behold, as for those who are bent on denying the truth—
it is all one to them whether you warn them or do not warn them:
they will not believe.*

***God has sealed their hearts and their hearing,
and over their eyes is a veil;
and awesome suffering awaits them.***

[Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:6-7]

In contrast with the frequently occurring term *al-kāfirīn* (“those who deny the truth”), the use of the past tense in *alladhīna kafarū* indicates conscious intent, and is therefore appropriately rendered as *those who are bent on denying the truth*. This interpretation is supported by many commentators, especially Zamakhsharī (who, in his commentary on the verse, uses the expression *those who have deliberately resolved upon their kufr*). Elsewhere in the Qurʾān such people are spoken of as having *Hearts with which they fail to grasp the truth, and eyes with which they fail to see, and ears with which they fail to hear* [7:179]. [For an explanation of the terms *kufr* (“denial of the truth”) and *kāfir* (“one who denies the truth”).

Over their eyes is a veil: this is a reference to the natural law instituted by God, whereby a person who persistently adheres to false beliefs and refuses to listen to the voice of truth gradually loses the *ability* to perceive the truth, “so that finally, as it were, a seal is set upon his heart” (Rāghib). Since it is God Who has instituted all laws of nature—which, in their aggregate, are called *sunnat Allāh* (“the way of God”)—this “sealing” is attributed to Him: but it is obviously a consequence of man’s free choice

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and not an act of “predestination.” Similarly, the suffering which, in the life to come, is in store for those who during their life in this world have willfully remained deaf and blind to the truth, is a natural consequence of their free choice—just as happiness in the life to come is the natural consequence of man’s endeavor to attain to righteousness and inner illumination. It is in this sense that the Qur^ʿanic references to God’s “reward” and “punishment” must be understood. (Asad, pp. 4-5)

The Bond with God

*In this way² does He cause many a one to go astray,
just as He guides many a one aright:
but none does He cause thereby to go astray except the iniquitous,
who break their bond with God
after it has been established [in their nature],
and cut asunder what God has bidden to be joined,
and spread corruption on earth:
these shall be the losers.*

[Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:26-27]

The *bond with God* (conventionally translated as *God's covenant*) apparently refers here to man's moral obligation to use his inborn gifts—intellectual as well as physical—in the way intended for them by God. The “establishment” of this bond arises from the faculty of reason which, if properly used, must lead man to a realization of his own weakness and dependence on a causative power and, thus, to a gradual cognition of God's will with reference to his own behavior. This interpretation of the *bond with God* seems to be indicated by the fact that there is no mention of any specific “covenant” in either the preceding or the subsequent verses of the passage under consideration. The deliberate omission of any explanatory reference in this connection suggests that the expression *bond with God* stands for

² The preceding āyātis say: *Behold, God does not disdain to propound a parable of a gnat, or something even less than that. Now, as for those who have attained to faith, they know it is the truth from their Sustainer—whereas those who are bent on denying the truth say, “What could God mean by this parable?”*

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something that is rooted in the human situation as such, and can, therefore, be perceived instinctively as well as through conscious experience: namely, that innate relationship with God which makes Him: *closer to man than his jugular vein* [50:16]. For an explanation of the subsequent reference to *what God has bidden to be joined*, see 13:21. (Asad, pp. 7-8)

God's Representative on Earth

*He it is Who created for you all that is upon the earth; then He turned toward the
heaven and made seven firmaments,
and He has perfect knowledge of all things.
And behold! Your Sustainer said to the angels:*

“I am about to establish upon earth a representative, a khalifah.”

*They said: “Will You place on it
one who will spread corruption thereon and shed blood—
whereas it is we who proclaim Your limitless glory
and praise You and hallow Your name?”*

God answered: “Truly, I know that which you do not know.”

And He imparted to Adam the names of all things;
then He brought them within the ken of the angels and said:

*“Declare to Me the names of these,
if what you say is true.”*

*They replied: “Limitless are You in Your glory!
No knowledge have we save that which
You have imparted to us.*

Truly, You alone are all-knowing, truly wise.”

Said He: “O Adam, convey to them the names of these.”

And as soon as Adam had conveyed to them their names,

*God said: “Did I not say to you, ‘Truly, I alone know
the hidden reality of the heavens and the earth,
and know all that you bring into the open
and all that you would conceal?’”*

[Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:29-33]

The term *khalīfah*—translated here as “representative”—has also the meaning of “one who shall inherit.” It is derived from the verb *khalafa*, “he succeeded [another].” The accent is on God’s having caused man to inherit the earth by endowing him with specific faculties and abilities. Its use elsewhere in the Qur’ān implies the grant to humanity of the ability to discern between right and wrong, truth and falsehood.

And He imparted to Adam the names of all things: literally, all the names. The term *ism* (“name”) implies, according to all philologists, an expression “conveying the knowledge [of a thing] . . . applied to denote a substance or an accident or an attribute, for the purpose of distinction”: in philosophical terminology, a “concept.” From this it may legitimately be inferred that the “knowledge of all the names” denotes here man’s faculty of logical definition and, thus, of conceptual thinking. That by “Adam” the whole human race is meant here becomes obvious from the preceding reference, by the angels, to *such as will spread corruption on earth and will shed blood*, as well as from 7:11. (Asad, pp. 8-9)

Adam is man, and man is the secret of God’s Self-knowledge, “the secret of the heavens and the earth.” Whatever is to be found in the heavens and the earth, the names of all things which are also the Names of God, are all to be found in man. By the matter of our physical bodies we are mineral. By our unconscious physiological processes we are vegetable. By our ability to move and sexually reproduce and respond to the world around us we are animal. By our ability to reason and choose, we are human. By our ability to conceive of invisible, celestial realities, we are angelic. And by our ability—necessarily limited—to conceive of the reality and nature of God, we participate—indirectly, and as it were by analogy—in God’s Divinity, though we do so not by our own exertions, but by His free gift.

Have you ever noticed how characters like those which belong to

entire animal species, in the case of man seem to belong to single individuals? We all know people we would describe as peacocks, or lions, or snakes, or foxes, or gazelles. In our separate individuality we may be “dominated” by specific Names of God, something which is fairly easy to see in the case of the great leader, the great craftsman, the great athlete, the great physician, the great poet. But in our intrinsic humanity, we are all of these things. Everything in God is reflected, in one way or another, in the human state. And because this is true, by God’s generosity, man can potentially know the seeds or prototypes of things; his art, his science, his philosophy, and his spiritual realization are clear proofs of this. The angels in this verse are the intrinsic prototypes or Names of all created things, all things in the heavens and the earth; and since all things are signs of God, these Names are both the names of created beings, and the Names of God which form and animate those beings. The angels are symbols or representatives of these Names, but they don’t *know* these Names; only Adam, only humanity, can tell the angels their own names.

It is this knowledge which gives man his central and sovereign position in the created order—a power which, when appropriated by the ego, makes man capable of destroying the earth. According to verse 29 of this *sūrah*, *He it is Who created for you all that is upon the earth*. We know that without earth there would be no man; but the deeper truth is: without man there would be no earth. (Upton)

What is Needed for Salvation

*Those who have attained to faith,
and those who follow the Jewish Scriptures
and the Christians and the Sabians,
and who believe in God and the last day and who do good works
shall have their reward with their Sustainer;
on them shall be no fear nor shall they grieve.*

[Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:62]

There seems to be a human tendency in almost every religion to claim some exclusive salvation for its adherents. Clearly, many Jews and Christians have made this claim. Many Muslims, including well-known commentators on the Qurʾān, have also expressed this belief despite the fact that there are numerous places in the Qurʾān that make spiritual attainment independent of professed beliefs or ethnic origin, and dependent on mindfulness of God (*taqwā*) and moral action (*ṣalihāt*).

Muḥammad Asad writes about *All who believe in God and the last day and who do good works shall have their reward with their Sustainer: on them shall be no fear nor shall they grieve*: “The above passage—which recurs in the Qurʾān several times—lays down a fundamental doctrine of Islam. With a breadth of vision unparalleled in any other religious faith, the idea of ‘salvation’ is here made conditional upon three elements only: belief in God, belief in the Day of Judgment, and righteous action in life. The statement of this doctrine at this juncture—that is in the midst of an appeal to the Children of Israel—is warranted by the false Jewish belief that their descent from Abraham entitles them to be regarded as ‘God’s chosen peo-

ple.” (Asad, p. 14)

Yusuf Ali writes in a similar vein: “*On them shall be no fear nor shall they grieve.* Compare 2:38, where the same phrase occurs. And it recurs again and again afterwards. In *Sūrah al-Baqarah* (the second *sūrah*) it occurs in verses 38, 62, 112, 262, 274, and 277. The point of the verse is that Islam does not teach an exclusive doctrine, and is not meant exclusively for one people. The Jews claimed this for themselves, and the Christians in their own origin were a sect of the Jews. Even the modern organized Christian churches, though they have been, consciously or unconsciously, influenced by the time-spirit, including the historical fact of Islam, yet cling to the idea of vicarious atonement, which means that all who do not believe in it or who lived previously to the death of Christ are at a disadvantage spiritually before the Throne of God. The attitude of Islam is entirely different. Islam existed before the preaching of Muḥammad on this earth; the Qurʾān expressly calls Abraham a Muslim (3:67). Its teaching (submission to God’s will) has been and will be the teaching of religion for all time and for all peoples.” (A. Yusuf Ali, pp. 33-34)

According to Mahmoud Ayoub: “Commentators have differed concerning the intent of this verse and the reason for its revelation. The verse is one of many general statements in the Qurʾān in which faith is raised above any religious or ethnic identity. Commentators have, however, sought to limit its universal application in several ways. Four main approaches may be distinguished. The first was to declare the verse abrogated and therefore inapplicable. The second was to limit the application of the verse by assigning the reason for its revelation to a specific group of people. The third approach has been to limit the verse to a strictly legalistic interpretation, and the fourth has been to accept the universality of the verse until the coming of Islam, but thereafter to limit its applicability only to those who hold the faith of Islam.” (Ayoub, p. 110)

The weakness of the argument for abrogation is that while God may abrogate a legal ruling, it would seem absurd for God to abrogate a spiritual principle, which would amount to redefining the nature of what is

essentially good.

Some commentators, including Tabarsi, have maintained, for instance, that the above verse is abrogated by: *If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to God), it will never be accepted from him* [3:85]. When one examines the context of this verse, we see that it is preceded by this very broad statement: *Do they seek for other than the religion of God, while all creatures in the heavens and upon the earth have willingly or unwillingly submitted (i.e., become muslim)?* [3:83].

Clearly “islam” in this context is a universal and natural state of submission, not a religion as such. This is followed by the *āyāts*: *Say: “We believe in God, and in what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Ismā‘īl, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes, and in the books given to Moses, Jesus, and the Prophets from their Lord: we make no distinction between one and another among them, and to God we submit.”* [3:84].

To limit the verse to the time before the coming of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ is based on a certain story related by As-Suddī. In this story, Salman Farsi, a close companion, was asking the Prophet whether some of his pious friends who had died before meeting the Prophet were in heaven or hell. The Prophet is said to have replied, “They are people of the Fire,” which disturbed Salman very much. Later this verse was revealed, supposedly correcting Muḥammad’s misperception.

If we accept this story, we must accept that the Prophet spoke something that was patently false regarding an essential spiritual matter and that he then needed to be corrected by God. Obviously this raises serious problems since the Prophet said, “If I advise you on worldly matters and you know better, then I may be wrong, but if I advise you on spiritual matters, you must believe me.”

Furthermore, according to this interpretation, Muḥammad is reported to have said that this refers only to those who died before the advent of his prophethood. Why then did God not clearly refer to the past in some way, such as: “Those before the coming of the Qur’ān and the Prophet Muḥammad”?

This verse is a clear lesson in a very fundamental principle of Qurʾanic interpretation: Take God at His word. Look at the primary and obvious meaning of the text. Do not allow the text to be contradicted or obscured by commentaries, or even by purported *ḥadīth* that may contradict those truths and principles that are repeatedly found in the whole of the Qurʾān. The Qurʾān is guaranteed reliable. No *ḥadīth* is absolutely guaranteed in the same way.

The *ḥadīth* collections were assembled about three centuries after the life of Muḥammad. About a million supposed *ḥadīth* were reduced by sincere scholars down to some tens of thousands, using the best methodology they could develop at the time. Scholarship of recent centuries, however, has raised questions about the reliability of even the sound *ḥadīth* collections. While a substantial portion of the *ḥadīth* literature undoubtedly represents the spirit, and the exact words of Muḥammad, nevertheless there must be admitted the possibility of inaccurate or fabricated *ḥadīth* finding their way into the *ḥadīth* collections.

A safe and secure principle might then be to give our attention to those *ḥadīth* that are beautiful and inspiring and that do not contradict or modify what is explicitly said in the Qurʾān, and to take the Qurʾān at its word. (Helminski)

Essential Submission

*Truly, one who submits his whole being³ to God,
and is in a state of virtue,
shall have their reward with their Sustainer;
these need have no fear, neither shall they grieve.*

[Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:112]

This verse follows the argument between Christians and Jews, each of whom claims that the other will not enter Paradise. Here we have the definitive answer to anyone who claims that nominal adherence to a belief system will bring salvation. As always, the Qur³ān refocuses us on what is essential: the surrender of one's whole self to God and the beautiful state of consciousness (*iḥsān*) that results.

Iḥsān is a word that is difficult to translate. It is the third element of the canonical definition of Islam (*islām, īmān, iḥsān*) and was described by the Prophet Muḥammad in this way: "Worship (or serve) God as if you saw Him, but even if you don't see him, know that you are seen." *Iḥsān*, which is related to the root meaning of "beauty" (*ḥasan*), implies doing something in the most excellent and beautiful way. The Prophet once remarked upon seeing a certain grave, which had been hastily shoveled, that a Muslim should do everything well, and requested that the gravesite be properly finished.

So, for those who surrender and become a *muḥṣin*, a person of excellence, they shall have no fear (*khawf*) or grief. Surrender then leads to the overcoming of fear, including the fear of God. What we should have in-

³ Whole being: *literally*, face.

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stead of fear of God is *taqwā*, the vigilant awareness of God's presence and the guarding of ourselves from our own neglectfulness (*ghaflah*).

Just a few verses later, the word *face* appears again. This time we are reminded that we can see God's face everywhere.

It is essential to understand the relationship between surrendering our whole being to God, on the one hand, and being free of fear and grief, on the other. (Helminski)

Freedom of Religion

*Hence, who could be more unjust than those
who bar the remembrance of God's name
from any of His houses of worship (masājid)
and strive for their ruin,
although they have no right to enter them save in fear?
For them, in this world, there is nothing but disgrace;
and for them, in the life to come, awesome suffering.*

[Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:114]

It is one of the fundamental principles of Islam that every religion which has belief in God as its focal point must be accorded full respect, however much one may disagree with its particular tenets. Thus, the Muslims are under an obligation to honor and protect any house of worship dedicated to God, whether it be a mosque or a church or a synagogue (see 22:40), and any attempt to prevent the followers of another faith from worshipping God according to their own lights is condemned by the Qur^ʿān as a sacrilege. A striking illustration of this principle is forthcoming from the Prophet's treatment of the deputation from Christian Najrān in the year 10 A.H. They were given free access to the Prophet's mosque, and with his full consent celebrated their religious rites there, although their adoration of Jesus as "the son of God" and of Mary as "the mother of God" were fundamentally at variance with Islamic beliefs. (Asad, p. 24)

Wherever You Turn . . .

*To God belong the East and the West.
Wherever you turn, there is the face of God.
Indeed, God is infinite, all-knowing.*

[Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:115]

Here *the East and the West* also mean the sunrise and the sunset, so we are given a beautiful picture of both the directions of East and West, as well as these moments in time when we witness the splendid display of nature.

We can be reminded of God's presence by the sunrise and sunset, and we can be reminded that *wherever we turn our gaze, there we can see God's "Face."* The face of a human being is that by which we can most easily recognize that person, so here we are also being told that God's most recognizable feature can be seen anywhere, anytime, if we are in the right state of openness.

Furthermore in many places in the Qur'ān we are told to witness. (*In this, behold, there is indeed a reminder for everyone whose heart is wide-awake—that is, who listens and witnesses [50:37] and O believers, be steadfast before God, witnesses for justice [5:8]*) To witness means to see for ourselves with all the faculties that are given to us. In the same way that we say: "I witness that there is no god but God," we can witness God's recognizable signature wherever we look. This is an astounding proposition, yet we would not be asked to witness in this way if it were not possible for us. God is infinite and all-knowing. God's perception and intelligence permeate everything. The signs of it are the lawfulness that science uncovers, the beauty and order of nature, as well as the meaning that relates one thing to another, as well as the sense of significance in all of this that the human heart experiences. God is not a distant abstraction, not merely

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some utterly transcendent “truth,” but something that is also here and now before our very eyes and hearts. (Helminski)

The Reciprocity of Remembrance

So remember Me, and I remember you.

[*Sūrah al-Baqarah* 2:152]

The Qurʾān calls upon us to remember God. But how are we to do this? To remember something is to call it to mind, to cause it to take place in our minds. But there is no room in our little human minds for the vastness of God. Only the human spiritual Heart has room for Him, and the Heart exists on a deeper level than the work of deliberate, constant, and conscious Remembrance we are commanded by the Qurʾān to carry out.

In verse 151 of this *sūrah*, it is made clear that the thing which gives us the power to remember God is the *Messenger* . . . *who recites to you Our revelations*. So God first remembered us, in our helpless need, and then commanded us to remember Him, thus making Remembrance synonymous with gratitude. But if, after His merciful act of remembering us, we fail to remember Him, He may not remember us again.

By His own act, He implants the Remembrance of Him in our Hearts. In the first case, the Remembrance is a response to revelation; in the second, the Remembrance itself *is* the revelation; this refers, on one level, to an “infused Remembrance,” a Remembrance of God implanted in our Hearts by the direct action of God; to the unveiling of Divine realities; to the direct knowledge of God.

Remembrance of a distant object takes work; remembrance of an “object” so overwhelmingly present that It can have no rival is a foregone conclusion. As God says in a *ḥadīth qudsī* (transmitted by Tirmidhī), “What is difficult for some is easy for those for whom Allāh has made it

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easy.” The work of remembering God can never bring us to Him—yet if we fail to remember Him, what can we expect? We remember Him, and fall infinitely short of His Reality. He remembers us, and reaches us in a heartbeat, or even sooner.

It is We Who have sent down to you the Remembrance.

[*Sūrah al-Ḥijr* 15:9]

He was, in fact, already here. His Remembrance of us *is* our Remembrance of Him within us. In a certain sense, we *are* that Remembrance. (Upton)