

THE ONE-WINGED BELIEVER

What Remains Where Faith and Reason Part?

VOLUME I

From Adam to the Turn of the Twentieth Century

Ömer Akin

Research Author | Strategic Intelligence Director

Quantum Intelligence Hub Ltd — UK / NL

Translated by

Şilan Akin

*Specialist in Psychological Manipulation and International
Relations*

Co-Founder, Quantum Intelligence Hub (QIH)

PREFACE

A Note from the Research Author

This book is not an act of nostalgia.

Nostalgia beautifies the past beyond recognition. It softens pain, conceals defeat, and smooths the rough edges of historical truth into a neatly cropped canvas. This book was written to do precisely the opposite: to render history as it actually was — in all its splendour and all its anguish — not to glorify it, not to condemn it, but to understand it.

The question that gave birth to this book was a simple one. Perhaps one of the greatest questions in the history of humanity: How did a civilisation that once shaped the world — that pioneered mathematics, medicine, astronomy, philosophy, and law — come to spend its days following the ideas others had produced, using technologies others had invented, and living within boundaries others had drawn?

To ask this question is not to lodge a complaint. To ask this question is not to surrender. To ask this question is to accept historical responsibility. And historical responsibility means being able to carry both pride and shame at the same time.

In writing this book, I set certain rules for myself.

The first: Honesty. I will not look away from the failings of those I hold in high regard. To write about the Battle of the

Camel — the conflict between Aisha (r.a.) and Ali (r.a.) — diminishes neither of those towering figures. To write about the flawed consequences of the system built by Ebu Suud Efendi is not to accuse him of ill intent. To write about the mistakes of the Ottoman Empire is not to deny the greatness of that civilisation. History is read not by exaltation alone, nor by condemnation alone, but by understanding.

The second: Not neutrality, but justice. Neutrality is an illusion; every historian writes from a vantage point. Justice, however, means evaluating different perspectives with fairness and integrity. This book was written neither as a tract against the West nor as an apologia for the Islamic world. Facts have been presented as they are, wherever they may fall and whoever they may challenge.

The third: Sources and accountability. Every historical claim in this book rests on academic sources. References are provided at the end of each chapter. Readers are actively encouraged to verify each claim independently. Because the most fundamental message at the spine of this book is this: Question everything.

This book is built upon a single concept: the two-winged believer. The concept is this: Faith and reason are not alternatives to one another — they are complements. Al-Khwarizmi prayed and founded algebra. Ibn al-Haytham supplicated and developed the scientific method. Al-Biruni held firm beliefs and yet explored foreign cultures with insatiable curiosity. For these men, the knowledge of religion and the knowledge of the world entered through the same door.

When that door was split in two — for institutional, political, and cultural reasons — civilisation came to a halt.

And this book tells the story of how that rupture occurred, what stages it passed through, and where we stand today.

One final note: this book will also be published in Europe. That fact directly shaped the way I wrote it. To present a European readership with an inflated fairy tale of Islamic civilisation would be just as wrong as caricaturing Western civilisation. Both distortions would be a betrayal of the reader. History's own records are already more than powerful enough. Propaganda is unnecessary.

This book speaks the same words to every reader — Muslim and non-Muslim, Eastern and Western alike: Two wings are required. Without one, you cannot fly with the other. And flight is the common concern of all humanity.

Ömer Akin

Research Author | Strategic Intelligence Director

Quantum Intelligence Hub

Leeuwarden, the Netherlands — 2026

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ömer Akın is the Founder and Strategic Intelligence Director of Quantum Intelligence Hub (QIH), a technology and consultancy firm registered in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, operating in the fields of cybersecurity, digital intelligence, global trade, and digital operations advisory.

Ömer Akın's work centres on the historical trajectory of Islamic civilisation, the crisis of identity and meaning in the digital age, strategic intelligence, and global power dynamics. He pursues a distinctive synthesis that draws equally on academic sources and operational experience gained in the field.

His literary voice aims — in his own words — to be 'lyrical yet grounded, heartfelt yet honest.' He approaches history not merely as a record of the past, but as an instrument for reading the present and building the future.

Ömer Akın lives in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands, and is also actively engaged in digital content production, SEO strategy, and corporate development.

For correspondence and collaboration:

Quantum Intelligence Hub | qihhub.com

QIH Network | qihnetwork.com

© 2026 Ömer Akın / Quantum Intelligence Hub
All rights reserved No reproduction without permission.

CHAPTER I

The Story of the Lost Wing

What Remains Where Faith and Reason Part?

"We have certainly created man in the finest form."

(Al-Tin, 95:4)

Bismillāhir-Rahmānir-Rahīm

The human being is not a creature defined by mere existence on earth. Man is a consciousness that seeks meaning — one who lives by the need for direction, balance, and purpose. Throughout history, what has distinguished humanity from all other living things is not simply the capacity to think, but the capacity to situate thought within an axis of meaning. When that axis is lost, man does not grow stronger; he drifts.

Consider a bird. It flies on two wings. If one wing is strong and the other weak, no matter how frantically it beats them it cannot rise. It spirals on the ground — exhausted, going nowhere. But when both wings are sound, it soars high and travels far. This simple observation encapsulates one of the deepest truths in the history of humanity.

The ascent of man does not rest on a single faculty. Neither faith alone nor reason alone is sufficient to sustain him. By the nature of his creation, man is endowed with two

foundational capacities: faith (iman) and reason (aql). These two are not alternatives to one another — they are complements. Historical experience has shown that civilisations flourish when this balance is preserved, and that decline becomes inevitable when it is broken.

This chapter examines how man came to lose one of these two capacities, the stages through which that loss unfolded, and the ways in which its consequences deepened over time. What is told here is not nostalgia. It is a reckoning — one that is indispensable for understanding the present and building the future.

Part I — The Two-Winged Structure: Faith and Reason

The Balance Written into Human Creation

Faith orients man toward existence. It does not tell him what to believe so much as why and how to believe. It offers a destination, establishes a hierarchy of values, and draws a moral framework. Reason, in turn, provides equilibrium on the journey toward that destination. It measures, weighs, compares, and generates method. When faith is left without direction it grows blind; when reason is left without purpose it becomes merely instrumental.

The Quran never presents these two dimensions as rivals. On the contrary, both are part of the same divine call. Faith is the orientation of the heart. Reason is the ground upon which that orientation stands. God speaks to both the heart and the mind:

"Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding."

(Al Imran, 3:190)

This verse is profoundly significant. To observe the creation of the universe is a summons directed at those who possess reason. That is to say, comprehending the order of the cosmos does not conflict with faith — it deepens it. Observation and contemplation stand side by side with worship. The following verse makes this still more explicit:

*"Those who remember God while standing,
sitting, and lying on their sides, and who
reflect upon the creation of the heavens and
the earth."*

(Al Imran, 3:191)

Remembrance and reflection; faith and reason; devotion and inquiry — all of these can, and indeed must, coexist within the same human being at the same moment. The idea of the two-winged believer is the name for precisely this unity.

It is for this reason that the enduring ascents throughout history have occurred in periods when faith and reason operated together. The notion that man is 'two-winged' is not a mere metaphor; it is a distillation of historical reality. Societies that have attempted to fly on a single wing have been swept either into fanaticism or into a rationalism drained of all meaning.

The First Command: 'Read' — and Its Meaning

The birth of Islam began with a call that set both wings in motion at once. The very first word of the first revelation is singular in its elegance and profound in its significance:

*"Read! In the name of your Lord who
created — Created man from a clinging
substance. Read! And your Lord is the Most
Generous — Who taught by the pen —
Taught man that which he knew not."*

(Al-Alaq, 96:1–5)

In this opening command, the word 'Read' is repeated twice. The repetition is not accidental. The first 'Read' is a direct divine imperative. The second provides the reason: because your Lord is the Most Generous. That is to say, reading is bound to God's generosity. The more man reads, the more he receives of that great bounty.

The command 'Read' is not, in any narrow sense, a mere instruction to engage in literacy. It is a comprehensive call to understand the universe, humanity, and life in their entirety. To read is not only to grasp a text — it is to comprehend context, sign, and consequence. To read a flower. To read history. To read another human being. And ultimately, to read one's own interior.

This understanding shaped the relationship that early Muslim societies formed with knowledge. Knowledge was not seen as a domain in conflict with the sacred, but as an instrument in service of understanding the sacred. Observation, experiment, calculation, and reasoning were regarded not as signs of weakening faith, but of its deepening.

In this period, faith did not become an authority that suppressed reason, nor did reason carry any claim of superiority that devalued faith. On the contrary, each recognised the boundaries and functions of the other. This mutual recognition formed the foundation of civilisational production.

The Age of Ascent: When the Balance Was Held

In the early Islamic societies, the production of knowledge was not confined to particular fields. Astronomy, medicine, mathematics, architecture, urban planning, and philosophy all flourished without conflict with belief — because knowledge was understood not as something set against the sacred, but as an effort to comprehend it.

The House of Wisdom (Bayt al-Hikmah), founded during the reign of Caliph Harun al-Rashid and reaching its zenith under Caliph al-Ma'mun, is the institutional expression of this understanding. This centre of learning in Baghdad was a space where works in Greek, Persian, and Syriac were translated into Arabic, studied, and then developed further. Astronomy, medicine, mathematics, and philosophy were all pursued here — not as activities in contradiction with faith, but as means of understanding the universe that God had created.

In this era, reason was not silenced in the name of faith, nor was faith reduced in the name of reason. The production of knowledge was coupled with moral responsibility. With each new piece of knowledge, man did not absolutise himself — on the contrary, he came to recognise his own limits more clearly. That recognition produced not arrogance, but humility.

Ibn al-Haytham proved that light emanates from objects rather than from the eye, and also calculated the times of prayer. Al-Biruni surveyed the geography of India and simultaneously documented different religions with remarkable impartiality. Ibn Sina wrote a medical encyclopaedia, composed philosophical treatises, and never neglected his acts of worship. These figures are living proof that science and faith can inhabit the same heart.

The Point of Rupture: Mistrust of Reason

Yet history shows that this balance could not be indefinitely preserved. Over time, for various social and political reasons, confidence in reason began to erode. Questioning came to be seen as troubling, criticism was perceived as a threat, and intellectual production was brought under the desire for control. This process did not unfold as a sudden break, but as a slow and inward transformation.

Behind this transformation lay multiple factors. The Mongol invasion of 1258, the sacking of Baghdad, and the profound trauma it left — giving rise to a psychology of defence and closure — stand foremost among them. Centuries of accumulated scholarly treasure were annihilated within days. This catastrophe bred deep fear and a reflexive withdrawal in the Islamic world. The impulse to 'protect what we have' overtook the impulse to 'produce something new.'

In parallel, political upheavals poisoned the relationship between learning and power. Scholars were drawn into political calculation. At times, views that were convenient to those in power were presented as truth. At other times, questions that ran contrary to political interest were branded as heresy (*bid'ah*). This relationship eroded the independence of scholarship.

Reason was pushed to the margins in the name of faith — and faith, in consequence, was left without reason. This did not lead to a deepening of belief but to its growing shallow. Belief without understanding gradually became unquestioning acceptance; and that acceptance fed fanaticism. At the same moment, when reason severed its bond with faith, it lost its capacity to generate meaning and became an instrument in the service of raw power and self-interest.

The One-Winged Man: A Historical Profile

The portrait that emerges at the end of this historical process is clear: faith is present, but reason is weak. Discourse is strong, but production is limited. Reaction is intense, but depth is absent. This resembles a bird that tries to fly on one wing and is perpetually dashed to the ground.

The question that the Quran poses again and again — 'Will you not reason?' — finds its meaning precisely at this juncture. This question recurs dozens of times in different forms throughout the Quran:

"Will you not reason?"

(Al-Baqarah, 2:44)

"Will you not reflect?"

(Al-An'am, 6:50)

"Will you not take heed?"

(Al-A'raf, 7:3)

These questions are not accidental. They are a continuous divine summons to the human being: Think. Question. Believe through understanding. For reason is not the adversary of faith — it is its safeguard. Faith without reason loses its direction; reason without faith loses its meaning.

This work has been written to examine how man arrived at this point of rupture, and how the lost balance might be restored. The missing wing has not been wholly destroyed. It has been forgotten; suppressed and stripped of its worth. But it still exists.

Part II — Two-Winged Believers and the Lost Balance

An Era When Knowledge Held a Different Meaning

Looking at the periods of ascent in Islamic civilisation, one common feature stands out: in these eras, knowledge was not regarded as a mere exercise of power or a vehicle for intellectual superiority. Learning was understood as an activity centred on the human being — one aimed at developing man morally, intellectually, and spiritually. This approach gave rise to a natural unity between faith and reason.

This unity did not remain at the theoretical level; it found direct expression in the lives of those who devoted themselves to scholarship. These individuals were neither detached philosophers who only thought, nor reclusive pietists who only believed. They were human beings capable of uniting faith and reason within the same body, in service of the same purpose. In other words, they were two-winged believers.

For these scholars, knowledge was not a domain that threatened faith. On the contrary, it was a path along which faith itself was deepened. To study the order of the universe, to seek to understand the human body, or to analyse the structure of society did not mean denying the divine order. Rather, such endeavour was a manifestation of the desire to draw near to the wisdom embedded in creation.

*"It is only those who have knowledge among
His servants that truly fear God."*

(Fatir, 35:28)

This verse builds the bridge between knowledge and faith with extraordinary force. The man who truly knows fears

God more — that is, he draws closer to Him. For the more deeply he comes to know the universe, the greater he perceives its Creator to be. Knowledge does not threaten faith; it deepens it.

A Profile of the Two-Winged Believers

The scholars of this period were conscious of their own limits even as they produced knowledge. Reason was not absolutised; faith was not hardened into an unquestionable dogma. Reason provided measure and method; faith provided direction and meaning. This equilibrium drove them neither toward arrogant intellectualism nor toward blind submission.

Al-Farabi engaged with both Aristotelian philosophy and Islamic theology with equal intellectual depth. In his work *Al-Madinah al-Fadilah* (The Virtuous City), he blended political philosophy with Islamic values as he defined the ideal society. In his view, the virtuous state could be founded under the joint guidance of both reason and revelation.

Ibn al-Haytham is one of the most important figures in the history of the scientific method. He is recognised as the first scholar to employ the method of observation, experiment, and replication in a systematic fashion. His *Kitab al-Manazir* (Book of Optics) became a foundational source for the science of optics and was read across Europe for centuries. Yet Ibn al-Haytham was also a man of deep faith. He began his investigations with the Basmala and regarded his findings as the hidden secrets of a universe God had created.

Yet this balance was not a matter of individual consciousness alone. Social structures, educational philosophy, and institutions were all built upon this two-winged understanding. The gatherings of scholars were not merely spaces for the transmission of information, but

arenas in which moral maturation was also pursued as a goal. Asking questions was not a threat — it was the natural part of learning. Criticism was seen as a constructive rather than a destructive activity.

The Unravelling of the Balance: Two Extremes

This structure began, in time, to dissolve. As the natural bond between learning and faith weakened, two extremes emerged. On one side, an outlook developed that sought to purge faith of reason. In this view, questioning came to be seen as dangerous, thought as sedition. Faith was treated as a fragile domain in need of protection, and reason was expelled from it.

On the other side, an approach that severed reason from faith gained ground. In this framework, reason declared itself self-sufficient. Meaning, value, and morality were pushed beyond the reach of reason and reduced to subjective preferences. Knowledge was thus separated from wisdom; power was divorced from responsibility.

Both approaches tore man from his wholeness. Faith without reason turned inward and hardened. Reason without faith lost its direction and became instrumental. The human type that emerged could neither think deeply nor believe deeply. This profile became the carrier of a mentality that was reactive but unproductive, assertive but shallow.

As the balance embodied by the two-winged believers disappeared, knowledge itself lost its meaning. Information multiplied; but wisdom diminished. Education expanded; but sagacity did not develop. Man came to know more and more things — but ceased to question why he was knowing them and to what end. This condition prepared the ground for the intellectual rupture that would deepen still further in the modern age.

The loss described in this chapter is not a matter belonging only to the past. The identity crisis, the crisis of meaning, and the mental fragmentation experienced in today's world are the continuing consequences of this historical rupture. So long as man forgets that he exists by virtue of two wings, he will be unable to find his balance.

Part III — The Withdrawal of Reason and Institutional Freezing

When Institutions Freeze, Thought Freezes Too

The balance between faith and reason was not disrupted only at the individual level. The deeper rupture came when that balance was withdrawn from institutional structures. For individuals can change over time; but when institutions freeze, thought begins to freeze as well. This freezing was not a temporary pause — it was the beginning of an intellectual rigidity that would persist across generations.

In the earliest period, scholarship was a living activity. Questions were asked, debates were held, and differing views could coexist. The jurisprudential disputes between Imam al-Shafi'i and Imam Malik, the intellectual clashes between Ibn Hazm and al-Ghazali — these are signs of that vitality. Disagreement was regarded not as sedition but as a mercy.

Over time, however, knowledge ceased to be something to be produced and came to be seen as a heritage to be preserved. From this point forward, thought ceased to be a moving river and became a still lake, held in custody. To touch the lake was forbidden; to add anything new to it was considered dangerous.

The most tangible sign of this transformation was the spread of the notion that 'the gate of ijtihad had been closed.' From roughly the fourth and fifth centuries of the Islamic calendar onward, the view gained traction that 'the great scholars have already said everything; all that remains for us is imitation (taqlid).' This idea appears, on its surface, to express humility — a reverence for the great. But at its core it contains something quite different: the freezing of thought.

The Transformation of Education: From Understanding to Memorisation

This transformation became most pronounced in the understanding of education. Learning was no longer to understand, to solve, and to reconstruct. It gave way to memorisation, repetition, and transmission. Knowledge became not a responsibility but a contest of memorisation. In this process, reason was stripped of its role as a productive subject and reduced to a tool that merely confirmed what had been handed down.

The madrasas began to drift from their founding purposes. Originally, a madrasa was not merely a space for transmitting information — it was a place for producing thought. Differing views were set side by side, students were encouraged to debate, and to say 'I do not know' was counted as a virtue. But over time this culture changed. The curriculum was fixed. Which books would be read and which questions could be asked were decided in advance. A teacher who thought differently came to be seen as a threat to the institution's order.

In time, the scholarly gatherings lost their character as spaces of debate. Differing views came to be perceived not as an enrichment but as a threat. Criticism was stripped of its function as a pursuit of truth and equated with sedition. This understanding gradually withdrew reason from

public life. Reason was silenced in the name of faith — yet that silence did not strengthen faith.

*"And when it is said to them, Follow what
God has revealed, they say: Rather, we will
follow that upon which we found our fathers.
Even if their fathers were those who did not
reason at all and were not guided?"*

(Al-Baqarah, 2:170)

This verse is the Quranic critique of institutional freezing. To render the authority of the past unquestionable brings thought to a standstill. Tradition has value; it must be preserved. But when tradition is placed ahead of reason, it ceases to be a guide and becomes a prison.

How Faith Was Hollowed Out

The withdrawal of reason from institutional structures also transformed the content of knowledge itself. Knowledge was uprooted from its context. Questions diminished; answers multiplied. The question 'Why?' gave way to the question 'How is it transmitted?' In this way, thought was transformed from a dynamic process into a static act of memorisation.

At this juncture, faith too began to change. In place of belief rooted in understanding, an unquestioned acceptance came to the fore. Faith narrowed rather than deepened. Belief not nourished by reason hardened over time, or developed a defensive reflex. This defensive posture closed faith off to the outside world and trapped it within a psychology of perpetual threat.

The institutional freezing made itself felt not only in the realm of thought but in social structures as well. Education lost its connection to production. Morality ceased to be a guiding principle for life and became an abstract discourse. Society became a structure that repeated the

past but could not build the future. This structure struggled to produce answers for a changing world.

During this process of reason's withdrawal, faith appeared to be preserved — but in reality its substance grew weak. For faith gains its meaning in concert with reason. Belief without reason feels compelled to defend itself constantly. A permanent state of defence increases not depth but hardness. That hardness, in time, feeds fanaticism, exclusion, and a turning inward.

Thus the 'two-winged' structure effectively came to an end. Man tried to walk on one wing. A condition emerged in which he could not fly — and yet no one asked why he could not fly. This was not merely an individual deficiency; it was a collective loss of consciousness.

Part IV — The Prohibition of the Question: The Silent Purging of Thought

Reason Is Not Banned; First, the Question Is Banned

When one examines the periods throughout history in which thought has regressed, a common feature stands out: reason is not prohibited all at once. First, the question is prohibited. When the question disappears, thought weakens of its own accord. This process unfolds not as a loud confrontation but in a silent and reasoned manner.

At the outset, the stated aim is to preserve order. Arguments are advanced such as: 'Let us not confuse the public,' 'not everyone needs to know everything,' 'these matters are too weighty for ordinary people.' In this way, certain subjects are reserved for narrow circles. Over time

these boundaries expand, and the habit of questioning comes to be regarded as generally inadvisable.

These justifications may often be sincere. Preserving order is a legitimate aim. The desire to protect society from misunderstanding may also carry a genuine intention. But intention does not determine outcome. Restricting inquiry appears, in the short term, to preserve order. In the long term, however, it dulls the community's capacity for thought. And a thought that has been dulled eventually becomes unable even to recognise an order that is itself decaying.

From Education to Politics: The Suppression of the Question in Different Forms

This transformation made itself most evident in the field of education. Whereas in the earliest period knowledge advanced through observation, debate, and comparison, in subsequent centuries it was reduced to a fixed body of information to be transmitted. Texts were sacralised; interpretation became risky. Preserving the text took precedence over understanding it.

At this point, the production of knowledge slowed. For knowledge cannot advance without the question. Where there is no question, answers multiply — but depth is lost. Education began to produce not fully formed human beings, but memorising individuals. These individuals excelled not at multiplying what they had learned, but at preserving it.

Social structures were affected by this intellectual transformation as well. Different views, alternative approaches, and new interpretations were seen not as opportunities for development but as elements that would destabilise the existing order. Thought was thus removed from its natural domain and confined within a narrow frame.

What is notable in this process is the following: reason was not extinguished altogether. On the contrary, it was permitted to operate in certain domains. Calculations could be made, technical affairs conducted, everyday problems solved. But at the threshold of the great questions, a boundary was drawn. Man was permitted to seek answers to the question 'how'; but the question 'why' was found to be disturbing.

One-Wingedness: A Conditioned State

This distinction, over time, narrowed the intellectual horizon of man. Man learned not why he was alive, but how to remain alive. The search for meaning was relegated to the background; practical solutions were elevated. This led to an intellectual diminishment. Man came to possess more knowledge — yet became less of a thinker.

This intellectual contraction affected not only individuals but society as a whole. As critical thought weakened, errors became permanent. Because mistakes were not questioned, they recurred; because problems were not addressed, they grew. Society attempted to answer the future by repeating solutions it had produced in the past.

Thus, without being aware of it, man became one-winged. He wishes to rise — yet does not question why he cannot rise. When the question itself becomes invisible, the possibility of a solution disappears as well.

The matter told in this chapter is not an individual deficiency — it is a historical habit. This habit has taught that thinking is risky, that questioning is dangerous, and that the search for meaning is unnecessary. Man was raised inside this teaching and accepted it as natural.

One-wingedness is not a choice. It is a conditioned state.

The Lost Wing as a Threshold of Beginning

This chapter has been composed not as the opening of a narrative, but as a preparatory space. Rather than drawing the reader directly into the debate, its aim is to ready the mind and the perception for the historical and intellectual journey that lies ahead. What is told here is not a conclusion; it is a frame.

For this work does not confine itself to a particular period or a single event. The narrative will encompass the human adventure on earth, the relationship between belief and knowledge, and the transformations that relationship has undergone throughout history — across a broad span of time. That span extends from the first moment of human consciousness to the threshold of the modern age.

Volume I will open, historically, with Adam (peace be upon him) and follow the human search for meaning through the chain of prophets. In this journey, it is not only the line of revelation that will be examined, but the relationship man formed with that revelation — how it was understood, and how that understanding was interpreted over time. The message of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) will stand at the centre of this account; and the interpretations, schools, and sects that arose in his wake will be evaluated within their historical contexts.

Within this framework, the early periods in which Islamic thought took shape, the institutionalisation of the scholarly tradition, and the scientific and intellectual production that emerged across different geographies will all be addressed — not in a language of praise or condemnation, but within a framework of cause and effect.

The aim is not to sanctify or to prosecute the past. The aim is to illuminate the intellectual climate in which that production was made, and to show how that climate changed over time.

This historical line will extend to the Ottoman period; it will examine how the relationship between knowledge, power, and governance was shaped. The aim here is not to write a history of an empire, but to show how the intellectual structure was built and at which points it became fragile.

Volume I covers, historically, the period from Adam (peace be upon him) to the early twentieth century. This period represents a long era in which technology was not yet the determining factor, but in which the intellectual and cognitive foundations were being formed. Without understanding this foundation, it is not possible to make a sound assessment of the ruptures experienced in the modern age.

Once this threshold is crossed, there is no turning back.

For the narrative is moving toward the exile of reason.

Bibliography and References

The Holy Quran — Al-Tin 95:4; Al Imran 3:190–191; Al-Alaq 96:1–5; Fatir 35:28; Al-Baqarah 2:44, 2:170; Al-An'am 6:50; Al-A'raf 7:3

Imam al-Ghazali — Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din [The Revival of the Religious Sciences] (On the relationship between knowledge and action; all volumes)

Ibn Khaldun — Muqaddimah [Prolegomena] (On the cycles of rise and decline of civilisations; the relationship between learning and power)

Ibn al-Haytham — Kitab al-Manazir [Book of Optics] (Optics; in the context of the history of the scientific method)

Ibn Sina — Al-Shifa; Al-Qanun fi al-Tibb [The Canon of Medicine] (The integrated structure of faith and knowledge)

Al-Farabi — Al-Madinah al-Fadilah [The Virtuous City] (Reason, revelation, and the virtuous society)

Fakhr al-Din al-Razi — Mafatih al-Ghayb [Keys of the Unseen] (Commentaries on Al Imran 190 and Al-Baqarah 170)

Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır — Hak Dini Kur'an Dili [The True Religion: The Language of the Quran] (Commentary on the relevant verses)

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi — Risale-i Nur Collection: The Words; The Letters (On the unity of faith and reason)

George Makdisi — The Rise of Colleges (The transformation of educational institutions in Islam)

Marshall Hodgson — The Venture of Islam, Vols. I–III (A broad history of Islamic civilisation)

İbrahim Kalın — Ben, Öteki ve Ötesi [I, the Other, and Beyond] (Reason and faith in Islamic thought)

Mustafa İslamoğlu — Hayat Kitabı Kur'an [The Quran: Book of Life] (Commentaries on Surahs Al-Baqarah and Al Imran)

Toshihiko Izutsu — God and Man in the Quran (Semantic analysis; the concepts of reason and faith)

CHAPTER II

The Exile of Reason

Part I — The Dialogue of Adam and Iblis

"We have certainly created man in the finest form."

(Al-Tin, 95:4)

In the Beginning, There Was a Question

The place where history begins is, more often than not, misread. The human adventure does not start in a patch of earth or in the emergence of a particular people — it begins at a far deeper, far more particular moment: that fragile instant when two wills confront each other, when two fundamentally different understandings of existence clash for the very first time.

This is not merely a religious story. It is a cipher — one that tells us who man is, what he struggles against, and why he has still not fully risen. The Quran unfolds this cipher again and again, across different surahs, in different contexts, with different emphases. That repetition is not accidental. For man must read this cipher anew in every generation.

The dialogue of Adam and Iblis is not an event that belongs only to the past. It is a reality re-enacted every day within every human being. This chapter aims to open that reality, layer by layer.

The Mystery of Creation: Why Adam?

When God Most High informed the angels that He would create a vicegerent on earth, the question the angels posed is both profound and extraordinarily significant for the history of humanity:

"Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your praise and sanctify You?"

(Al-Baqarah, 2:30)

The angels are not wrong. Man has indeed shed blood. Man has indeed spread corruption. Why, then, did God proceed with this creation? The answer follows immediately:

"Indeed, I know that which you do not know."

(Al-Baqarah, 2:30)

This brief sentence holds the greatest secret in the history of humanity. God knows something the angels do not. What is this 'unknown thing'? It is not simply what man will do. It is something deeper: what man is capable of becoming.

The angel acts by command. Iblis acts by pride. But man exists within that delicate tension between will, reason, and faith. It is precisely this tension that makes him singular. For a being that acts not by necessity but by choice can, in the truest sense, bear responsibility. Can, in the truest sense, generate meaning.

This creation does not describe a weak being — it describes a being of potential. Man can ascend. This possibility of ascent is a grace that may make him superior even to the angels. Accordingly, God commands the angels to prostrate before Adam. This command is not symbolic; it is the recognition of the potential man carries.

The Secret of the Names: The First Source of Knowledge

Before the command to prostrate, a remarkable scene unfolds. God Most High teaches Adam the names:

"And He taught Adam the names of all things; then He set them before the angels and said: Tell Me the names of these, if you are truthful."

(Al-Baqarah, 2:31)

The angels cannot answer. For they cannot go beyond what has been taught to them. They possess a fixed capacity for knowledge — they cannot expand it, cannot deepen it, cannot interpret. Adam, by contrast, knows the names; that is, he possesses a structure capable of grasping the essence of objects, concepts, and realities.

The word 'names' must not be read in any narrow sense here. Islamic scholars have debated this expression across the centuries. Ibn Abbas, Ibn Mas'ud, and other great commentators have stated that these names encompass not only the labels of things but their natures, their functions, and their relationships with one another. To put it plainly: God granted Adam the capacity to construct meaning.

This capacity is sufficient to make man the vicegerent of the earth. For a being capable of constructing meaning can comprehend order, assume responsibility, and build the

future. It is for this reason that man was deemed worthy of bearing the trust of the earth.

Yet there is a critical point here. This knowledge was given to Adam — that is, this capacity for meaning-making that man carries was not of his own making; it was acquired through divine grace. Man does not produce knowledge; he discovers it, develops it, transmits it. The moment he forgets this distinction, pride begins. And pride is the first seed of one-wingedness.

The Refusal of Iblis: The Anatomy of Pride

When the command to prostrate is given, all the angels prostrate. One being alone refuses: Iblis.

"God said: What prevented you from prostrating when I commanded you? Iblis said: I am better than him. You created me from fire and created him from clay."

(Al-A'raf, 7:12)

This brief dialogue contains the greatest act of pride in the history of humanity. Iblis advances a claim. That claim is built upon a faulty logical inference: Fire is superior to clay; therefore I, created from fire, am superior to one created from clay.

On its surface, it appears a coherent argument. But it harbours a fatal error: the tethering of superiority to origin. Origin may not be the determining factor; potential, purpose, and choice are what determine. Iblis derived a claim of superiority from the physical property of fire, yet turned a blind eye to the potential Adam carried, to his capacity for meaning-making, and to the divine grace bestowed upon him.

This is the first error of logic. And it is the essence of pride: confusing the visible with the real. Equating surface with depth, form with substance, origin with worth.

But the error of Iblis is not pride alone. There is a deeper problem: he placed the 'Self' at the centre. When evaluating the command, he did not ask 'What does God will?' He asked 'Is this right for me?' This is to place reason not in the service of will, but in the defence of the ego. From this point forward, the reason of Iblis ceased to be a search for truth; it became an instrument for justifying his own existence.

This transformation is of the utmost importance. For when reason ceases to be a search for truth and begins to serve as a function of defence, it no longer illuminates — it rationalises. It no longer seeks what is right; it seeks to vindicate what already is. This is the most dangerous form of reason's corruption.

The Stage of the Nafs: The Ally of Iblis

Here a vital question must be asked plainly: which is more dangerous — Iblis or the nafs?

The Quran answers this question indirectly. When Joseph (peace be upon him) was cast into the well, when he fell into the trap set by his brothers, when he was subjected to the temptation of Zulaikha — in each case he faced a danger coming from without. Yet he says:

*"And I do not acquit myself. Indeed, the nafs
is inclined to evil, except that upon which my
Lord has mercy."*

(Yusuf, 12:53)

Joseph speaks not of Iblis but of his own nafs. For Iblis comes from without — he whispers, he insinuates. But the nafs comes from within; it is a force entrenched in man's very core, perpetually active. When this force is not brought under control, it opens the door to Iblis.

The relationship between the nafs and Iblis may be understood as follows: Iblis knows the weak points of the

human nafs. He targets pride, greed, desire, fear, and anger. So long as the nafs harbours these weaknesses, Iblis's task is made easy. As the nafs is purified, the influence of Iblis diminishes.

It is for this reason that in Islam the inner struggle precedes the outer. Upon returning from the expedition to Tabuk, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: 'We have returned from the lesser jihad to the greater jihad.' The Companions asked: 'What is the greater jihad, O Messenger of God?' He replied: 'The jihad against the nafs.'

The one-winged believer has turned a blind eye to this inner struggle. While focusing on the enemy outside, he has allowed the weakness within to grow. Pride has swollen; he has grown distant from questioning; the nafs has strengthened. In this way, he has opened the greatest door to Iblis — from the inside.

From Paradise to Earth: The True Meaning of Exile

The expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise is, more often than not, read as a punishment. But the Quran also presents the matter from a different perspective. Before the expulsion, God says:

"Descend, all of you, as enemies to one another. On earth you will have a place of settlement and enjoyment for a time."

(Al-Baqarah, 2:36)

The phrase 'as enemies to one another' is striking. It speaks not only of the conflict between Adam and Iblis, but of the conflict within man himself. The spirit and the nafs stand against each other. Reason and desire stand against each other. Faith and doubt stand against each other. This conflict will continue on earth.

Is this exile then a tragedy? The Quran offers another perspective. After God accepted the repentance of Adam, He says:

*"Then Adam received words from his Lord,
and He accepted his repentance. Indeed, He
is the Accepting of Repentance, the Merciful."*

(Al-Baqarah, 2:37)

The exile is not the end of the relationship. Man has been sent down to earth, but God has not severed communication with him. On the contrary, guidance has been promised:

*"Descend from it, all of you. And if guidance
comes to you from Me, then whoever follows
My guidance — no fear will there be
concerning them, nor will they grieve."*

(Al-Baqarah, 2:38)

This promise is the greatest good tidings in the history of humanity. Earth is not a place of punishment — it is a place of trial. And in the place of trial, guidance is present. That guidance reaches every human being through revelation, reason, and the fitra — the innate disposition.

Here lies the very essence of the two-winged believer: to receive guidance and to grasp it with both faith and reason together. One who understands through faith alone turns the guidance to stone. One who understands through reason alone instrumentalises it. When both operate together, guidance leads to truth.

The Strategy of Iblis: A Plan That Spans the Centuries

When Iblis is expelled, he does not surrender. He makes a demand:

*"He said: Grant me respite until the Day
they are raised. God said: Indeed, you are of
those granted respite."*

(Al-A'raf, 7:14-15)

And then he openly declares his strategy:

*"He said: Because You have put me in error,
I will surely sit in wait for them on Your
straight path. Then I will come to them from
before them and from behind them and on
their right and on their left, and You will not
find most of them grateful."*

(Al-A'raf, 7:16-17)

This declaration is of the utmost importance. Iblis will not attack directly. He will come from the front, from behind, from the right, and from the left — that is, from every direction. He will employ a strategy of encirclement. The target is a single thing: to sever man's gratitude — his bond with God.

The word 'gratitude' (shukr) must also be understood correctly here. Gratitude is not merely the utterance of 'Alhamdulillah.' Gratitude is awareness of blessings, using them rightly, feeling oneself indebted, and preserving consciousness of servitude. It is precisely this consciousness that Iblis targets.

When one surveys the strategies Iblis has followed across the centuries, the same pattern is always visible: to sever man from God. This is sometimes accomplished through open denial. But sometimes through far more insidious means: pride, desire, fear, sloth, lust for station, love of the world. All of these instruments corrode man from within.

And as the modern age is reached, these instruments are updated. Perception management, the pollution of information, the hollowing out of meaning, the isolation of the individual, the creation of systemic dependence —

all serve the same end: to prevent man from being a grateful being, that is, one who is bound to God, full of meaning, and conscious of responsibility.

But to treat this subject in depth belongs to Volume II. For now it is sufficient to establish this: the plan of Iblis has not changed throughout history. Only its instruments have changed.

The First Error of Logic and Its Consequences

Understanding precisely at which point the fall of Iblis occurred is critical for understanding the general course of human history. For Iblis is not without reason. He heard the command to prostrate. He knew the power of God. He refused nonetheless.

At the root of this refusal lies the misuse of reason. Iblis deployed his reason in the following sequence: first, he drew a comparison — fire and clay; second, he derived a hierarchy from that comparison — fire is superior; third, he generated a claim of right from that hierarchy — therefore I need not prostrate.

Each step of the reasoning appears coherent. But the whole is wrong. For the foundational premise is flawed: the material of creation does not determine worth. Worth is determined by the command of God. Iblis passed God's command through the filter of his own reason — and rejected it.

This is the most dangerous form of reason's use: judging the divine by human criteria. This error has repeated itself across the centuries. Every mind that rejects revelation on the grounds that 'this command is not logical,' every mind that dismisses divine rulings with the words 'I do not accept this' — is repeating the first error of Iblis.

Yet this too must be said: to use reason is not wrong. To question is not wrong. On the contrary, the Quran

encourages both. But there is a fine yet sharp boundary between questioning and pride. The questioning reason seeks truth. The prideful reason seeks confirmation of its own correctness.

This distinction lies at the precise centre of the two-winged believer's understanding. When reason serves faith, the search for truth unfolds. When reason serves the nafs, rationalisation begins. In the first case, reason elevates man. In the second, man turns his reason into the justification for his own fall.

Dying Before Death: The Secret of Passing Through the Dimensions

In Islamic mysticism, the expression 'die before you die' carries a profound meaning. This is not physical death. It is the death of the nafs — the ego-self. It is man's purification from selfishness, pride, and attachment to the world; the liberation of the spirit.

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) says: 'Die before you die.' This hadith speaks not of an escape but of a transformation. When man liberates his spirit by confronting his nafs, he passes into a different dimension while still in this world.

This passing of dimensions is not metaphorical. As the heart is purified, as the nafs is refined, perception changes. Man begins to see the same world through different eyes. He discerns the wisdom behind events. He perceives connections. Meaning deepens.

Adam (peace be upon him) accomplished this passage in the aftermath of his descent from paradise to earth. Through his repentance, through receiving the words of God, and through turning once more toward guidance, he underwent a transformation. This transformation carried him from primal humanity to conscious humanity.

This is what the two-winged believer aims for. Faith provides direction: Where is one going? Reason produces method: How does one get there? As the nafs is purified, the path opens; the door to Iblis is closed. And man, while yet alive, draws near to the gates of truth.

This is not a religious myth. It is a reality that has been witnessed again and again throughout the history of humanity. The great scholars, the great saints, the human beings who truly became two-winged — they lived this transformation, and the marks they left have outlasted the centuries.

The Lesson of the Dialogue: What Will Man Choose?

The dialogue of Adam and Iblis in truth illuminates two roads that lie before man. The first is the road of Iblis: pride, the absolutisation of one's own reason, the judging of God's command by human criteria, the sovereignty of the nafs. This road appears, at the outset, like freedom. 'I trust my own reason; I prostrate before no one.' But its end is exile. For meaning is lost. Direction is lost.

The second is the road of Adam: there is error, but there is also repentance. There is a fall, but there is also rebuilding. There is the nafs, but there is also the spirit. This road appears, at the outset, burdensome. 'Confronting oneself is hard.' But its end is salvation. For guidance has been received, meaning has been preserved, balance has been established.

Every day, man chooses between these two roads. On the larger scale, civilisations too choose between these two roads. History shows that civilisations which chose the road of Iblis collapsed at the zenith of their pride; while civilisations that strove to hold to the road of Adam found the possibility of learning from their errors and rising again.

The one-winged believer has lost the ability to see the difference between these two roads. For one of his wings — either his faith or his reason — has grown weak. If reason has grown weak, he mistakes the road of Iblis for faith. If faith has grown weak, he mistakes the road of Iblis for freedom. In either case, he is deceived.

This is precisely the matter this chapter has sought to convey: in order to choose rightly, one must first see rightly. To see rightly, two wings are needed. And the two wings attain their full function only when the nafs is acknowledged, when the strategy of Iblis is recognised, and when the guidance of God is internalised.

Part Closing

The Dialogue Has Not Ended

This part has told of a dialogue. But that dialogue has not ended. Iblis will continue until the allotted time has run its course. The nafs is active within every human being. And every day, man plays one of the characters in this dialogue.

The question that must be asked is this: Which side are we playing? The side that seeks to justify its pride? Or the side that acknowledges its error and rebuilds itself through repentance?

The answer is not merely an individual choice. This choice is directly bound to the fate of civilisations. For civilisations are composed of individuals. And individuals either rise as two-winged beings, or flail as one-winged ones.

In the next part, we will examine how this dialogue was reflected into history, how the first pride was transmitted

across generations, and how man has carried this inheritance.

Bibliography and References

The Holy Quran — Al-Baqarah 2:30–38; Al-A'raf 7:11–18; Al-Tin 95:4; Yusuf 12:53; Al-Hijr 15:26–43; Al-Isra 17:61–65; Al-Kahf 18:50; Sad 38:71–85

Ibn Kathir — Tafsir al-Quran al-Azim (Sections on Al-Baqarah and Al-A'raf)

Fakhr al-Din al-Razi — Mafatih al-Ghayb [Keys of the Unseen] (Commentaries on the story of Iblis and Adam)

Imam al-Ghazali — Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din [The Revival of the Religious Sciences] (Chapters on the nafs and pride)

Ibn Arabi — Fusus al-Hikam [The Bezels of Wisdom] (The chapter of Adam)

Sayyid Qutb — Fi Zilal al-Quran [In the Shade of the Quran] (Commentary on Al-Baqarah)

Elmahlı Hamdi Yazır — Hak Dini Kur'an Dili [The True Religion: The Language of the Quran] (Commentary on the relevant verses)

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi — The Words (Twenty-Fourth Word: On the nafs and Iblis)

Mustafa İslamoğlu — Hayat Kitabı Kur'an [The Quran: Book of Life] (Commentary on Surahs Al-Baqarah and Al-A'raf)

M. Fethullah Gülen — Kalbin Zümrüt Tepeleri [The Emerald Hills of the Heart] (The stations of the nafs)

CHAPTER II — The Exile of Reason

Part II — The First Pride

"He truly waxed proud, and so became one of those who deny the truth."

(Al-Baqarah, 2:34)

The Moment Pride Was Born

Before every great collapse in history there is an invisible moment. The swords have not yet been drawn; the battle has not yet begun; yet everything has already changed. This moment cannot be perceived from without. For it lives inside a heart.

The pride of Iblis was born in just such a moment. Before the command to prostrate was given, Iblis was among the beings who worshipped God most devotedly, who had served in submission the longest. According to the transmitted accounts, every inch of the earth bore the marks of his prostration. Yet all this worship concealed a poison growing within: the sense of being special.

Pride is born, more often than not, not from sin but from an excess of worship, an excess of knowledge, an excess of success. For this reason the most dangerous pride is not the pride of the ignorant — it is the pride of the learned. The deepest fall is not the fall of the sinner — it is the fall of one who considers himself virtuous. Iblis is the most striking example of this truth.

This part examines how that first pride was born, how it grew, and how it came to shape the destiny of an entire history. For the pride of Iblis did not occur only once in history. Its traces are visible in every human being, in the history of every society, and in the collapse of every civilisation.

Defining Pride: A Disease Deeper Than It Appears

To understand pride, one must first define it correctly. In common usage, pride is often understood as 'boasting.' But this is only the outward face of pride. True pride lives far more quietly and far more deeply.

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) defines pride in the following terms:

"Pride is rejecting the truth and looking down upon people."

(Muslim, Kitab al-Iman, Hadith 147)

This definition is of the utmost importance. It contains two elements: rejecting the truth, and looking down upon people. The first concerns the mind. The second concerns the heart. Pride is both an intellectual and a spiritual disease.

Rejecting the truth means this: refusing to accept what is right even when you see it — because to accept it would mean saying 'I was wrong.' The proud person cannot bear this. Because they cannot bear it, they deny, they manufacture justifications, they blame others, or they silence them. But they can never say 'you are right.'

Looking down upon people means this: diminishing the worth of others in order to make one's own worth appear greater. It is a comparative system of self-value. The proud person obtains their sense of height not from any absolute

elevation, but by lowering others. Pride, for this reason, is not merely an inward feeling — it is a social dynamic.

Iblis demonstrated both dimensions without exception. He rejected the command of God — that is, he denied the truth. He held Adam in contempt — that is, he debased mankind. When these two acts occur together, pride is complete.

The Trap of Accumulation: The Pride of Worship

What makes the fall of Iblis still more tragic is the height from which he fell. He had worshipped for centuries. That worship was real — it was not insincere or performed for show. But over time something began to happen: worship was transformed into an accumulated claim of right.

This transformation is what Islamic scholars term 'ujb' — self-admiration. Ujb is to regard one's own good deeds as great; to treat acts of worship not as a gift received but as an achievement earned. While Iblis was serving God, he was — without being aware of it — keeping his own account. And that account, in time, became a ledger of what was owed to him.

Imam al-Ghazali examines this matter in depth in *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*. Al-Ghazali states: a person may see the abundance of their own deeds and feel secure. This feeling leaves them in a state of heedlessness (ghafla). Heedlessness leads to the hardening of the heart. A hardened heart carries out its duties not with love but with habit. And habit, over time, loses its meaning — and becomes the ground in which pride takes root.

The tragic journey of Iblis is precisely this. His long life of worship should have drawn him closer to God — but the ujb within him was quietly pulling him further away. From the outside, a magnificent devotion was visible; inside, a

pride was accumulating. And when the command to prostrate came, that accumulation erupted.

This is a warning of the utmost importance for the history of humanity. The accumulation of knowledge can give birth to pride. The accumulation of worship can give birth to pride. Success can give birth to pride. Lineage, rank, beauty, power — all of these carry the seeds of pride. And those seeds, unless one is vigilant, will grow.

The Poison of Comparison: The Self and the Other

At the centre of the pride of Iblis lies a comparison. 'I from fire, he from clay.' This simple comparison reveals the structural essence of pride: pride is always constructed between 'I' and 'the other.'

Man shapes his identity to a great degree through comparison. This is unavoidable, for meaning is relational. But comparison can operate in two directions. The first: 'Let me learn from the strength of the other.' The second: 'Let me prove my own superiority.' The first feeds humility; the second feeds pride.

Iblis constructed his comparison in the second direction. He did not look to the capacity of Adam; he brought forward his own origin. This is comparison in its most primitive form: seeing form instead of essence; counting lineage instead of measuring potential.

This pattern has repeated itself throughout history. 'We are superior to them because our race is purer.' 'We are superior to them because ours is an older civilisation.' 'We are superior to them because we know more.' Every one of these sentences carries the logic of Iblis. To claim superiority on the basis of origin, form, or accumulated achievement is the most classic form of pride.

The Quran rebukes this pride with the utmost clarity in another verse:

*"O mankind, indeed We have created you
from male and female and made you peoples
and tribes that you may know one another.
Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of
God is the most righteous of you."*

(Al-Hujurat, 49:13)

Nobility does not lie in origin. It lies in taqwa — God-consciousness. And taqwa is the precise opposite of pride: to see oneself as small before God, to preserve one's bond with Him, and to live with a sense of responsibility.

The Four Masks of Pride

Pride does not always come with an open face. More often than not, it wears a mask. These masks are so convincing that the proud person, in most cases, does not recognise their own pride. At times they even mistake pride for virtue.

The first mask: the pride of righteousness. This person is always right. In every argument, every disagreement, every criticism, they defend their own truth. They regard stepping back as weakness. The sense of 'I am right' is so powerful that even when their error is proven, they do not inwardly accept it. This carries the dimension of Iblis's rejection of the truth.

The second mask: the pride of knowledge. This person uses their knowledge as an instrument of power. 'I know; you do not.' They look down on those who ask questions, they hold in contempt those who offer a different view. They carry knowledge not to share it, but to establish superiority. Over time, knowledge departs from the path toward truth and becomes a marker of status.

The third mask: the pride of worship. This person, because they worship abundantly, considers themselves privileged above others. They look upon those who sin not with compassion but with contempt. They think: 'I perform this much worship — God will surely forgive me.' This thought closes the door to repentance. For because they do not feel themselves in need of forgiveness, they cannot sincerely live the experience of seeking it.

The fourth mask: the pride of nation and civilisation. This person or community holds the identity to which they belong in high regard. They count religion, race, language, geography — one or several of these — as grounds for privilege. They define other peoples as inferior and their own as superior. In this form of pride, it is not an individual ego but a collective ego that comes into play. And the collective ego is far more destructive than the individual one.

These four masks share a common characteristic: each of them distances man from God. The pride of righteousness prevents repentance. The pride of knowledge prevents learning. The pride of worship prevents sincerity. And the pride of civilisation prevents compassion.

The Inner Ruin of Pride: The Sealing of the Heart

The deepest ruin that pride brings is not the visible one. The visible ruin — the breaking of relationships, social conflict, wars — all of these are real, but they are on the surface. The true ruin occurs within.

The Quran describes the effect of pride upon the heart with a striking concept: sealing.

*"Thus does God seal the heart of every
arrogant tyrant."*

(Ghafir, 40:35)

A sealed heart no longer receives anything new. Revelation does not reach it. Wisdom cannot take root in it. Warning does not move it. For the door has been closed. And it is not God who closes this door — it is the choices of the human being himself. God is ratifying what has been chosen.

This sealing does not happen in an instant. It advances slowly. Each proud choice hardens another portion of the heart. Each decision of 'I am right' covers over one more stone. Each thought of 'I am superior to him' tightens the lock of the door a little further. And one day, without being aware of it, man finds himself living inside a heart that is completely closed.

Iblis reached this point. The moment he rejected the command to prostrate, the door closed. What followed proceeded without return. He swore to lead mankind astray — because within him there was no longer space for truth. The windows through which the right could be seen had been shut.

This picture is as valid for societies as it is for individuals. Looking at history, before every great collapse the same pattern is always visible: warnings go unheeded. Prophets are rejected. Reformers are silenced. Voices are suppressed. And in the end, when no one remains who can receive the warning, catastrophe becomes inevitable.

The Social Dimension of Pride: The Pride of Civilisations

Pride is not only an individual disease. Societies can become proud. Civilisations can become proud. And history has recorded the fate of civilisations that became proud, again and again.

The Quran tells this truth most strikingly in the story of the peoples of Ad and Thamud. The people of Ad were the

most powerful society of their age. They had constructed great buildings. They had a formidable army. And they said among themselves:

"Who is mightier than us in strength?"

(Fussilat, 41:15)

This sentence is the finest example of a civilisation's pride. The question 'Who is mightier than us?' is in truth less a question than a claim. And this claim leaves God outside the equation. Power is positioned as though it originates from themselves. This positioning is the subtlest form of associating partners with God.

Hud (peace be upon him) warned them. He invited them to repentance, to humility, to a return to God. But pride had stopped up their ears. The warning had reached them — but sealed hearts did not receive it. And the reckoning came in its time.

When one looks at the final period of the Ottomans, a similar pattern is visible. There was a great accumulated civilisation. A historical memory was present. But over time this accumulation ceased to be a ground for learning and became a foundation for pride. 'We are Ottoman — nothing can touch us.' This feeling prevented the necessary reforms from being made. Warnings were ignored. And collapse became inevitable.

The same pattern holds for the modern world. Today, Western civilisation carries a similar pride. 'We are modern, we are scientific, we are civilised.' This claim prevents the decay within from being seen. Moral collapse, the crisis of meaning, the erosion of the family — none of these is taken seriously. For pride is closed to criticism.

This context will be treated in far greater depth in Volume II. For now it is sufficient to establish this: the pride of civilisations carries the same dynamic as the pride of individuals. And it walks toward the same end.

The Opposite of Pride: Humility Is Not Weakness

Humility stands across from pride. But humility must be correctly understood. Humility is not to regard oneself as worthless. Nor is it to present oneself as smaller than one is. Humility is to see reality as it truly is.

The simplest definition of humility is this: to accept the truth wherever it comes from, and not to look down upon people. This is the precise opposite of pride. The proud person rejects the truth and holds people in contempt. The humble person accepts the truth and values the human being.

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) embodied the highest example of humility. While head of state, he would help a person up from the ground and be a guest of the poor. Returning victorious from conquest, he would bow his head and praise only God. When he sat among his Companions, a stranger could not tell who he was — for he sought no privileged position.

This humility is the manifestation not of weakness but of strength. For the person who is secure in their own worth has no need to elevate themselves by diminishing others. True strength does not need to prove itself.

The Quran expresses this truth while describing the servants of the Most Merciful:

*"The servants of the Most Merciful are those
who walk upon the earth in humility, and
when the ignorant address them, they say:
Peace."*

(Al-Furqan, 25:63)

'Walking in humility' describes not merely a physical demeanour but an orientation toward life. This person has no need to prove themselves. Even if another diminishes

them, they are not shaken. For they receive their worth from God — not from anyone else.

Here lies the foundation of the two-winged believer's understanding. Faith gives man a consciousness of worth that comes from God. Reason interprets this worth correctly and carries it into life. When these two wings operate together, there is no room for pride — nor the danger of a blind submission.

The Remedy for Pride: Three Doors

Pride is not a disease without remedy. The Islamic tradition has pointed to three foundational doors against this disease: muhasaba, muraqaba, and tawba — self-reckoning, self-vigilance, and repentance.

Muhasaba is to call oneself to account — not others, but oneself. At the end of a day or the close of a period, one turns inward and asks: 'Did I see the truth today? Did I look down on anyone? Did I avoid accepting what was right?' These questions allow the seeds of pride to be noticed. A seed that is noticed can be uprooted before it grows.

Muraqaba is a state of continuous awareness. One observes one's own inner world — watches one's thoughts, intentions, and emotions. One notices at which moments pride rises, by which triggers it is set in motion. This awareness frees man from reflexive reactions. Proud thought begins to occur not automatically, but by choice.

Tawba — repentance — is the deepest door. Muhasaba and muraqaba make pride visible; tawba cleanses it. But for tawba to be effective, three elements are required: remorse, turning back, and making amends. Simply saying 'I have repented' is not enough. One must see the damage that pride has caused, renounce that pride, and repair what can be repaired.

Iblis closed all three doors. He did not engage in muhasaba — he did not see his error. He did not engage in muraqaba — he did not observe his inner world. And most crucially, he did not repent. Instead of remorse, he chose to place blame: 'Because You led me astray...' This sentence is pride's final mask: casting responsibility outward.

Adam (peace be upon him), by contrast, did precisely the opposite:

*"Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves. And
if You do not forgive us and have mercy
upon us, we will surely be among the losers."*

(Al-A'raf, 7:23)

This supplication is the zenith of humility. There is no blame. There is no justification. There is only seeing the truth and turning to God. It is this prayer that carried Adam to the starting point of rebuilding.

The Bridge Between Iblis and the Nafs: How Pride Is Transmitted

Iblis fell — but his plan did not end. For he does not carry pride only within himself; he transmits it to human beings. How, then, does this transmission occur?

Iblis does not say directly to man: 'Be proud.' Such a blunt suggestion would be easily detected. Instead, he follows a far more subtle path: he makes use of the natural tendencies within the human nafs.

Within every human being there is a need for recognition. This need is part of the fitra — it is not wrong. But Iblis feeds and amplifies this need. He whispers: 'No one sees you.' He says: 'You have given so much effort — why are you not appreciated?' He provokes: 'That person works less than you, yet receives more praise.' And slowly, the need for recognition is transformed into a claim of superiority.

Similarly, every human being possesses a sense of justice. This too is part of the fitra. But Iblis distorts this sense. He says: 'This is an injustice done to you.' He says: 'You deserved this.' He says: 'They stand ahead of you despite being of lesser worth.' And slowly, the sense of justice gives birth to envy and pride.

When this mechanism of transmission is understood, one sees why the inner struggle is of such importance. Iblis comes from without, but he makes use of the doors that are within. So long as the nafs leaves these doors open, Iblis does his work with ease. As the nafs is purified, the doors close, and the influence of Iblis weakens.

It is for this reason that the mystical tradition of Islam focused first on the inner struggle. In order to defeat the outer enemy, one must first come to know the inner enemy. Without this knowing, even the battles fought outside may feed pride. The glory that victory brings can be more dangerous than anything won in the battle itself.

Reflections of Pride Throughout History

The pride of Iblis has manifested itself in history again and again, in different forms. Some of these manifestations are individual in dimension; others are collective.

Pharaoh is perhaps the clearest historical example of pride. When Moses (peace be upon him) came with miracles, the leading figures of the court witnessed those miracles. Even the sorcerers came to believe. But Pharaoh refused. For to accept would have meant calling his throne into question. Pride left truth in the shadow of the throne.

*"And they rejected them, though their souls
were convinced of them, wrongfully and out
of pride. But see how the end of the
corrupters was."*

(Al-Naml, 27:14)

What is striking here is the phrase 'wrongfully and out of pride.' Pharaoh knew the miracles were real. This was not genuine disbelief from within. It was a conscious rejection. Pride rendered even knowledge inoperative.

History holds many similar examples. In the early period of Islam, the leading figures of Mecca knew the truthfulness of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). They themselves had given him the title al-Amin — the Trustworthy. But to accept him would have put their social position at risk. Pride stepped in front of knowledge.

A similar pattern is visible in the period of Islamic civilisation's decline. When the scientific and technical advances coming from the West were noticed, certain quarters rejected them as 'the knowledge of unbelievers.' This rejection did not come from ignorance — it came from pride. 'We already possess the truth; there is nothing we need to learn from them.' This feeling prevented the necessary transformation. And the result was written into the pages of history as a lesson.

Where Does Pride Lead?

Throughout this part we have examined pride from its source, through its forms, to its social dimensions and its remedies. Now it is necessary to ask the final question: where does pride lead?

Iblis's answer, given centuries ago, retains its validity today. The end of pride is exile. To grow distant from meaning, from truth, from God. To appear strong from the outside — but to be hollowed out within. To speak from on high — but to sink beneath the ground.

This end is as valid for individuals as it is for societies. Proud individuals grow lonely over time. For pride poisons relationship. Proud societies collapse in time. For pride prevents learning.

And ultimately, the deepest consequence of pride is this: man forgets who he is. For pride severs man from God. And man severed from God is severed from his own essence. He becomes unable to know who he is, why he exists, or where he is going. This forgetting is the deepest form of one-wingedness.

In the next part, we will examine the relationship between this pride and knowledge. For the chasm between knowledge and wisdom is one of the most important fruits of historical pride. And this chasm has shaped the history of humanity at its very depths.

Bibliography and References

The Holy Quran — Al-Baqarah 2:34; Al-A'raf 7:12–23; Al-Hujurat 49:13; Ghafir 40:35; Al-Furqan 25:63; Al-Naml 27:14; Fussilat 41:15; Al-Isra 17:37

Muslim — Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Iman, Hadith 147 (The definition of pride)

Imam al-Ghazali — Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din, Vol. III (Chapters on pride and ujb)

Imam al-Ghazali — Minhaj al-'Abidin [The Path of the Worshippers] (The obstacles of the nafs)

Fakhr al-Din al-Razi — Mafatih al-Ghayb [Keys of the Unseen] (Commentary on Al-Baqarah, verse 34)

Ibn Kathir — Tafsir al-Quran al-Azim (Al-A'raf, verse 12 and surrounding verses)

Elmahlı Hamdi Yazır — Hak Dini Kur'an Dili [The True Religion: The Language of the Quran] (Commentary on Surah Ghafir)

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi — The Gleams (On pride and humility)

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya — Madarij al-Salikin [Ranks of the Divine Seekers] (Chapters on muhasaba and muraqaba)

Sayyid Qutb — Fi Zilal al-Quran [In the Shade of the Quran] (Commentary on the story of Pharaoh)

Ibn Khaldun — Muqaddimah [Prolegomena] (The cycles of rise and decline of civilisations)

CHAPTER II — The Exile of Reason

Part III — The First Error of Logic

*"Will you not reason?"
(Al-Baqarah, 2:44)*

The Two Faces of Reason

In the Quran, reason is never declared an enemy. On the contrary, it is the failure to reason that is censured. 'Will you not reflect?', 'Will you not reason?', 'Do you not see?' — these are among the warnings the Quran repeats most insistently. In hundreds of verses, observation, contemplation, and rational inquiry are actively encouraged.

Yet if the Quran elevates reason to such heights, why did the understanding that 'reason is dangerous' take root at various points in the Islamic world throughout history? Why did a mentality of 'do not ask too many questions; belief is sufficient' occasionally push its way to the fore?

The answer lies in two distinct uses of reason. Reason can be used to seek truth. Or reason can be used to justify what already exists. The first use elevates man. The second traps him inside whatever error he happens to inhabit.

What Iblis did is precisely the second. He did not fail to use reason — on the contrary, he conducted a very clear process of deliberation. But that deliberation was constructed not to seek truth, but to justify a decision

already made. This is the oldest and most dangerous misuse of reason known to history.

This part examines the structure of that misuse, its mechanism, and how it has repeated itself throughout the ages. For the error of logic that Iblis committed did not go to the grave with him. In every era it is re-enacted, wearing a new guise.

What Is a Logical Fallacy? Basic Concepts

A logical fallacy is a line of reasoning that appears valid on the surface but is fundamentally misleading. Seen from the outside, it looks coherent — the steps follow one another, the conclusion appears to flow from the premises. But if a foundational premise is wrong, or if a hidden leap has been made at some point along the way, then no matter how plausible the conclusion may seem, it is false.

Logical fallacies have been comprehensively classified throughout the history of philosophy — from Aristotle to Ibn Rushd, from al-Ghazali to Ibn Taymiyya. But understanding the most fundamental fallacies requires no complex philosophical scaffolding, for these errors appear constantly in everyday thought.

One of the most common is the 'false premise': it is not possible to arrive at a true conclusion by setting out from a false assumption — and if one appears to do so, it is by accident. The second is the 'misleading analogy': drawing a superficial resemblance between two things and claiming an essential equivalence between them. The third is 'selective evidence': seeing the evidence that supports one's own thesis while ignoring the evidence that refutes it.

The reasoning of Iblis contains all three of these errors. And the presence of all three together made the outcome inevitable: a departure from truth.

The Anatomy of Iblis's Reasoning

Let us examine once more, with care, the argument Iblis employed when he refused to prostrate:

*"I am better than him. You created me from
fire and created him from clay."*

(Al-A'raf, 7:12)

We can set out this argument in its logical structure as follows. First premise: fire is superior to clay. Second premise: I was created from fire; Adam was created from clay. Conclusion: therefore I am superior to Adam.

Let us proceed step by step. First premise: 'Fire is superior to clay.' Is this true? By what criterion? Fire burns — but clay nurtures. Fire is swift — but clay is stable. Fire transforms — but clay builds. Which property is to count as 'superiority'? Iblis did not ask this question. He selected a criterion according to his own preferences and presented it as though it were a universal truth. This is the first error: treating a subjective criterion as though it were objective reality.

The second premise appears, on its surface, to be correct. The Quran does state that Iblis was created from fire and Adam from clay. But here a hidden leap is concealed: does the material of one's creation determine one's worth as a being? This leap was never examined. And this unexamined leap is the cornerstone of the conclusion.

The conclusion then follows necessarily from these two flawed premises: 'I am superior; therefore I need not prostrate.' But the coherence of the conclusion depends on the truth of the premises. When the premises are refuted, the conclusion collapses.

Here, then, is the essence of Iblis's error of logic: to derive a false hierarchy from a false criterion; to generate a false claim of right from that hierarchy; and to use that claim to

reject the divine command. Each step depends upon the one before it. But the foundation is wrong.

The Hidden Premise: 'I Know'

In the reasoning of Iblis there is one further hidden premise — never articulated, yet the foundation upon which everything else is built: 'I know what is superior and what is inferior.' This premise was never stated. Yet it is indispensable for the argument to function.

This hidden premise implies the following: Iblis's scale of values is valid independently of the command of God. That is to say, even though God has said 'prostrate,' his own assessment stands above that command. This is an extraordinarily subtle — yet extraordinarily deep — act of rebellion.

Open rebellion is visible and can be identified. But rebellion that operates through hidden premises, more often than not, does not recognise itself as rebellion. On the contrary, it presents itself as 'a rational evaluation.' 'I cannot do wrong, because I have thought it through and this is correct.' This feeling is the dangerous territory where reason meets the summit of pride.

In the Islamic tradition, this condition has been expressed through the concept of acting on *ra'y* — personal opinion alone. The *ra'y* in question means purely individual judgement: rendering a verdict based solely on one's own reason, outside the guidance of the revealed text, of revelation, and of the Prophet. This approach was considered legitimate in certain periods, yet it was identified by the great majority of Islamic scholars as a serious risk.

The risk is this: the human intellect is limited. Its knowledge is incomplete. Its perspective is shaped by the position it occupies. To trust solely in one's own reason

without awareness of these limitations is to claim the ability to see what cannot be seen. And this claim inevitably opens the door to error.

Instrumental Reason: Deliberation in the Service of a Conclusion

In modern philosophy, the concept of 'instrumental reason' was examined comprehensively by Max Horkheimer and the Frankfurt School. Instrumental reason is a form of reason that, rather than questioning values, purposes, or truth, finds the most effective path to a predetermined goal. That is to say, reason does not ask 'What is right?' — it asks 'How do I reach my target?'

When we carry this concept into the terminology of Islamic thought, we see the same problem in a different language. Hawa — the desires, inclinations, and interests of the nafs — determines an aim. Reason is then enlisted to realise that aim. In this situation, reason has entered the service of hawa.

The Quran gives an explicit warning against this relationship:

*"Have you seen the one who takes as his god
his own desire? Then God has led him
astray, knowing him, and has sealed his
hearing and his heart and put over his vision
a veil."*

(Al-Jathiyah, 45:23)

'Taking one's desire as one's god' is an extraordinarily powerful expression. This is not openly worshipping an idol. It is making one's own desires and inclinations the centre of life — counting not God's command but one's own will as the determining force. And this condition is one of the subtlest forms of associating partners with God.

This is precisely what Iblis did. When God's command came, he placed his own assessment ahead of it. He made his hawa — the feeling that 'I am superior' — into a god. And reason produced the justification for this feeling. Logic was operating not as it freely sought truth, but as it defended a conclusion already determined in advance.

This mechanism has repeated itself throughout history. When human beings or societies wish to reach a conclusion that serves their interests, their fears, or their desires, reason finds the arguments that support that conclusion. This process is called 'motivated reasoning' in the psychological literature — reasoning driven by a predetermined goal. The conclusion is settled in advance; reason labours to justify it.

The Limits of Analogy: When Does Comparison Mislead?

Iblis drew an analogy — a qiyas. He compared the properties of fire and clay and derived from that comparison a hierarchy of value. Analogy (qiyas) is also a method widely employed in Islamic jurisprudence. But for an analogy to be valid, certain conditions must be met.

The first condition: the two things being compared must share a common property, and that common property must be the property upon which the ruling is based. In the analogy of Iblis, however, the comparison is built upon a property that has no bearing on the ruling. The capacity of fire to burn, or its lightness, has no connection to the capacity to bear worth and responsibility.

The second condition: the analogy must not exceed the scope of the ruling it establishes. Iblis, however, drew a moral superiority from the physical property of fire — a colossal leap that far exceeds the proper scope of analogy.

The third condition: the analogy must not contradict the ruling of revealed texts. Iblis, however, used his analogy to reject an explicit divine command — which violates the most fundamental boundary of analogy.

When these three violations are considered together, nothing of the validity of Iblis's analogy remains. Yet its appearance of plausibility is precisely what makes it so dangerous. For a flawed line of reasoning, when it looks correct, is far harder to detect.

Many of the ideas that led to great catastrophes in history have operated in this way. Had they been presented as open evil, they would have been rejected. But because they arrived wearing the guise of apparent logic, they found acceptance. Theories of racial superiority, the justification of colonialism, the ideologies manufactured to oppress the weak — all of these are the products of false analogies. And in every one of them the shadow of Iblis's error of logic can be seen.

The Chasm Between Knowledge and Wisdom

To understand the error of Iblis in depth requires understanding the fundamental distinction between knowledge and wisdom. This distinction occupies a central place in the Islamic tradition, and its framework was sketched in Chapter I. Let us now make it concrete in the context of the logical fallacy.

Knowledge is the grasp of realities. The properties of fire can be known. The properties of clay can be known. The differences between the two substances can be identified. These fall within the domain of knowledge. Iblis possessed this knowledge.

Wisdom is the placing of that knowledge within a correct framework of value. 'What does this knowledge mean? In what context is it valid? What does it determine, and what

does it not determine? Which conclusions are legitimate to draw, and which are not?' These questions fall within the domain of wisdom. Iblis was destitute of this wisdom.

This destitution was not ignorance. For Iblis knew a great deal. It was a blind spot. He could not place his knowledge within a correct framework of value — because that framework of value could not be independent of the command of God. And when he rejected the command of God, the very foundation of wisdom collapsed.

It is for this reason that the Quran defines wisdom as something different from — and more valuable than — knowledge:

*"He gives wisdom to whom He wills, and
whoever has been given wisdom has
certainly been given much good. And none
will remember except those of
understanding."*

(Al-Baqarah, 2:269)

The phrase 'has certainly been given much good' is striking. Wisdom is not an extension of knowledge — it is a separate grace. And this grace cannot be attained without attachment to God. For wisdom requires the correct reading of values, priorities, and contexts. And that reading is not possible without divine guidance.

Throughout history there have been many examples of those whose knowledge was great but who were destitute of wisdom. Great strategists, brilliant commanders, cunning rulers — some of these possessed razor-sharp minds. Yet their frameworks of value were corrupted. They harnessed what they knew to wrong ends. And the consequences were destructive to a degree disproportionate to the greatness of their knowledge.

Failing to Ask the Question: The Greatest Logical Fallacy

There is another dimension of Iblis's error of logic that demands attention: the questions he did not ask. Iblis constructed his argument. But he never asked the following questions: 'Why did God give this command? Is there a wisdom behind it? Is there something I cannot see?'

The failure to ask these questions is the most direct manifestation of pride. Pride says: 'I already know.' This feeling closes the door to questioning. And where no question is asked, no new knowledge can enter; no perspective can broaden; no error can be recognised.

The Quran conveys this point with striking force in a different context — in the story of Moses (peace be upon him) and al-Khidr. Everything al-Khidr does appears, on the surface, to be wrong. The boat is damaged; the child is slain; the wall is rebuilt without payment. Moses objects at every turn — because the picture before him contradicts the values he knows.

But in the end, al-Khidr explains the wisdom behind each action. And it emerges that every one of them carries a meaning that reaches far beyond what was visible. The lesson this story gives is clear: what is visible does not always fully reflect reality. Questioning is legitimate; but rendering a definitive judgement on the basis of appearances alone is dangerous.

Iblis, however, rendered a definitive judgement on the basis of appearances. From the visible properties of fire and clay, he arrived at an absolute claim of superiority. He did not ask about what he could not see. He did not seek to understand the wisdom he had not grasped. And this is his most fundamental error of logic: to use what he knew as though there were nothing beyond what he knew.

The Transmission of the Logical Fallacy Across Generations

The error of logic that Iblis committed did not remain confined to him. It was bequeathed as an inheritance to the history of humanity. For Iblis made it his mission to lead mankind astray. And his most effective weapon is to teach them his own logical error.

This transmission does not occur through open suggestion — for 'reason incorrectly' would be noticed and rejected. Instead, it operates through the following channels.

The first is education. If, in a given society, asking questions is not encouraged; if knowledge is transmitted without being questioned; if students are conditioned to regard what they have been taught — rather than what they have examined — as correct; then instrumental reason becomes dominant in that society. Individuals learn to use what they know as a tool for justification rather than a tool for truth-seeking. Not the pursuit of truth, but the pursuit of confirmation, prevails.

The second is culture. If, in a given culture, the sentence 'we have always done it this way' is expected to put an end to criticism; if traditions are presented as sacred domains that cannot be questioned; then the error of logic of Iblis has been institutionalised in that culture. Origin has taken the place of truth.

The third is politics. If a ruling power presents, as truth, the arguments manufactured for its own continuation; if criticism is defined as treachery; if different thinking is seen as a threat; then that political structure has harnessed instrumental reason to its own service. And the people living within that structure are, over time, conditioned to seek not truth but the truth of those in power.

When these three channels operate together, an entire society repeats the error of logic of Iblis without being aware of it. And this repetition is reflected in the destiny of that society — both as individuals and as a collective.

Debates on Reason in Islamic Thought

Throughout the history of Islam, the question of reason has been the subject of profound debate across the centuries. The Mu'tazilite, Ash'arite, and Maturidite schools held deep differences of view regarding the role of reason in religious rulings. It is not the purpose of this work to evaluate that debate by taking sides. But understanding its essence casts important light on the matter of the logical fallacy.

The Mu'tazila held that reason is capable of independently determining good and evil. The strength of this position lies in the importance it accords to reason. But its weakness is also clear: to install a limited reason in an unlimited position of authority bears a close kinship with the hidden premise of Iblis.

The Ash'arite school held that reason, without revelation, cannot determine good and evil. The strength of this position is that it preserves the authority of revelation. But in the course of history, certain interpretations of this approach pushed reason further into the background than was necessary — foregrounding submission rather than inquiry.

The Maturidite school sought to establish a balance between these two positions. Reason is a valuable instrument, but it stands in need of guidance. Revelation provides that guidance. Reason is indispensable for understanding, interpreting, and applying the content of revelation to life.

The question at the heart of this debate is the following: is reason an independent authority, or is it an instrument? The answer to this question shapes the intellectual climate of a society at its deepest level. One who declares reason fully independent ultimately approaches the path of Iblis. One who silences reason entirely arrives at the institutional freezing examined in Chapter I.

The balance shown by the metaphor of the two wings applies here as well: reason and faith must balance each other. Neither will reason fly without faith, nor will faith walk without reason.

The Logical Fallacy and the Modern Age

Seeing the manifestations of Iblis's error of logic in the modern age is of the utmost importance for this part. For in our time, this error has assumed extraordinarily sophisticated forms.

The first manifestation: scientism. Science is an immensely valuable method for understanding nature. But scientism presents science as the only valid source of truth. Claims such as 'what cannot be measured does not exist' or 'meaning cannot be proven in a laboratory and is therefore subjective' are, in fact, logical fallacies themselves. For these claims cannot be tested by science's own methods. That is to say, the foundations of scientism are not consistent even by its own criteria.

The second manifestation: ideological reasoning. If a person or society has adopted a particular ideology in advance, they read every event they encounter in the way that ideology confirms. They see the evidence that supports it; they ignore the evidence that refutes it. This is the ideological form of the selective evidence fallacy. And in the twentieth century, this fallacy led to immense suffering.

The third manifestation: identity politics. Every political framework built upon a division of 'us' and 'them' potentially carries Iblis's error of comparison. 'We are of greater worth because our identity is more ancient, more pure, more chosen.' This feeling has been used throughout history as a tool of legitimation. And it has always been constructed with the assistance of reason.

These modern manifestations will be examined in far greater depth in Volume II — especially perception management, media, and the structure of Zionist ideology in this context. For now it is sufficient to establish this: Iblis's error of logic, in the modern age, has simply donned a more complex disguise. Its essence is unchanged.

The Qualities of Correct Reason: How Should We Think?

Throughout this part we have examined wrong reason. What, then, does right reason look like? What qualities must the reason of the two-winged believer possess?

First: it asks questions. It does not hesitate to question every claim, every tradition, every accepted assumption it encounters. 'Is this true? What is its basis? Has an alternative been considered?' These questions are the sign of reason's health.

Second: it examines its premises. When evaluating an argument, it looks not only to the logical consistency of the steps, but to the truth of the foundational premises. For it is possible to arrive at a false conclusion through a consistent argument built on a false premise.

Third: it knows its limits. It accepts that its own knowledge, perspective, and capacity are limited. This acceptance both keeps it open to learning and protects it against errors arising from excessive self-confidence.

Fourth: it respects revelation. It knows that divine guidance possesses a dimension that its own reason cannot see. This knowledge allows it to regard revelation not as blind submission but as a compass that its limited mind genuinely needs.

Fifth: it seeks wisdom. It does not content itself with accumulating knowledge — it endeavours to place that knowledge within a correct framework of value. It continues to ask: 'What does this knowledge mean? Which conclusions are legitimate to draw from it?'

These five qualities define the reason of the two-winged believer. And this reason does not fall into the error of Iblis. For neither rejecting the truth nor holding people in contempt is compatible with these five qualities.

Part Closing

Reason: Not an Enemy, but a Trust

The matter we have examined throughout this part can be summarised in a single fundamental truth: reason is neither a saviour nor an enemy. Reason is a trust — an amanah.

A trust, when used correctly, is a great blessing. When misused, it harms both the one who carries it and those around them. Iblis misused this trust. He used it not to seek truth, but to defend his pride. And this misuse prepared the ground for the greatest fall in history.

Man carries the same trust. Every day he makes countless logical choices. Between the question 'Is this true?' and the question 'Is this what I want?' he makes his selection —

sometimes without even being aware of it. And these choices accumulate to shape identity, character, and ultimately destiny.

One-winged societies have systematically fallen to the wrong side in these choices. They used their reason not to seek truth, but to preserve what already existed. They chose justification over questioning. And this choice prepared the ground for their civilisations to freeze, to regress, and ultimately to collapse.

In the next part, we will examine perhaps the most important dimension of this collapse: the distinction between knowledge and wisdom, and the deep marks that distinction has left on the historical journey of Islamic civilisation. For the error of logic is not merely a matter of the individual mind. When it is transformed into an institutional structure, an educational system, and a cultural mentality, it shapes the destiny of civilisations.

Bibliography and References

The Holy Quran — Al-Baqarah 2:44, 2:269; Al-A'raf 7:12; Al-Jathiyah 45:23; Al-Kahf 18:60–82; Al-Hijr 15:32–33

Aristotle — Organon (The Analytics; theory of syllogism and premises)

Ibn Rushd (Averroes) — Fasl al-Maqal [The Decisive Treatise] (The relationship between reason and revelation)

Imam al-Ghazali — Tahafut al-Falasifa [The Incoherence of the Philosophers] (The limits of philosophical reasoning)

Imam al-Ghazali — Al-Mustasfa [The Essentials of Islamic Legal Theory] (Theory of analogy in jurisprudence)

Ibn Taymiyya — Dar' Ta'arud al-'Aql wa al-Naql [The Refutation of the Conflict Between Reason and Tradition] (The reason-revelation relationship)

Fakhr al-Din al-Razi — Mafatih al-Ghayb [Keys of the Unseen] (Commentary on Al-Jathiyah, verse 23)

Al-Maturidi — Kitab al-Tawhid [The Book of Divine Unity] (The place and limits of reason)

Max Horkheimer — Eclipse of Reason (The concept of instrumental reason)

Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır — Hak Dini Kur'an Dili [The True Religion: The Language of the Quran] (Commentary on Al-Baqarah, verse 269)

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi — Isharat al-I'jaz [Signs of Miraculousness] (The verses on reason in Surah Al-Baqarah)

Ibn Khaldun — Muqaddimah [Prolegomena] (The social dimension of reason and the institutional dimension of thought)

CHAPTER II — The Exile of Reason

Part IV — The Distinction Between Knowledge and Wisdom

"And He taught him wisdom and the knowledge of the Book."

(Al Imran, 3:48)

Two Different Treasures

Consider a person. They have read for decades — thousands of books. They know history and science. When they speak, their words follow one another coherently; their arguments appear consistent. Yet they are somehow unable to make the right decision in their own life. Relationships collapse around them; they clash with those

around them; something always feels missing within. They have knowledge — yet they cannot find direction.

Now consider another person. Perhaps they have not read a great deal; perhaps they hold no academic title. Yet when they speak, something in you settles. When they look at your problem, they see not what you can see but what you cannot. Their decisions surprise you — and yet, with time, they always prove correct. In their presence, you feel better.

The difference between these two people cannot be explained by the quantity of their knowledge. The first has more knowledge yet feels less guided. The second has less knowledge yet makes more reliable decisions. The difference between them is wisdom.

Knowledge and wisdom are two concepts that are very often used interchangeably. Yet between them lies a profound chasm. Without understanding this chasm, it is not possible to read correctly the historical course of either an individual or a civilisation. For the ascent of Islamic civilisation occurred when it carried both treasures together. Its decline began when it preserved knowledge while losing wisdom.

Defining Knowledge: What Do We Know?

Knowledge is the representation of realities within the mind. To know what a thing is, how it operates, where it is found, what properties it possesses — all of this falls within the domain of knowledge. Knowledge is acquired through observation, experiment, reading, and transmission. It can be accumulated, passed on, and tested.

It is no accident that the first command of Islam was 'Read.' Knowledge is one of the foundational values of Islam. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: 'Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every

Muslim.' This hadith is a plain expression of the importance accorded to knowledge.

The Quran too ascribes great value to knowledge. It repeatedly encourages the observation of the universe, reflection upon living creatures, and the study of history — all of which are processes of acquiring knowledge. Knowledge is not the enemy of faith; it is its complement.

But knowledge has a limit. That limit is this: knowledge answers the question 'what.' But it cannot, on its own, answer the questions 'why,' 'what for,' and 'how should this be used.' These questions go beyond knowledge. And the thing that answers them is wisdom.

Defining Wisdom: Beyond Knowledge

The word hikma — wisdom — in Arabic is related to the root meaning 'to govern' or 'to judge.' To govern a thing means to place it in its proper position, to render an appropriate decision regarding it, to make a correct evaluation. Setting out from this root, wisdom means: the capacity to place knowledge in its correct context, toward its correct purpose, and in its correct measure.

Wisdom is acquired differently from knowledge. Knowledge comes from without — it is read, heard, observed. Wisdom grows from within. It matures through experience, through contemplation, through confronting one's errors, through coming to know the nafs, and through nearness to God.

In the Islamic tradition, several foundational dimensions of wisdom have been identified. The first is the capacity to make sound decisions — to know what ought to be done in a given situation. The second is the ability to order priorities correctly — to be able to see what is more important. The third is the ability to foresee consequences — to take into account the long-term effects of an action.

And the fourth, the deepest dimension: to be able to see truth not only from the outside, but from within.

When these four dimensions are considered together, wisdom ceases to be a purely mental faculty. It becomes interwoven with spiritual maturity, moral integrity, and divine attachment. It is for this reason that the Quran defines wisdom not as something granted to the intelligent, but as a grace bestowed by God upon whomsoever He wills.

Wisdom in the Quran: The Source of the Grace

In the Quran, the concept of wisdom is placed at an extraordinarily high station. It is mentioned not alongside knowledge alone, but side by side with the prophetic mission:

"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."

(Al-Baqarah, 2:151)

There is a striking sequence in this verse: first the recitation of the verses, then purification, then the Book and wisdom. This sequence is not accidental. Purification precedes the transmission of knowledge. For in a heart that has not been purified, knowledge cannot settle in its proper place. And without knowledge settling in its proper place, wisdom too cannot unfold.

In another verse, the example of Luqman (peace be upon him) is given. Though it remains debated whether Luqman was a prophet, the Quran presents him as a man of wisdom:

"And We had certainly given Luqman wisdom: Be grateful to God. And whoever is

*grateful is grateful for the benefit of himself.
And whoever denies — then indeed, God is
Free of need and Praiseworthy."*

(Luqman, 31:12)

An extraordinarily important connection is established here: wisdom begins with gratitude. And gratitude is the expression of attachment to God, of awareness of His blessings, and of distance from self-aggrandisement. That is to say, the door to wisdom stands directly opposite the door of pride. Iblis closed the door with his pride. Luqman opened it with his gratitude.

This connection is not accidental. Wisdom comes to the door of the one who knows their own smallness — not to the one who aggrandises themselves. For in order to see truth, there must be no wall of pride to conceal it. Pride draws a veil before the eye. Humility lifts that veil. And when the veil is lifted, knowledge begins to carry a deeper meaning.

The Deficiency of Iblis: Knowledge Was Present, Wisdom Was Absent

The tragedy of Iblis must be reassessed within this framework. He was not destitute of knowledge. He knew the existence, power, and will of God. He had witnessed the creation of Adam. He had heard the command to prostrate. There was no deficiency of knowledge.

But he was destitute of wisdom. For the door to wisdom passed through gratitude and humility. And Iblis had chosen comparison over gratitude, pride over humility. This choice closed the door of wisdom.

When wisdom closed, what happened? Knowledge could no longer settle into its correct context. The properties of fire and clay were known — but it could not be seen which conclusions could legitimately be drawn from this

knowledge and which could not. Knowledge became an instrumental weapon. And that weapon was used to defend pride.

This picture is as valid for societies as it is for individuals. A society may know a great deal — but if it does not know where to place that knowledge, what to use it for, or within what framework of value to evaluate it, that society is destitute of wisdom. And a society destitute of wisdom may use its knowledge for its own destruction.

Two Summits: The Meeting of Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali

To understand how knowledge and wisdom were able to operate together in the golden age of Islamic civilisation, two names are of particular importance: Ibn Sina and Imam al-Ghazali. These two figures walked by different roads — yet each reached one of the summits of human history in their respective domains.

Ibn Sina was the summit of knowledge. In medicine, philosophy, astronomy, chemistry, and music, he produced work that went beyond the horizons of his age. His *Al-Qanun fi al-Tibb* (The Canon of Medicine) was used as a textbook across Europe for centuries. His encyclopaedic *Al-Shifa* (The Book of Healing) was a monumental work that united philosophy with the natural sciences. Ibn Sina demonstrated what it means to systematise, classify, and advance knowledge.

Imam al-Ghazali was the summit of wisdom. He too possessed an extraordinarily deep knowledge — an unparalleled accumulation in theology, jurisprudence, and philosophy alike. But al-Ghazali came to a halt at a certain point. He passed through his own inner crisis. He reviewed what he knew — and asked the question: 'Is knowing sufficient for salvation?' And he gave his answer: No. Knowing, unless it meets wisdom, is not sufficient.

Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din was born from this question. This work does not merely transmit knowledge — it shows how knowledge can be made a living thing. From jurisprudence to ethics, from worship to social conduct, it approaches every domain from the perspective of knowledge being transformed into wisdom. Al-Ghazali's greatest contribution is this: he showed a path for the internalisation of knowledge.

The fact that these two figures could coexist embodies the balance of Islamic civilisation in its golden age. Ibn Sina carried knowledge to its summit. Al-Ghazali brought knowledge to wisdom. And when these two dimensions operated together, civilisation attained both productive power and depth of meaning.

The Point of Rupture: When Knowledge Is Sacralised

But this balance, in time, was broken. And this breaking occurred in a striking manner: knowledge was sacralised.

Sacralisation operated as follows: the knowledge produced by previous generations became, over time, an unquestionable heritage. To criticise Ibn Sina's medical works came to be regarded as something approaching a religious offence. To debate al-Ghazali's interpretations was evaluated as heresy. The words of the great scholars were frozen — together with the very form in which they had expressed them.

This freezing appears, on the surface, to be reverence for knowledge. But at its core it is a betrayal of knowledge. For knowledge is, by its nature, dynamic. Knowledge grows through questions. When questioning is prohibited, knowledge stops growing. Knowledge that stops growing becomes, over time, disconnected from reality. And knowledge disconnected from reality no longer produces wisdom — it produces the status quo.

The most striking example of this transformation is the change in madrasa education. In the earliest period, the madrasas were spaces of living debate. Different views could stand side by side. The student could ask questions. The teacher, when he could not answer, could say 'I do not know.' But over time this culture changed. The madrasa ceased to be a place of producing knowledge and became a place of transmitting it. And with this transformation, wisdom too slowly withdrew from the madrasa.

*"And when it is said to them: Follow what
God has revealed, they say: Rather, we will
follow that upon which we found our
fathers."*

(Al-Baqarah, 2:170)

Though this verse was revealed in a religious context, the principle it contains is universal. To render the authority of the past unquestionable brings thought to a standstill. And when thought stands still, wisdom too withers.

The Prison of Memorisation: What Is Lost When Knowledge Is Merely Transmitted?

The difference between transmitting knowledge and producing knowledge lies at the very centre of the question of wisdom. Transmitted knowledge is learned — but it may not be internalised. Knowledge that has been memorised gives the correct answer on an examination paper, but does not give the correct decision in life.

The reason is this: knowledge is not merely a mental content. Real knowledge transforms the person who holds it. To truly understand something is not only to hold it in your mind — it is to allow that understanding to change you. Without this transformation, knowledge is nothing more than carrying a burden.

This truth has been expressed beautifully in the Islamic tradition. Ali ibn Abi Talib (may God be pleased with him) said: 'Knowledge is not measured by the abundance of what is narrated, but by the degree to which it illuminates the heart.' This saying summarises, in a single sentence, the difference between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge that does not illuminate the heart, however abundant it may be, is only knowledge — not wisdom.

In societies where a culture of memorisation prevails, precisely this division is experienced. People know a great deal — but that knowledge does not illuminate their hearts. Religious knowledge is memorised, but does not shape morality. Historical knowledge is transmitted, but no lesson is drawn from it. The rules of jurisprudence are learned, but their spirit and purpose are not grasped.

This division affects the general health of society at the deepest level. For when knowledge fails to become wisdom, the connection between possessing knowledge and making correct decisions is severed. Society fills with people who know a great deal but do not know how to use it. And this condition is one of the most important signs of a civilisation's collapse from within.

The Sources of Wisdom: From Where Does It Draw Its Nourishment?

If wisdom does not come solely from the accumulation of knowledge, then — where does it come from? This question has been answered in various ways in the Islamic tradition. But the foundational sources may be summarised as follows.

The first source: tafakkur — contemplation. Not thinking in the sense of merely circulating information through the mind, but deepening. To see a truth from different angles; to put different questions to it; to establish its connections with other realities. The Quran encourages tafakkur again

and again. For without contemplation, knowledge remains on the surface. With contemplation, knowledge deepens and opens a door to wisdom.

The second source: experience and patience. Wisdom is more often than not earned through living. Making an error, seeing its consequences, learning from that seeing, and changing — this is the cycle through which wisdom is built. Patience is what allows this cycle to be completed. The impatient person moves on to the next error without receiving the lesson of the experience.

The third source: counsel and consultation — sohbet and meshveret. When one looks at the lives of the great scholars, one sees that they did not work alone. Gatherings of learning, environments of debate, and the exchange of ideas are the spaces in which wisdom develops. To hear another perspective provides the occasion to recognise one's own blind spots. It is for this reason that in the Islamic tradition, taking counsel was regarded not merely as a practical need but as an instrument for the transformation of knowledge into wisdom.

The fourth source, and the most fundamental: taqwa — God-consciousness. The Quran makes this connection directly:

*"O you who have believed, if you fear God,
He will grant you a criterion and will
remove from you your misdeeds and forgive
you."*

(Al-Anfal, 8:29)

The furqan — the criterion, or the capacity to distinguish right from wrong — is fed directly by taqwa. Taqwa is the consciousness of responsibility before God, respect for His boundaries, and the awareness of servitude. When this consciousness is internalised, man can see more reliably where to place the knowledge he has received, which decision is correct, and which path will lead him where.

When these four sources are considered together, wisdom ceases to be a mystical state. It gains a concrete, developable, and liveable dimension: an inner capacity that grows through contemplation, experience, counsel, and taqwa. And this capacity transforms knowledge into a light that carries meaning.

The Wisdom Test of Civilisations

One of the most reliable ways to measure the health of a civilisation is to look at the balance between knowledge and wisdom. When this balance is established, civilisation rises. When knowledge increases while wisdom diminishes, civilisation appears brilliant on the surface while collapsing within. When wisdom is present but knowledge is insufficient, civilisation remains virtuous but powerless.

The golden age of Islamic civilisation was the period in which this balance was established. In Bayt al-Hikmah, astronomy, mathematics, and medicine were being studied. Simultaneously, figures such as al-Muhasibi, al-Qushayri, and al-Ghazali were working on the spiritual and moral dimension of that knowledge. The production of science and spiritual deepening flowed not in separate channels but as two veins of the same civilisation.

Looking back, the point of rupture is clearly visible: the separation of these two veins. Science was severed from its spiritual context. Spiritual life grew distant from scientific production. And when the two veins separated from each other, both were weakened. Science, deprived of its framework of value, became instrumental. Spiritual life, deprived of knowledge, turned inward and closed itself off.

This rupture is not unique to Islamic civilisation. Western civilisation underwent a similar process. After the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, knowledge grew enormously. Technology, medicine, physics, and

chemistry fundamentally altered the life of humanity. But alongside this growth, wisdom was systematically excluded. Religion was declared irrational. Meaning was confined to the private sphere. Values were regarded as relative.

And the result: the civilisations that knew the most also produced the greatest destructions. Two world wars, the atomic bomb, ecological catastrophe, spiritual emptiness — all of these are the products of knowledge used without wisdom. This picture will be examined in far greater depth in Volume II.

The Rebuilding of Wisdom: Is It Possible?

To ask this question is to search for hope. And the answer is both arduous and possible.

It is arduous — because wisdom is not acquired quickly. Changing the education system, updating the curriculum, adding new courses — all of these are necessary, but they are not sufficient. Wisdom is not a course content. It is a culture. And cultures change in decades, not in years.

It is possible — because the sources of wisdom are inexhaustible. Contemplation is an action available to every human being. Learning from experience is a process that requires will but is accessible to all. Taqwa is a door open to every person who preserves their attachment to God. And these doors have never been fully closed in any period.

Even in the darkest periods of Islamic history, human beings of wisdom have emerged. After the Mongol invasion, Ibn Khaldun arose and read history's cycles with his wisdom. In the period of Ottoman decline, Said Nursi arose and defended faith and reason together. These figures arose not despite the conditions of their time, but

from within those conditions — by confronting them face to face.

This means that the rebuilding of wisdom does not require waiting for a saviour to come from without. It begins from within. It begins with the individual. Every human being chooses whether to use their reason to seek truth or to justify what already exists. Every human being chooses whether to make the effort to deepen their knowledge and carry it toward wisdom, or to keep it on the surface.

This choice may appear small. But the choice made in the same direction by thousands of human beings changes the course of history.

The Two-Winged Believer and the Knowledge–Wisdom Balance

Returning to the spine of this book: the two-winged believer is the one who carries both knowledge and wisdom together. This person learns — but internalises what they learn. They ask questions — but ask them in pursuit of truth. They produce — but place their production within a framework of value. They grow in strength — but that strength protects them from pride.

This balance is not an abstract ideal. It has been lived in history. The figures who represent the summit of Islamic civilisation — Ibn al-Haytham, al-Biruni, al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, al-Ghazali — all of them carried this balance in different forms. Their spiritual depth was as great as their scientific production. Their character was as great as their learning.

And when this balance was lost, what happened? Knowledge turned to repetition; wisdom fell silent. The ascent halted. The wind ceased. And a civilisation that needed two wings to fly sank to the ground on one.

This part was written to tell the essence of that breaking. To see what is lost when knowledge and wisdom are parted is the first step toward repairing that parting. And this repair is not only institutional — it is, above all, individual.

Part Closing

Carrying Knowledge Is Not Enough

The distinction we have examined throughout this part can be summarised in a single sentence: carrying knowledge is not enough. One must know where to place it.

Iblis knew. But he could not know where to place what he knew. Or he knew — but his pride caused him to place it in the wrong position. And this wrong placing prepared the ground for the greatest fall.

Man too knows. He knows his history, his religion, his science. But when he does not know where to place this knowledge, how to bring it to life, or within what framework of value to evaluate it — that knowledge does not serve him. On the contrary, it sometimes misleads him.

Knowledge without wisdom resembles a person who holds a weapon in their hand yet does not know what they are using it for. The power is there — but the direction is absent. And power without direction is the most dangerous power of all.

In the next part, we will move to the practical manifestations of this distinction: the importance of questioning and the suppression of thought. For the

chasm between knowledge and wisdom has, in history, been institutionalised through particular mechanisms. Understanding these mechanisms is indispensable for reading today and tomorrow correctly.

Bibliography and References

The Holy Quran — Al-Baqarah 2:151, 2:170, 2:269; Al Imran 3:48; Luqman 31:12; Al-Anfal 8:29; Al-Zumar 39:9

Imam al-Ghazali — Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din [The Revival of the Religious Sciences] (All volumes; especially the chapters on the relationship between knowledge and action)

Ibn Sina — Al-Qanun fi al-Tibb [The Canon of Medicine] (On the systematic structure of knowledge)

Ibn Sina — Al-Shifa [The Book of Healing] (The integrated structure of philosophy and science)

Al-Muhasibi — Al-Ri'ayah li-Huquq Allah [Observance of the Rights of God] (The relationship between knowledge and the purification of the heart)

Al-Qushayri — Al-Risalah al-Qushayriyyah [The Qushayri Epistle] (Wisdom and the mystical tradition)

Ibn Khaldun — Muqaddimah [Prolegomena] (The balance of knowledge and wisdom in civilisations)

Fakhr al-Din al-Razi — Mafatih al-Ghayb [Keys of the Unseen] (Commentaries on Al-Baqarah verse 269 and Luqman verse 12)

Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır — Hak Dini Kur'an Dili [The True Religion: The Language of the Quran] (Commentary on the wisdom verses)

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi — The Words (On the relationship between faith and knowledge)

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya — Miftah Dar al-Sa'adah [The Key to the Abode of Happiness] (The unity of knowledge, action, and wisdom)

Toshihiko Izutsu — God and Man in the Quran (Semantic analysis; the concept of wisdom)

CHAPTER II — The Exile of Reason

Part V — The Importance of Questioning

"Say: Are those who know equal to those who do not know?"

(Al-Zumar, 39:9)

A Bridge from the Previous Part: The Dead End of Knowledge Without Wisdom

In the previous part we examined the profound distinction between knowledge and wisdom. We saw that knowledge answers the question 'what,' while wisdom answers the questions 'why' and 'what for.' And we explored how this distinction has shaped the course of history — how it has determined the rise and fall of civilisations.

Now we descend to the practical root of this distinction: questioning. For the first condition of knowledge being transformed into wisdom is the questioning of that knowledge. Where no question is asked, knowledge stands still, freezes, and in time grows detached from reality. When a question is asked, knowledge moves, deepens, and acquires meaning.

This was one of the greatest errors of Iblis: he did not ask the question he should have asked. He did not ask: 'Why did God give this command? Is there something I cannot see?' This silence prevented his knowledge from being carried toward wisdom. And in this part we will examine what that silence means, why questioning is so vital, and what those who suppressed inquiry in history thereby lost.

The Question: Not the Enemy of Faith, but Its Complement

In certain periods of Islamic history, asking questions was interpreted as a sign of weakness in faith. The understanding of 'do not doubt — simply believe' occasionally pushed its way to the fore. The intention behind this understanding may have been good: to protect faith, to prevent sedition. But the result was, more often than not, the precise opposite of the intention.

For the true enemy of faith is not the question — it is the question that goes unanswered. If a person suppresses a question growing in their mind, that question does not vanish; it sinks deeper and continues to grow there. Over time, a small doubt, left in silence, becomes an immense void. The question that is asked and answered, by contrast, does not weaken faith — it reinforces it.

The Quran makes this truth explicit. Questioning is one of the actions the Quran most consistently encourages. In hundreds of verses, observation, inquiry, and contemplation are commanded. 'Do you not see?', 'Do you not reflect?', 'Will you not reason?' — these questions are a divine summons. God invites man to think; and He warns against thoughtlessness.

*"And thus does God place defilement upon
those who do not reason."*

(Yunus, 10:100)

The phrase 'place defilement' is extraordinarily powerful. Failure to think is defined as something akin to losing one's purity. This shows how grave a loss the non-use of reason represents. And this loss occurs not from without — but from within.

The Questions of Abraham: The Prophetic Tradition of Inquiry

One of the most affecting scenes in the Quran is the process of inquiry undertaken by Abraham (peace be upon him). Abraham grew up in a polytheistic society. His father was a maker of idols. The whole community worshipped idols. Yet Abraham (peace be upon him) senses that something is wrong — and begins to question:

*"And when the night covered him with
darkness, he saw a star. He said: This is my
Lord. But when it set, he said: I do not like
those that set. And when he saw the moon*

rising, he said: This is my Lord. But when it set, he said: Unless my Lord guides me, I will surely be among the people gone astray."

(Al-An'am, 6:76-77)

This scene is a perfect example of how inquiry operates. Abraham (peace be upon him) tests every possibility. He evaluates the star, the moon, and the sun in turn. He observes the setting of each. He says: 'What sets cannot be a Lord.' And this systematic inquiry leads him to the one true Lord.

What is striking here is this: Abraham (peace be upon him) is not doubting. He is searching. The difference between doubt and searching is of the utmost importance. Doubt sets out from one point of departure: 'There is no truth.' Searching has a different point of departure: 'There is truth; I am looking for it.' The inquiry of Abraham (peace be upon him) is not a sceptical rejection — it is a seeking after truth.

And what is the outcome of this seeking? God shows him the right path. To the servant who questions and searches, God opens His guidance. This is the most beautiful proof that inquiry does not weaken faith — on the contrary, it deepens it.

The Objection of Moses: A Question Is Not Disrespect

The dialogues between Moses (peace be upon him) and God constitute some of the most striking scenes in the Quran. In these dialogues, Moses (peace be upon him) asks questions again and again — sometimes in language that appears to verge on objection.

Upon receiving revelation at Mount Sinai and learning of the condition of his people, he rushes back. He makes his anger apparent. In another context, he says:

"Moses said: My Lord, if You had willed, You could have destroyed them before and me as well. Would You destroy us for what the foolish among us have done?"

(Al-A'raf, 7:155)

This is a profoundly courageous question. Moses (peace be upon him) brings his people's error before God and requests an explanation. It is a prophet who poses this inquiry. And God does not regard this inquiry as disrespect. On the contrary, He responds.

This scene demonstrates: to ask a question is not to reject divine authority. On the contrary, it is to enter into genuine dialogue with that authority. God does not turn away from the servant who asks. The question is not the exclusion of the relationship — it is its deepening.

Iblis, however, did not ask. He did not say 'Why?' He did not say 'What is the wisdom of this command?' Out of pride, he refused to inquire. And this refusal severed him from God. Failure to ask is therefore not obedience. True obedience is to trust God even while asking. Iblis did not ask because he did not trust — he refused because he trusted his own pride.

The Quran's Culture of Questioning: Hundreds of Invitations

Every person who reads the Quran carefully encounters a single recurring phenomenon: the Quran constantly poses questions to man. These questions take various forms. Sometimes they draw attention to the signs in nature: 'Do they not look at the camels — how they were created?' Sometimes they direct attention to history: 'Have they not journeyed through the earth and seen what was the end of those before them?' And sometimes they address reason directly: 'Will you not think?'

These questions are not rhetorical ornaments. They are summons, constructed to set man in motion. Every question seeks to take the reader somewhere: toward observation, toward comparison, toward the drawing of conclusions. That is to say, toward inquiry.

In the Quran, expressions derived from the root 'aql — reason — appear 49 times. The call to tafakkur — deep reflection — is made 18 times. Tadabbur — profound contemplation — is commanded 4 times. Nazara — looking and examining — appears more than 30 times. These numbers show how vast a space the Quran reserves for reason and questioning.

Yet in history there have been periods in which the understanding of 'look to the Quran, but do not ask questions' gained strength. This contradiction is not accidental. While the Book itself encourages inquiry, some of those who interpreted that Book suppressed inquiry. The reasons and consequences of this suppression will be examined in depth in the next part. For now it is sufficient to establish this: the Quran stands on the side of inquiry.

Two Dimensions of Questioning: The Seeking and the Destructive

The defence of questioning in such strong terms does not mean that every question is legitimate. An important distinction must be made here: the seeking question and the destructive question.

The seeking question is asked in order to find truth. Its direction is forward. When an answer is found, it is accepted. When an answer cannot be found, the search continues. This question enlarges the person, deepens them, and brings them to maturity. The questions of Abraham (peace be upon him) were of this kind.

The destructive question is asked not to find truth, but to undermine what already exists. Its direction is backward. Even when an answer is found, it is rejected — because the aim is not to find an answer but to spread doubt. This question does not enlarge the person; it erodes them. And the reason of the person who asks this kind of question is not seeking truth — it is seeking vindication.

The Quran gives a clear warning against this second kind. Questions asked for the purpose of dispute, of concealing truth, or of leading people astray fall within the scope of divine reproach. Indeed, the questions that the hypocrites and unbelievers directed at the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) were, more often than not, of this nature: not for the sake of an answer, but for the sake of refutation.

This distinction is as determinative at the social level as it is at the individual. When seeking questions are encouraged in a society, that society grows. When destructive questions become systematic, that society fractures. When we examine the periods of fitna — civil strife — in Islamic history, we see very clearly how this second kind was employed.

An Example from the Companions: Being Able to Say 'I Do Not Know'

One of the most beautiful examples of a culture of inquiry is concealed in the courage of the Companions to say 'I do not know.' This may appear, on the surface, to be a small detail. But it is in fact the most critical pillar of a culture of questioning.

Umar ibn al-Khattab (may God be pleased with him), during his caliphate, said the following on a major legal matter: 'I have no knowledge on this subject. Go and ask someone else.' The head of state stated openly that he did not know. This attitude is the most concrete example of

accepting the limits of knowledge and keeping a culture of inquiry alive.

It is narrated that Imam Malik (may God have mercy on him) gave the answer 'I do not know' to the great majority of the questions posed to him. One of the greatest jurists of his age approached questions with this courage. For to say 'I do not know' is the requirement of respect for knowledge. To speak while one does not know is a betrayal of knowledge.

This tradition is a sign that a culture of inquiry is functioning in a healthy manner. For the person who can say 'I do not know' is simultaneously aware of their own limits, open to new knowledge, and careful not to mislead others. When these three qualities exist together, knowledge circulates in society in a trustworthy manner. And this trustworthiness prepares the ground for wisdom to grow.

Conversely, one who speaks without knowing: errs because they do not know their limits; fails to develop because they are closed to new knowledge; and damages social trust because they have misled others. This damage, over time, erodes the culture of inquiry. For when people realise they have been misled, they either stop asking — or approach every answer they find with suspicion.

Ijtihad: The Institutional Form of Inquiry

Ijtihad — one of the most distinctive concepts in Islamic law — is in essence the institutional form of inquiry. Ijtihad is the production, by proper method, of a ruling on a matter where the revealed texts do not directly legislate. This production cannot take place without questions. 'By which principle of the revealed text is this situation to be resolved? To which established ruling can this new matter be compared by analogy? What is the maslaha — the

public interest — in this context?' — such questions are the raw material of *ijtihad*.

The periods in which the gate of *ijtihad* stood open are the most productive periods in Islamic law. New matters arising in different geographies and different social contexts were brought to resolution through *ijtihad*. These resolutions were sometimes disputed. But the dispute kept inquiry alive.

The periods in which the gate of *ijtihad* effectively narrowed represent the beginning of stagnation. The understanding that 'the great scholars have already said everything; there is nothing for us to add' is in reality the suppression of inquiry furnished with a respectable justification. And with this closure, jurisprudence began to grow detached from social reality.

The consequences of this detachment have been severe. Attempts were made to answer the new questions of a changing world with old answers. And in every place where the old answers proved insufficient, a portion of society withdrew from the religious domain. This withdrawal is the price paid for closing the gate of inquiry.

From Socrates to Ibn Rushd: The Price Paid by the Questioning Mind

History has more often than not failed to reward the questioning mind. On the contrary, it has at times sought to silence it — or to destroy it. But what is remarkable is this: the silenced voices have, over time, become the ones that speak most loudly.

Socrates established an extraordinary tradition of questioning in Athens. He posed questions to everyone. He showed those who thought they knew how little they in fact knew. And this questioning made him dangerous. The Athenians accused him of 'corrupting the youth.' He was

sentenced to death. Yet his ideas continued to live for two and a half thousand years after his death.

Ibn Rushd (Averroes) was one of the greatest philosophers the Islamic world has produced. He wrote his commentaries on Aristotle, defended the compatibility of reason and revelation, and sought to demonstrate that inquiry strengthens faith. But the political climate of the age changed. His books were burned; he was exiled from Andalusia. Yet his works crossed into the Latin world. And they became a significant part of the intellectual foundation that prepared the way for the European Renaissance.

These two examples reveal a profound paradox: those who suppress inquiry appear, in the short term, to have won. But in the long term, the inquiries they suppressed return — sometimes more powerful, sometimes more fierce. For the question cannot be destroyed. It can be suppressed and delayed — but in the end it rises to the surface.

The Relationship Between Inquiry and Social Health

Research conducted in the modern period demonstrates a strong correlation between a culture of inquiry and social development. Education systems that encourage critical thinking produce societies with greater scientific output. Institutions that encourage the asking of questions become structures that adapt more quickly and pass through fewer errors.

But it is not only modern research that demonstrates this relationship clearly — the history of Islam itself does so. The period in which Bayt al-Hikmah was founded is the period in which inquiry was most free. The works of different civilisations were translated, debated, criticised, and developed. This environment made possible an immense scientific production.

The periods in which inquiry narrowed correspond to the periods in which production also narrowed. This is not a coincidence. For production feeds on questioning. Without a question, nothing new comes into being. And a society from which nothing new emerges falls behind the times.

Understanding this connection is of the utmost importance for the present as well. The answer to the question of why Muslim societies lag behind in scientific production must not be sought in economic or political reasons alone. There is also a cultural dimension: how the asking of questions is received. And this cultural dimension is the one that is most difficult to change.

The Child's Question: The Purest Form of Inquiry

The purest form of a culture of inquiry is found in children. A child asks 'Why?' They receive an answer. 'But why?' they ask again. This cycle of questioning is the most natural form of learning. The child has not yet learned that 'this question should not be asked.'

But as the process of education advances, this naturalness is in most cases broken. 'If the teacher said it, it is true.' 'Elders know; you stay out of it.' 'It is not appropriate for you to ask this question.' These messages, over time, weaken the questioning reflex within the child. And by the time they reach adulthood, this reflex has been largely dulled.

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) approached the questions of children with great respect. He did not dismiss them or turn their questions away. The Companions are seen to have adopted this same disposition. Even very young children who attended the gatherings of learning were able to ask questions.

This tradition is of the utmost importance. For the child who asks questions becomes the adult who asks questions. And a society composed of adults who ask questions continues to grow — both individually and collectively. The transmission of inquiry from generation to generation is one of the most precious inheritances of civilisation.

The Balance Between Questioning and Faith: Where Should One Stand?

Throughout this part we have examined how important questioning is. But at this point a delicate balance must also be seen: the place where question and faith meet.

Not every question is appropriate in every context and in every form. Faith has certain foundations, and questions concerning these foundations require a different kind of care. For example, a question that interrogates the existence of God and a question that explores the meaning of one of His attributes are not of the same nature. The first may enter into an existential crisis. The second is a deepening of knowledge.

It is for this reason that Islamic scholars have bound inquiry to a method — *usul*. Which question is to be asked by which method; which sources are to be taken as primary; within which limits one is to remain — all of this is a framework determined by *usul*. This framework does not abolish inquiry; it makes inquiry productive.

Like the bed of a river. The river bed does not imprison the water — it directs it. Water without a bed spreads and becomes a swamp. Water with a bed is both powerful and reaches its destination. The *usul* of inquiry is the same: it does not suppress questioning — it makes it strong.

The two-winged believer is the one who carries this balance. They both question and believe. They both investigate and submit. This submission is not the

abandonment of inquiry — it is trust in the truth reached after inquiry. And this trust is not a blind submission, but a confidence earned through understanding.

Part Closing

The Question Is the Breath of Civilisation

Throughout this part, an attempt has been made to show a single truth from many different angles: the question is the breath of civilisation. When questioning stops, civilisation cannot breathe. It fades slowly. And one day, without anyone noticing, it has died.

Iblis did not ask — and fell. Abraham (peace be upon him) asked — and rose. These two paths have stood before societies throughout history. The societies that asked questions grew. The societies that suppressed inquiry fell behind the times.

Today this choice still stands before us. And the consequences of this choice are not limited to scientific production. The quality of faith, the depth of morality, the health of society, and the future of civilisation — all of these are directly connected to whether inquiry is alive.

In the next part we will examine how and why this inquiry was suppressed. The suppression of thought will be explored in its historical, political, and cultural dimensions. For without understanding why inquiry was silenced, we cannot know how to revive it.

Bibliography and References

The Holy Quran — Al-Zumar 39:9; Yunus 10:100; Al-An'am 6:76–77; Al-A'raf 7:155; Al-Baqarah 2:44, 2:170; Al-Nahl 16:43

Muslim — Sahih Muslim (Chapters on knowledge and the asking of questions)

Imam Malik — Al-Muwatta [The Well-Trodden Path] (The tradition of *ijtihad* and 'I do not know')

Ibn Abd al-Barr — Jami' Bayan al-'Ilm [A Comprehensive Exposition of Knowledge] (The etiquette of knowledge; the culture of questioning)

Imam al-Ghazali — Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din, Vol. I [The Revival of the Religious Sciences] (The etiquette of knowledge and learning)

Ibn Rushd (Averroes) — Fasl al-Maqal [The Decisive Treatise] (Reason, revelation, and the legitimacy of inquiry)

Ibn Hazm — Al-Ihkam fi Usul al-Ahkam [Precision in the Principles of Rulings] (*Ijtihad* and questioning)

Fakhr al-Din al-Razi — Mafatih al-Ghayb [Keys of the Unseen] (Commentary on Yunus, verse 100)

Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır — Hak Dini Kur'an Dili [The True Religion: The Language of the Quran] (Verses calling to inquiry)

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi — Munazarat [Discussions] (Inquiry, faith, and free thought)

Toshihiko Izutsu — The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology (Reason and the relationship between faith)

W. Montgomery Watt — Islamic Philosophy and Theology (The culture of inquiry in the early period)

CHAPTER II — The Exile of Reason

Part VI — The Suppression of Thought

*"And when it is said to them: Do not cause corruption upon the earth, they say: We are only reformers."
(Al-Baqarah, 2:11)*

A Bridge from the Previous Part: The Silencing of Inquiry

In the previous part we saw that questioning is the breath of civilisation. We examined the seeking of Abraham (peace be upon him), the courage of Moses (peace be upon him), the virtue of saying 'I do not know' in the tradition of the Companions, and how ijtiḥad carried inquiry onto an institutional footing. And the part ended with a question: Then why was this breath cut off?

Now we enter the answer to that question. The suppression of thought does not occur with a sudden explosion. No decree is issued; thought is not prohibited on a single day. This process advances slowly, insidiously, and more often than not with justifications that appear well-intentioned. And it is precisely for this reason that it is so very difficult to detect.

This part examines the mechanisms of that process, its historical examples, and the traces it has left reaching into the present day. And as we move toward the closing of this chapter, we will ask the great question that binds all these parts together: How did a civilisation that once illuminated the world come to extinguish its own light?

The Anatomy of Suppression: Four Stages

The suppression of thought has deepened historically through four foundational stages. These stages follow one upon another. Each grows on the ground of the one before. And each is more difficult to reverse than the last.

The first stage: restriction. Certain subjects are removed from the reach of certain circles. 'These matters belong to scholars, not to the public,' it is said. On the surface it appears a measure of caution. But at its core it is a narrowing of access to knowledge. At this stage, questioning is not entirely prohibited — it is simply confined to particular domains.

The second stage: stigmatisation. Those who question begin to be defined as dangerous. 'He is a follower of heresy.' 'He is stirring up sedition.' 'He is weakening the faith.' These labels do not actually silence inquiry — but they make it socially costly. The person who asks a question must now face not only the risk of failing to find an answer, but the risk of social exclusion.

The third stage: institutionalisation. Suppression ceases to be individual pressure and enters the system. Educational curricula determine which questions can be asked. Institutions decide which ideas are legitimate. And the generations raised within this structure conduct their inquiry within an already-restricted domain — because they know no other way.

The fourth stage: internalisation. This is the deepest and most dangerous stage. External pressure is no longer necessary. The person suppresses themselves. 'I should not ask this.' 'This question is not appropriate.' 'Who am I to question this?' These voices come from within. And a voice that comes from within is far more permanent in its effect than any prohibition imposed from without.

When these four stages are complete, suppression has ceased to be a system and become a culture. And cultures are far more difficult to change than laws.

The Method of Pharaoh: The Classic Form of Controlling Thought

The most classic historical example of the suppression of thought is the rule of Pharaoh. The Quran portrays Pharaoh not merely as a tyrannical ruler, but as an authority that applied systematic control of the mind.

Pharaoh says the following to Moses (peace be upon him):

*"Pharaoh said: I show you only what I see,
and I guide you only to the path of right
conduct."*

(Ghafir, 40:29)

This sentence is the very essence of thought control. Pharaoh has defined his own view as 'the path of right conduct.' Now no other path can be sought — for 'the right path' is established, and it is in his hands. Once this definition is accepted, one who thinks differently is not merely mistaken — they are 'straying from the right path.' And this straying becomes both a religious and a political offence.

When the sorcerers come to believe, Pharaoh's response is also most instructive:

*"Pharaoh said: You believed in him before I
gave you permission. This is a conspiracy
you have plotted in the city to drive out its
people."*

(Al-A'raf, 7:123)

'Before I gave you permission.' This expression shows exactly where freedom of thought is killed: in the mechanism of permission. When believing, thinking, and

changing one's view all become matters requiring authorisation, free thought has effectively died. For the permission system places a gate before thought. And the key to that gate is held by those in power.

The Pharaoh model has repeated itself in different forms throughout history. The name changes; the geography changes — but the mechanism remains the same: making thought subject to the approval of the central authority.

The Points of Rupture in Islamic History

In Islamic history there are particular points of rupture at which thought was suppressed. To see these points is critical for understanding how the process operated.

The first great rupture was the period of the Mihna — the Inquisition. Between 833 and 848, the Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mun and those who followed him applied the policy of the Mihna, compelling scholars to accept the doctrine that the Quran was created. This was the imposition of a political belief upon an intellectual matter. Many scholars, foremost among them Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal, resisted. Some were imprisoned; some were subjected to torture. This period demonstrated how fragile the relationship between power and thought can be.

The second great rupture was the effective narrowing of the gate of ijtiḥād. From roughly the fourth and fifth centuries of the Islamic calendar onward, the understanding that 'the great scholars have already said everything' gained ground. Taqlid — the unquestioning adoption of the views of the great scholars — gradually became widespread. This transformation was not a prohibition. But it was a cultural closure. And cultural closures preserve their effect far longer than legal ones.

The third great rupture was the defensive reflex that followed the Mongol invasion. The burning and

destruction of Baghdad in 1258 left a deep trauma in the Islamic world. One consequence of this trauma was the coming to the fore of the instinct for 'preservation.' Innovation came to be seen as a risk. The impulse to 'protect what we have' overtook the impulse to 'produce something new.' This defensive reflex is an understandable psychological response. But in the long term it paralysed civilisation.

These three points of rupture formed a chain that fed one another. Political pressure facilitated cultural closure. Cultural closure made the defensive response to trauma permanent. And this chain affected thought profoundly across the centuries.

The Deep Root of Memorisation Culture: Safety or Submission?

The most widespread and most insidious form of the suppression of thought is the culture of memorisation. Memorisation appears, on the surface, to be an innocent educational method. But beyond a certain point, its purpose changes. It is no longer used to transmit knowledge — it is used to prevent questioning.

In a culture of memorisation, the student learns answers — not questions. They learn what to say — not why it is said. They learn which conclusion is to be reached — not how that conclusion was arrived at. This form of education transmits knowledge, but produces no thought.

The practical consequences of this are severe. Generations raised on memorisation struggle to resolve the new problems they encounter. For new problems do not correspond to memorised answers. And since they know no method other than memorisation, they either try to force-fit the old answer to the new situation, or find themselves helpless.

In the period of Islamic civilisation's decline, the manifestations of this picture are visible. Why was the Industrial Revolution missed? Because the intellectual structure of society was not prepared to produce new solutions to new problems. The culture of memorisation caused even the fact that the world was changing to be recognised late. And when the change was finally noticed, no one remained who knew what to do.

*"And when it is said to them: Follow what
God has revealed, they say: Rather, we will
follow that upon which we found our fathers.
Even though their fathers understood
nothing and were not guided?"*

(Al-Baqarah, 2:170)

This verse is the Quranic critique of memorisation culture. The unquestioning acceptance of everything that comes from the forebears is defined as a grave error. Tradition has value and must be preserved. But when tradition is placed ahead of thought, it ceases to be a heritage — and becomes a prison.

The Politics of Silence: Do Those Who Stay Silent Win?

In the suppression of thought, there is another mechanism that is as important as the pressure itself: the rewarding of silence. In every society there is a price to be paid for speaking. But simultaneously, there is also a return to be had from silence. And when that return is sufficiently attractive, people stop speaking.

Historically this mechanism has operated as follows: the scholar who questions faces both social and political risks. The one who maintains silence, however, occupies a position that is secure, respected — and even rewarded. This duality, over time, determines the general tendency

of society. Bold voices diminish. Cautious silences multiply.

But this silence does not destroy truth. It merely postpones it. Every suppressed thought goes underground. And thoughts that go underground either disappear altogether in time, or one day emerge through a far more powerful channel.

History is full of examples of this second outcome. The Tanzimat in the Ottoman Empire was the delayed eruption of suppressed questions. The debates over modernisation were the collective surfacing of questions deferred for decades. And these delayed eruptions more often than not took the form not of a controlled transformation but of a shattering rupture.

For this reason it can be said: those who suppress inquiry appear, in the short term, to have won. But in the long term, the questions they suppressed demolish the very system they built. Suppression does not solve the problem — it accumulates it. And the accumulated problem one day returns as an insoluble crisis.

The Weaponisation of Knowledge: When Learning Becomes an Instrument of Control

Perhaps the most refined form of the suppression of thought is the use of knowledge itself as an instrument of control. In this situation, knowledge is not prohibited — on the contrary, it is produced. But the knowledge that is produced is constructed in order to close off inquiry.

This mechanism operates as follows: power creates a body of knowledge that legitimises its own existence. This knowledge is transmitted through schools. Generations are raised with this knowledge and come to accept it as natural reality. Inquiry, when it falls outside this body,

already appears meaningless — because 'what is correct' has been established in advance.

In Islamic history, the traces of this mechanism can be seen in the Umayyad period and in certain parts of the Abbasid period. Hadiths that supported political legitimacy were brought to the fore; interpretations that questioned those in power were pushed to the background. This is not a conspiracy theory — it is a reality documented in the records of history. Ibn Khaldun analysed this relationship systematically in his *Muqaddimah*.

In the modern age this mechanism has assumed far more sophisticated forms. The media, the education system, and digital platforms are the spaces in which knowledge is produced and distributed. When these spaces are controlled, what is to be asked — and what is not to be asked — is also largely determined. This subject will be examined in depth in Volume II in the context of perception management and the global knowledge system. For now it is sufficient to establish this: knowledge is not neutral. Every body of knowledge is produced within a context — and reflects that context.

The Contradiction Within Those Who Suppress Thought

Most of those who suppress thought see themselves as saviours. This is an important psychological reality. 'I am protecting society.' 'I am defending the faith against sedition.' 'I am keeping people from error.' These intentions may sometimes be genuinely sincere. But intention does not determine outcome.

Suppression carried out with sincere intent is more dangerous than suppression carried out with cunning. For suppression with cunning is noticed over time, and resistance develops against it. Suppression with sincere

intent, however, appears legitimate across generations. To oppose it is counted both a religious and a moral offence. And this accusation is the most effective means of lowering the volume of inquiry.

The Quran tells of this contradiction with striking force. The hypocrites in Surah Al-Baqarah are described as follows:

"And when it is said to them: Do not cause corruption upon the earth, they say: We are only reformers. Unquestionably, it is they who are the corrupters, but they perceive it not."

(Al-Baqarah, 2:11–12)

'They perceive it not.' This expression is of the utmost importance. To cause corruption and to believe oneself to be a reformer — both are possible at the same moment. And this lack of awareness is the greatest weakness of those who suppress inquiry. People who believe themselves to be honest do not question their honesty. People who believe themselves to be right do not test their rightness.

This contradiction operates at the institutional level just as it does at the individual level. Institutions that suppress thought more often than not genuinely believe that they pursue legitimate goals — 'protecting the faith' or 'ensuring social stability.' And this belief prevents them from questioning their own activities.

Collapse from Within: The Ultimate Consequence of One-Wingedness

The long-term consequence of the suppression of thought is not a destruction that comes from without. It is a collapse that occurs from within. This distinction is of the utmost importance. For destruction from without is seen, identified, and can be met with unified resistance. But the

collapse that occurs from within is invisible. Everyone feels that something is wrong — but no one can see what it is.

The decline of Islamic civilisation proceeded in precisely this manner. Missing the Industrial Revolution was not simply the result of an external assault. It was the result of an internal freezing accumulated over decades. Questions had not been asked. New developments had not been tracked. While the world was changing, civilisation had stood still. And this stillness had, over time, become a falling behind.

The most striking sign of this inner collapse is the intellectual confusion of the Ottoman period's final phase. On one side, those who said: 'Everything is in the faith — we have nothing to learn from the West.' On the other, those who said: 'We must take everything from the West — let us leave our own culture behind.' Between these two extremes, the loss of the intellectual ground that could have established the true balance is the clearest manifestation of the loss of two-wingedness.

The two-winged believer does not become lost in this confusion. For they neither refuse blindly nor accept blindly. They question, they evaluate, they develop while preserving their essence. But this capacity grows only on a ground where inquiry is alive and thought is free. When that ground dries up, it becomes impossible to raise two-winged believers.

The Voice of Rebirth: Thoughts That Cannot Be Suppressed

But history is not composed solely of dark pages. In every period of suppression, voices that could not be suppressed have also arisen. And these voices are the ones that have left the most enduring marks.

Ibn Taymiyya continued to write despite the political and religious pressures of his age. He was imprisoned again and again. But he never put down his pen. And today, in dozens of countries, his ideas are still being read, debated, and felt.

Said Nursi lived through one of the most severe conditions of oppression in the twentieth century. He spent decades in exile, in custody, or under surveillance. Yet he continued to write under every circumstance. The Risale-i Nur Collection was born under these conditions of suppression. And today it is read in every corner of the world.

These examples are not accidental. What they show is this: thought cannot be destroyed. It can be suppressed, delayed, made more difficult. But a mind in pursuit of truth ultimately finds its way. For truth is engraved upon the fitra — the innate disposition — of man. And what is engraved upon the fitra, however fiercely it may be suppressed, will one day rise to the surface.

The Quran expresses this truth as follows:

"God is the Light of the heavens and the earth."

(Al-Nur, 24:35)

The light of truth cannot be extinguished. It can be covered over. But when the covering is lifted, the light is still there. And even in the darkest periods of history, human beings have emerged who carried this light.

Chapter II Closing

From the Exile of Reason to Rebuilding

This chapter examined the exile of reason across six parts. We began with the dialogue of Adam and Iblis; we explored the first pride, the first error of logic, the distinction between knowledge and wisdom, the importance of questioning, and the suppression of thought. Each part connected to the one before. And these connections formed a single great story:

Man was created with two wings. Faith and reason are the names of these two wings. When these wings work together, man rises, civilisations grow, and truth is produced. But pride breaks this balance. The error of logic distorts it. Ignorance weakens it. And suppression destroys it in practice.

Iblis stands at the beginning of this process. He displayed the first pride. He made the first error of logic. He rejected the first inquiry. And he swore to show man the same road. This oath has been fulfilled in different forms in every period of history.

But man holds something that Iblis does not: the door of repentance. Adam (peace be upon him) used this door — and rebuilding began. Every person, every society, every civilisation can use this door. To realise, to accept, and to turn — these three steps form the foundation of rebuilding.

In the chapters ahead in Volume I, we will see the historical examples of this rebuilding. The chain of prophets will show how each one touched the point of rupture of their own community. The golden age of Islamic civilisation will tell how two-wingedness looked in practice. And the period of decline will reveal how the loss of this balance was reflected in civilisation.

But at the centre of all this narrative, the same question will always stand:

"With which of your wings are you flying?"

This question is not a rhetorical ornament. It is an existential question that every human being must answer in their own life. And the answer given to this question determines the destiny of both the individual and the civilisation in which they live.

Chapter II closes here. We have looked upon the place to which reason was exiled. Now, in order to understand what happened before the exile, we will descend into the depths of history.

Bibliography and References

The Holy Quran — Al-Baqarah 2:11–12, 2:170; Ghafir 40:29; Al-A'raf 7:123; Al-Nur 24:35; Al-Hujurat 49:6

Ibn Khaldun — Muqaddimah [Prolegomena] (The relationship between power, learning, and social decline; all chapters)

Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal — Musnad (Historical documents relating to the period of the Mihna)

Ibn Kathir — Al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya [The Beginning and the End] (The history of the Mihna period and political suppression)

Ibn Taymiyya — Majmu' al-Fatawa [The Collection of Legal Opinions] (Scholarship produced under conditions of suppression)

Said Nursi — Tarihçe-i Hayat [Biography] (Thought under conditions of exile and oppression)

Said Nursi — Risale-i Nur Collection (The defence of faith and reason)

Fakhr al-Din al-Razi — Mafatih al-Ghayb [Keys of the Unseen] (Commentary on Al-Baqarah, verses 11–12; hypocrisy and self-deception)

George Makdisi — The Rise of Colleges (Educational institutions in Islam and intellectual freedom)

Marshall Hodgson — The Venture of Islam, Vols. I–III (The processes of transformation of Islamic civilisation)

Albert Hourani — Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age (The Ottoman transformation and thought)

Cemil Meriç — Bu Ülke [This Country] (The dissolution of the Ottoman intellectual structure)

İsmail Kara — İslâmcıların Siyasî Görüşleri [The Political Views of Islamists] (The intellectual crises of the period of decline)

CHAPTER III

The Prophets and the Rebuilding of Humanity

Every Community Had a Disease; Every Prophet Was Its Cure

*"For every community there is a messenger.
When their messenger comes, the matter
between them is decided in justice, and they
are not wronged."*

(Yunus, 10:47)

Introduction to the Chapter: History Is Not Merely a Narrative

The history of the prophets is not a fairy tale. Nor is it legend. It is the documentation of the process of rebuilding the intellectual, moral, and spiritual health of humanity. Each prophet was sent not in a vacuum, but at the precise moment when a particular disease had become chronic in a particular community. And each brought a remedy specific to that disease.

In this chapter we will examine the accounts of seven prophets. But this narrative is not ordinary historical

writing. In each account we will follow three questions: To which community did this prophet come? What was that community's fundamental disease? And what was the remedy brought? These three questions are critical not only for understanding the past, but for reading the present. For the diseases of communities have not changed. Only their forms have changed.

And within this narrative, we will clearly see a recurring pattern: the Children of Israel. This people, across the course of history, was sent prophet after prophet; warned again and again; shown miracle after miracle — yet deviated at every turn. This deviation is not accidental. It is the systematic manifestation of pride, worldly calculation, and the desire to bend truth to one's own purposes. To overlook this reality is to miss one of the most important lessons history has to offer.

The accounts of the prophets are narrated again and again in the Quran. This repetition is not a literary choice. It is a divine pedagogy: 'Think. See. Take heed.' For what was lived in the past is being lived today as well. The same diseases, the same denials, the same justifications. Only the names have changed.

The Matter of the Children of Israel: The Longest Records of Deviation in History

Before entering this chapter, one reality must be stated plainly: the Children of Israel are the people to whom the greatest number of prophets were sent, who were shown the greatest number of miracles, and who nonetheless deviated the most. This is not a prejudice. These are the records of the Quran, of the Torah, and of history itself.

When the Quran speaks of the Children of Israel, it uses an exceptionally clear language:

"We had already taken the covenant of the Children of Israel and had sent to them

messengers. Whenever there came to them a messenger with what their souls did not desire, a party of them they denied, and another party they killed."

(Al-Ma'idah, 5:70)

This verse is extraordinarily striking. They did not merely deny — they killed the prophets. That is to say, the deviation did not remain at the level of individual error; it acquired a collective and systematic character. When the causes of this collective deviation are examined, several interconnected foundational factors come to the fore.

The first: placing worldly interest ahead of divine ruling. When Moses (peace be upon him) brought them rulings, they rejected these rulings whenever they threatened their social interests. The rabbinic class and the religious scholars in particular instrumentalised religious interpretation in order to preserve their own status. Truth was rejected whenever it conflicted with interest.

The second: the pride of chosenness. The understanding of 'We are God's chosen people' transformed over time into 'we can do whatever we wish.' This pride made it difficult to heed the warnings of the prophets. The question 'Who is warning us?' came to precede the question 'What are they saying?'

The third: the distortion of revelation. The Quran explicitly states that the Children of Israel altered the word of God by displacing it from its proper position:

"They distort words from their proper usages."

(Al-Nisa, 4:46)

This distortion is not limited to altering the text. Changing the meaning, context, and application of the text falls into the same category. And at the root of this distortion there

always lies the same thing: the desire to shape truth according to one's own interests.

To see this pattern is vital for understanding the present. For the same dynamics are operating today. Zionism is the modern form of this history — combining Jewish identity with an ideology of chosenness, turning revelation into an instrument for a political project, and constructing powerful institutions to bend truth in service of that aim. These are all contemporary manifestations of that old pattern. This subject will be examined in depth in Volume II. But to read the history of the prophets without seeing this reality is to leave that reading incomplete.

Noah (Peace Be Upon Him) — The Flood of Pride

To Which Community Did He Come?

Noah (peace be upon him) was sent during the period of humanity's first great recorded social crisis. We have no precise geographical knowledge of the people of that time — but the Quran and the tradition of Quranic commentary offer extraordinarily illuminating information about the structure of this community. According to the accounts transmitted by Ibn Kathir and other great commentators, the people of Noah had, across the long centuries since Adam (peace be upon him), largely lost their bond with God.

The most striking feature of this community is the process and form of its transition to polytheism. The Quran tells of this transition in a most instructive manner. The idols the community revered and worshipped — Wadd, Suwa', Yaghuth, Ya'uq, and Nasr — are reported to have been, in their origins, righteous people. In time, statues were made

to preserve the memory of these individuals; and as the generations changed, these statues were transformed into objects of worship. That is to say, shirk — the association of partners with God — began not with ill intention but with good intention. This is the most dangerous form of polytheism.

What Was the Community's Disease?

The people of Noah had more than one disease. But when one goes to the root of them all, a single foundational factor stands out: pride. This pride manifested itself in different forms.

The first form: class pride. The leading figures of the community rejected Noah (peace be upon him) in the following terms:

"The eminent among his people who disbelieved 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, lacking discernment."

(Hud, 11:27)

This objection is most instructive. The problem is not that what Noah says is wrong. The problem is that Noah is 'one like us.' And those who first follow him come from the lower strata of society. That is to say, truth is being filtered through the lens of social class. The question 'Who is saying this, and who is accepting it?' is being placed ahead of the question 'Is this true?'

The second form: insistence on the pride of forebears. Whenever Noah (peace be upon him) issued a warning, the community cited as justification the order they had seen from their ancestors. This justification prevented the investigation of truth. For the answer 'We have always seen it this way' closes the question 'But is it right?'

The third form: fear of losing status. The leading figures of the community regarded following Noah as losing their social standing. To accept truth meant, for them, a social cost. And this cost was placed ahead of the value of truth.

What Was the Remedy?

Noah (peace be upon him) preached for 950 years — the longest recorded period of prophetic mission in the history of humanity. And throughout this time he tried different methods:

"My Lord, indeed I invited my people night and day. But my invitation increased them not except in flight. And indeed, every time I invited them that You might forgive them, they put their fingers in their ears, covered themselves with their garments, persisted, and were arrogant with great arrogance."

(Nuh, 71:5–7)

This supplication of Noah (peace be upon him) reveals an important truth: the truth was conveyed. But whether or not it was accepted was left to the choice of the human being. God does not compel anyone to believe. For a faith obtained by compulsion is not true faith.

The remedy of Noah (peace be upon him) rested on a single, clear call: tawhid — the oneness of God. Worship God alone. Leave the idols. This call was the key to both individual and collective salvation. But the community refused.

And the flood came. The flood was not an act of vengeance. It was the cleansing of a community in which the possibility of reform had been exhausted. In the words of Ibn Arabi, the flood was also a manifestation of mercy — for the continuation of that community would have produced only further sedition and corruption.

The lesson to be taken from the account of Noah (peace be upon him) is clear: pride renders one unable to see truth. Class divisions, anxiety about social status, and blind submission to the traditions of the forebears can cause even the longest mission to be rejected. And this rejection drags not only the individual but the whole of society toward catastrophe.

Hud (Peace Be Upon Him) — The Intoxication of Power

To Which Community Did He Come?

Hud (peace be upon him) was sent to the people of Ad, who lived in the south of the Arabian Peninsula — in the region of present-day Yemen and Hadramawt. The people of Ad were one of the most powerful and advanced societies of their age. The Quran describes them with a most striking expression:

*"Do you not consider how your Lord dealt
with Aad — Iram — who had lofty pillars,
the like of which were not produced in all the
land?"*

(Al-Fajr, 89:7–8)

Iram, with its legendary architecture, is described as one of the most magnificent cities in history. The people of Ad had constructed great buildings, brought vast territories under their control, and possessed the most powerful army of their age. This power gave them a deep self-confidence. But that self-confidence, in time, transformed into a dangerous pride.

What Was the Community's Disease?

The fundamental disease of the people of Ad was the intoxication of power. The Quran conveys their own words:

"Who is greater than us in strength?"

(Fussilat, 41:15)

This sentence is the clearest example of a civilisation's pride. 'Who is mightier than us?' is in truth less a question than a claim. And this claim leaves God outside the equation. Power is positioned as though it originates from themselves — cut off from its source and absolutised. This is one of the subtlest forms of shirk: to count power as coming from oneself rather than from God.

The second disease of the people of Ad was the complacency brought by prosperity. Societies living in abundance more often than not believe that abundance is permanent. They forget gratitude, flee responsibility, and begin to regard luxury as a right. In the people of Ad, this transformation had taken place. The great buildings no longer carried great meaning — they were merely displays of power.

The third disease was oppression. The strong had crushed the weak. Social justice had been lost. Despite the warnings of the prophet, this oppression continued.

What Was the Remedy?

Hud (peace be upon him) made a clear and plain call to his people: fear God. Worship Him. Know that power and wealth are a trust for which an accounting will be rendered. Know that your community cannot protect you from God.

*"And to the Aad We sent their brother Hud.
He said: O my people, worship God; you
have no deity other than Him. You are not
but inventors of falsehood."*

(Hud, 11:50)

But the people of Ad refused. They described Hud (peace be upon him) as one who had lost his mind and as a liar. Their power made them feel they could reject truth.

And the punishment came. The Quran describes the storm that destroyed the people of Ad with extraordinary dramatic force:

"Which He imposed upon them for seven nights and eight days in succession, so you would see the people therein fallen as if they were hollow trunks of palm trees."

(Al-Haqqah, 69:7)

'Hollow trunks of palm trees.' This metaphor is extraordinarily powerful. The people of Ad appeared, from the outside, powerful and magnificent. But within, they had long since rotted away. Pride, the intoxication of power, and oppression had destroyed the inner fabric of society. And at the first great external shock, this hollow structure collapsed.

The lesson of the account of Hud (peace be upon him) is this: power is not a guarantee. Even the most powerful society cannot be protected from the punishment of God. And the true power of a society lies not in the height of its buildings, but in the soundness of its morality.

Salih (Peace Be Upon Him) — The Trampling of the Sign

To Which Community Did He Come?

Salih (peace be upon him) was sent to the people of Thamud, who lived in the north of Arabia — in the region

of al-Hijr (Mada'in Salih, modern Saudi Arabia). The people of Thamud were a community that had grown powerful after the destruction of the people of Ad, and were known for their magnificent rock-hewn structures. The Quran draws attention to this architectural power:

*"And remember when He made you
successors after the Aad and settled you in
the land, and you take for yourselves palaces
from its plains and carve from the
mountains, homes."*

(Al-A'raf, 7:74)

Salih (peace be upon him) was one of them — from among the Thamud themselves. He was initially received with respect by his community. This is an important detail in the history of prophethood: Salih (peace be upon him) was not a stranger coming from outside. He was someone his community knew, loved, and trusted. But when the mission began, this affection and trust turned to enmity.

What Was the Community's Disease?

The disease of the people of Thamud was multi-layered. The first and most fundamental was shirk and pride. They had inherited the legacy of the people of Ad — yet had drawn no lesson from their fate. Failure to learn from history was Thamud's greatest weakness.

The second was the corruption of the leadership class. The nine of that city were the forerunners of sedition and corruption:

*"And there were in the city nine family heads
causing corruption in the land and not
reforming."*

(Al-Naml, 27:48)

These nine held both political and religious authority in their hands simultaneously. This concentration of power

became an instrument for controlling the rest of the community. The call of the prophet was rejected because it threatened their power.

The third disease was obstinacy in the face of miracle. God sent to Thamud an unmistakably clear miracle: a she-camel that emerged from the rock. This she-camel was a divine sign. Salih (peace be upon him) said to his people:

*"This is the she-camel of God, a sign for you.
So let her graze freely upon God's earth, and
do not touch her with any harm, or you will
be seized by a painful punishment."*

(Al-A'raf, 7:73)

What Was the Remedy?

The remedy of Salih (peace be upon him) was a call to tawhid, supported by miracle. God gave Thamud not merely words but a visible, tangible proof. The miraculous emergence of the she-camel from the rock was sufficient proof for belief. And this she-camel also became the occasion of a test.

But the nine of the community slaughtered the she-camel. This was not merely the killing of an animal; it was the deliberate trampling of a divine sign. How had this audacity — or this insolence — been possible? Because pride blinds the eye. It becomes possible to overlook the source of a miracle, if accepting it runs contrary to one's interests.

And the punishment came within three days. Thamud was wiped from the face of the earth. Salih (peace be upon him), departing from his people, left them with these final words:

*"He said: O my people, I had certainly
conveyed to you the message of my Lord and
advised you, but you do not like advisors."*

(Al-A'raf, 7:79)

The lesson of the account of Salih (peace be upon him) is this: seeing a miracle is not sufficient for belief. If the heart is filled with pride and calculation of interest, even the most manifest proof can be rejected. And the corruption of the ruling class can deprive a community of the voice of its prophet.

Lot (Peace Be Upon Him) — The Denial of the Fitra

To Which Community Did He Come?

Lot (peace be upon him) was the nephew of Abraham (peace be upon him) and had emigrated with him from Iraq. When prophethood was bestowed upon him, he was sent to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. These cities are located in the vicinity of the present-day Dead Sea and lay on the trade routes of their time. The cities appear to have been in economic prosperity — but this prosperity had prepared the ground for a deep moral collapse.

The community of Lot (peace be upon him) is presented in the Quran as the most explicit example of moral deviation in history. This deviation was not merely an individual sin — it was a corruption that had spread throughout the whole of society, been legitimised, and come to be openly defended.

What Was the Community's Disease?

The disease of the community of Lot (peace be upon him) was the denial of the fitra — the innate disposition with which God created man. God created the human being upon a particular fitra, which is an order inscribed into

human nature encompassing biological, spiritual, and social dimensions. The community of Lot (peace be upon him) reversed this order.

"Do you approach the immorality that no one has preceded you with from among the worlds? Indeed, you approach men with desire instead of women. Rather, you are a transgressing people."

(Al-A'raf, 7:80–81)

'A transgressing people.' This expression is of the utmost importance. To deny the fitra is not merely a moral error — it is to exceed the limits of existence. To disregard the boundaries God has set shakes the foundations of both the individual and the society.

But the disease of the community was not this alone. In addition, the practice of violence against guests had also become a custom of the community. When the angels came as guests to the home of Lot (peace be upon him), the community came to assault them. This represents the collapse of all the social norms of the city. To protect the guest was, in that era, the most fundamental moral value. The disappearance of this value showed that decay had been completed at every level of society.

What Was the Remedy?

The remedy of Lot (peace be upon him) was both an individual and a social call: return to the fitra. Conform to the order God has created. Desist from this deviation.

But the community did not merely refuse — it threatened Lot (peace be upon him) and intimidated him with expulsion from the city. To silence the prophet does not eliminate the disease — it conceals it. And a concealed disease prepares the ground for a far deeper collapse.

God sent the angels both to rescue Lot (peace be upon him) and to destroy the cities. Lot (peace be upon him) and those who believed left the city. Those who remained were overtaken by the punishment. The Quran describes this scene as follows:

*"And We rained upon them a rain of stones.
Then see how was the end of the criminals."*

(Al-A'raf, 7:84)

The lesson of the account of Lot (peace be upon him) is multi-layered. First: the denial of the fitra is one of the fastest routes to social collapse. Second: when deviation does not remain at the individual level but is legitimised, it spreads to the whole of society. Third: to silence the prophet eliminates not the disease but only the warning. And communities deprived of warning cannot see their own collapse.

Reading this account today, it is possible to see the modern forms of the same pattern. Ideologies that deny the fitra, the efforts to redefine moral norms, and the cultural and political instruments used to legitimise this — these carry the trace of the community of Lot (peace be upon him). To see this connection is to read the account in its true meaning.

Abraham (Peace Be Upon Him) — A Nation Unto Himself

To Which Community Did He Come?

Abraham (peace be upon him) was born in Ur, in the south of Iraq — the very heart of Sumerian civilisation. This city was one of the most advanced centres of civilisation of its age: a developed writing system, advanced agricultural

technology, great temples, and a powerful state structure. And all of this was built upon polytheism. It is narrated that his father was a skilled craftsman who carved idols.

Abraham (peace be upon him) was born at the very centre of this civilisation. And from that very centre he objected. This is one of the rarest examples of courage in history. His surroundings, his family, his trade, his city, his state — everything rested upon shirk. And he, alone, said 'No.'

God describes Abraham (peace be upon him) as 'a nation unto himself':

*"Indeed, Abraham was a nation — devoutly
obedient to God, inclining toward truth, and
he was not of those who associate others
with God."*

(Al-Nahl, 16:120)

What Was the Community's Disease?

The disease of the community of Abraham (peace be upon him) was multi-layered and deeply rooted. The first was an eclipse of reason. The community was worshipping idols they had made with their own hands — yet everyone knew these idols were man-made. Abraham (peace be upon him) struck at this contradiction with the sharpest precision:

*"He said: Do you worship what you
yourselves carve, while God created you and
what you make?"*

(Al-Saffat, 37:95–96)

This question retains its sharpness today. Can man worship what his own hand has made? Yes. Not only idols of wood or stone — money, power, technology, ideology, fame — any of these can be transformed into an object of worship. The question of Abraham (peace be upon him) remains valid in every age.

The second disease was a religious understanding built upon fear. People were worshipping idols not because they believed in them, but to prevent misfortune from befalling them. Power managed this fear. King Nimrod used religious authority as an instrument of political dominance. Abraham (peace be upon him) threatened this order and accordingly faced the death penalty.

The third disease was the prohibition of questioning. When Abraham (peace be upon him) posed questions to his father Azar, he was rejected. In that society, questioning was seen as an act that threatened the established order.

What Was the Remedy?

The remedy of Abraham (peace be upon him) had three dimensions. The first was to use reason. He demonstrated the invalidity of the idols both through argument and through action. He smashed the idols and forced society to think. But they chose anger over thought.

The second was submission to the divine test. The life of Abraham (peace be upon him) was filled with fire, migration, solitude, and the greatest test of all — the command to sacrifice his son. In every test he gave the same answer: I submit.

"His Lord said to him: Submit. He said: I have submitted myself to the Lord of the worlds."

(Al-Baqarah, 2:131)

The third was to bequeath a legacy of tawhid. Abraham (peace be upon him) addressed not only his own age but all of humanity. The construction of the Kaaba is the concrete manifestation of this universal call — a centre inviting the people of every corner of the earth to tawhid.

The deepest lesson of the account of Abraham (peace be upon him) is this: truth is sometimes defended alone. The surroundings, the family, the state — all may stand against you. But truth rests not on numbers, but on its essence. A single person who stands correctly, though standing alone, can give direction to civilisations a hundred years later.

Moses (Peace Be Upon Him) — Pharaoh, Israel, and the Weight of Freedom

To Which Community Did He Come?

The account of Moses (peace be upon him) is the most comprehensive and multi-layered narrative in the history of prophethood. The Quran does not narrate the account of any other prophet as broadly and as repeatedly as it narrates that of Moses (peace be upon him). This repetition is not accidental — the lessons it contains are so deep and so universal that every generation must learn from this account anew.

Moses (peace be upon him) was born in Egypt. At that time Egypt was the most powerful empire in the world. Pharaoh was the absolute master of both political and religious authority. He had declared himself a god. The Children of Israel were the slaves of this empire. Centuries of slavery had profoundly shaped the psychology of this community.

Moses (peace be upon him) was raised in the palace — in the care of Pharaoh's household. He knew both the world of the slaves living under oppression and the world of the palace that applied the oppression. Knowing both worlds made his mission unique.

What Was the Community's Disease? — The Side of Pharaoh

The disease of Pharaoh is the clearest historical example of pride. He had declared himself a god:

"And Pharaoh said: O eminent ones, I have not known you to have a god other than me."

(Al-Qasas, 28:38)

This claim is the expression not only of an individual pride, but of a systematised falsehood. Pharaoh may not have believed in his own divinity. But to say so reinforced his power. Religion had been turned into an instrument of political dominance.

The second disease of Pharaoh was his failure to believe despite seeing miracles. Moses (peace be upon him) displayed nine great miracles. After each one, Pharaoh made concessions — but went back on his word once the tribulation had passed:

"But each time We removed the punishment from them until a term which they were to reach, at once they broke their word."

(Al-A'raf, 7:135)

This pattern is most instructive. To submit under pressure is not a sign of true submission. The 'faith' of Pharaoh vanished each time he found relief. This is a form of compliance that comes not from the heart but from calculation. And such compliance breaks at the first available opportunity.

What Was the Community's Disease? — The Side of the Children of Israel

But the heaviest and most instructive dimension of the account of Moses (peace be upon him) is not Pharaoh. The real weight lies concealed in the Children of Israel. For

Pharaoh was already a denier. What is truly shocking is the ingratitude of those who were saved.

After enduring centuries of slavery, the Children of Israel were saved in miraculous fashion. The sea parted. The army of Pharaoh was drowned. In the desert, manna and quail were sent down. A cloud shielded them from the heat. Every need they had was met through divine grace.

And yet they rebelled at every opportunity:

"They said: O Moses, we can never endure one kind of food. So call upon your Lord to bring forth for us from the earth its green herbs and its cucumbers and its garlic and its lentils and its onions. He said: Would you exchange what is better for what is less?"

(Al-Baqarah, 2:61)

This scene reveals the anatomy of ingratitude: forgetting the miraculous salvation, failing to appreciate the value of the divine blessing, and coming with complaint at the slightest worldly dissatisfaction. But there is something still heavier:

"And the people of Moses made, after his departure, from their ornaments a calf — an image having a lowing sound. Did they not see that it could neither speak to them nor guide them to the right way? They took it for worship, and they were wrongdoers."

(Al-A'raf, 7:148)

When Moses (peace be upon him) went up to Mount Sinai, he was away for only forty days. Forty days. And the Children of Israel — imitating the polytheist tradition of Egypt, the very land in which they had been enslaved — made a golden calf and worshipped it. This was not mere ignorance. A community that had seen God part the sea prostrated before a golden statue within forty days.

This deviation is not accidental. It is the manifestation of the disease that slavery had etched into their minds. A community that had lived for centuries under oppression did not know what to do with freedom. When they were saved, instead of giving thanks, they reproduced the form of dependence to which they had become accustomed.

What Was the Remedy?

The remedy of Moses (peace be upon him) was a three-dimensional project of liberation. The first was political liberation: deliverance from the tyranny of Pharaoh. The second was spiritual liberation: deliverance from the disease that slavery had left in the mind. The third was legal construction: carrying the rulings of God into social life.

The revelation of the Torah is the foundation of this third dimension. God offered not only physical salvation — He also gave a comprehensive legal system regulating how the community was to live. But the Children of Israel were unwilling to bear the weight of this system.

One of the most important lessons emerging from the account of Moses (peace be upon him) is this: freedom is not merely the breaking of physical chains. True freedom is intellectual and spiritual freedom. And this freedom is far more difficult. For the chains of the body are visible — the chains of the mind are not.

The Children of Israel could never absorb this lesson. Moses (peace be upon him) warned them again and again — he grew angry, he wept, he prayed. But the picture recorded by the Quran is clear: this people became a people that denied its prophets and even sought to kill them. And to overlook this reality is to miss the most important lesson history has to offer.

Jesus (Peace Be Upon Him) — The Rebirth of the Spirit, and Distortion

To Which Community Did He Come?

Jesus (peace be upon him) was born in Bethlehem, in Palestine, under the dominion of the Roman Empire. At that time Jerusalem was under both the political sovereignty of the Romans and the cultural and religious authority of the Jewish religious scholars. The people, caught between these two powers, were crushed under both political oppression and religious burden.

The Jewish religious scholars — the Pharisees and Sadducees — had instrumentalised religious law in order to control the community. Religion had become not a liberating but a binding burden. The spirit had been lost; the form had remained. Jesus (peace be upon him) came precisely to fill this void.

What Was the Community's Disease?

The disease of the community of Jesus (peace be upon him) was the loss of the spirit of religion. The rulings of the Torah existed — but the spirit of these rulings, which was to draw the human being closer to God, had long since died. The religious scholars were expert at interpreting rules, but had forgotten the purpose for which these rules had been sent — namely, the purification of the human heart.

The second disease was the hypocrisy of the religious scholars. Jesus (peace be upon him) criticised this hypocrisy directly and sharply:

*"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's faces."
(Matthew, 23:13 — historical context reference)*

This criticism of Jesus (peace be upon him) reflects a reality that the Quran also confirms: the instrumentalisation of religion by the scholar class for its own power. This situation is not unique to the Children of Israel — it is a universal danger that can arise in every community.

The third disease was the political oppression of the Romans. But Jesus (peace be upon him) responded to this not with direct political opposition but with a spiritual revolution. For the real problem was not the chain on the outside — it was the chain on the inside.

What Was the Remedy?

The remedy of Jesus (peace be upon him) was to revive the spirit of religion. Love, compassion, humility, and inner purity — these were the essence of the teaching of Jesus (peace be upon him). Give a hand to the one who stumbles. Forgive. Look to your inner world. Do not worship for show.

*"And when Jesus son of Mary said: O
Children of Israel, indeed I am the
messenger of God to you, confirming what
came before me of the Torah and bringing
good tidings of a messenger to come after
me, whose name is Ahmad."*

(Al-Saff, 61:6)

Jesus (peace be upon him) confirmed what came before him and gave glad tidings of what was to come. His mission was one link in the chain of revelation. But the most critical feature of this link was that it brought the spirit back to the fore.

And what happened then? The greatest deviation of the Children of Israel in history occurred in connection with Jesus (peace be upon him). They had denied the earlier prophets. But Jesus (peace be upon him) they both denied

and attempted to kill. The Quran conveys this reality plainly:

*"And for their saying: We killed the Messiah,
Jesus, the son of Mary, the messenger of
God. And they did not kill him, nor did they
crucify him; but it was made to appear so to
them."*

(Al-Nisa, 4:157)

God protected Jesus (peace be upon him). But the intent of the Children of Israel was laid bare: the attempted killing of a prophet. This is the most striking expression of that people's historical character.

And then distortion began. The teaching of Jesus (peace be upon him), after his departure, underwent a profound transformation. Tawhid was changed into the doctrine of the Trinity. Jesus (peace be upon him), who was the servant and messenger of God, was deified. This distortion is not accidental — it is a conscious and systematic process.

The lesson of the account of Jesus (peace be upon him) is multi-layered. First: when the spirit of religion is lost, the religion that consists of form alone cannot save the human being. Second: when the scholar class is turned into an instrument of power, even the voice of the prophet can no longer be heard. Third: distortion is the most insidious enemy of truth — because from the outside it looks like truth.

General Evaluation

Seven Accounts, Seven Lessons

Recurring Patterns: The Common Root of the Diseases

When the accounts of the seven prophets are read together, several foundational diseases stand out — manifesting in different geographies, in different eras, and in different forms, yet identical at their core.

The first common disease: pride. The people of Noah displayed class pride. The people of Ad carried the pride of power. Pharaoh claimed the pride of existence itself. The Children of Israel were mired in the pride of chosenness. The form of each is different — but the root is the same: 'I am not obliged to heed this warning.'

The second common disease: anxiety over status. In every community, the leading figures opposed the prophet. For the call of the prophet threatened their power. Truth was rejected whenever it stood in the way of status.

The third common disease: blind submission to the tradition of the forebears. 'We found our fathers doing thus.' This justification repeated itself in every community. Blind attachment to the past blocked both newness and truth.

The fourth common disease: ignoring the miracle. Every prophet showed miracles to convince his community. But a miracle does not transform the heart — it only presents proof. The proud heart can reject even the most manifest proof.

The Place of the Children of Israel in History: The Systematic Dimension of Deviation

In these seven accounts, the Children of Israel occupy a special place. Unlike the other communities, they were warned repeatedly, saved repeatedly, and given chance after chance. This repeated opportunity makes their responsibility correspondingly much heavier.

The Quran addresses this historical pattern of the Children of Israel comprehensively in various surahs. A large portion of Surah Al-Baqarah narrates the historical process they lived through with Moses (peace be upon him). And this narrative is not given merely to provide historical information. It is a warning: the same diseases are possible today.

Zionism is the modern form of this history. Combining Jewish identity with an ideology of chosenness, turning revelation into a political instrument, and regarding the bending of every moral norm as legitimate in service of this aim — these are the manifestations, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, of the historical disease of the Children of Israel. This reality is not enmity. It is history itself. And reading history correctly is the condition for understanding the present correctly.

"And We had already taken the covenant of the Children of Israel and had sent to them messengers. Whenever there came to them a messenger with what their souls did not desire, a party of them they denied, and another party they killed."

(Al-Ma'idah, 5:70)

The Common Message of the Prophets: A Single Call

Despite all their differences, the message of the seven prophets is, at its core, one: Turn to God. Leave pride. Establish justice. Return to the fitra. Live the revelation with understanding.

This message has changed in form according to its historical context. Noah (peace be upon him) called to tawhid against shirk. Hud (peace be upon him) reminded those intoxicated with power of humility and gratitude. Salih (peace be upon him) showed the price of trampling a miracle. Lot (peace be upon him) said 'stop' to the denial of the fitra. Abraham (peace be upon him) was able to say 'no' to a civilisation, alone. Moses (peace be upon him) taught both political and spiritual freedom. And Jesus (peace be upon him) revived the spirit of religion.

And the last link in this chain came with the greatest of prophets — Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him). He did not merely bring a new religion. He was the completion of the whole of this chain. He healed all the wounds left by the earlier prophets, corrected the distortions, and conveyed to humanity the final and complete message. His account will be treated in a separate chapter — for he is too great and too comprehensive to be contained within the bounds of this chapter alone.

The Accounts Live Not in the Past — but in the Present

A question should by now have formed in the reader's mind: Why does all of this feel so familiar? Because it is familiar. The class pride of the people of Noah — you will see it in today's media. The intoxication of power of the people of Ad — you will see it in today's arms race. The denial of the fitra of the community of Lot — you will see it in today's culture wars. The self-deification of Pharaoh — you will see it in today's authoritarian systems. The ingratitude of the Children of Israel after their salvation — you will see it in today's societies that consume blessings without gratitude.

The Quran repeats these accounts again and again. And in every repetition it says: 'Look. See. Take heed.' For to take heed is, in reading the past, to truly see the present.

In the next chapter, using the ground this chapter has prepared, we will examine the birth of Islam, the life of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), and the foundations of the civilisation that was established. For all of these accounts are the prologue to that final and great page.

"Every prophet held up a mirror to the face of humanity. Those who looked were changed. Those who did not — threw the broken mirror at the prophet."

Bibliography and References

The Holy Quran — Yunus 10:47; Al-Ma'idah 5:70; Al-Nisa 4:46, 4:157; Hud 11:27–50; Nuh 71:5–7; Al-Fajr 89:7–8; Fussilat 41:15; Al-Haqqah 69:7; Al-A'raf 7:73–84, 7:148; Al-Naml 27:48; Al-Saffat 37:95–96; Al-Nahl 16:120; Al-Baqarah 2:61, 2:131, 2:170; Al-Qasas 28:38; Al-Saff 61:6

Ibn Kathir — Qisas al-Anbiya' [Stories of the Prophets] (The history of the prophets; primary source)

Ibn Kathir — Tafsir al-Quran al-Azim (All relevant surahs)

Fakhr al-Din al-Razi — Mafatih al-Ghayb [Keys of the Unseen] (Commentaries on the accounts of the prophets)

Al-Tabari — Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil al-Quran [The Comprehensive Clarification of the Interpretation of the Quran] (The historical background of the accounts)

Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır — Hak Dini Kur'an Dili [The True Religion: The Language of the Quran] (Commentary on the relevant surahs)

Sayyid Qutb — Fi Zilal al-Quran [In the Shade of the Quran] (The social and political dimensions of the prophetic accounts)

Mustafa İslamoğlu — Peygamberlerin Mesajı [The Message of the Prophets] (A contemporary reading of the accounts)

Ibn Khaldun — Muqaddimah [Prolegomena] (The cycles of rise and decline of communities; relationship to the accounts)

Marshall Hodgson — The Venture of Islam, Vol. I (Pre-Islamic history and the prophetic tradition)

Karen Armstrong — A History of God (The historical development of the Abrahamic traditions)

Israel Shahak — Jewish History, Jewish Religion (On the historical character of the Children of Israel)

Norman Finkelstein — Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict (The historical foundations of modern Zionism)

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi — Isharat al-I'jaz [Signs of Miraculousness] (The accounts of the Quran in Surah Al-Baqarah; chapters on the Children of Israel)

Ali Shariati — The Prophet [Peygamber] (The social function of the institution of prophethood)

CHAPTER IV

The Final Prophet and the Great Transformation

Part I — Mecca

"And I swear by this city."

(Al-Balad, 90:1)

A Bridge from the Previous Chapter: The Ground the Prophets Prepared

In the previous chapter we followed the accounts of seven prophets. Each pointed to a different community, a

different disease, and a different remedy. But they all shared a common feature: the message they brought was not yet complete. Noah (peace be upon him) called to tawhid — his people refused. Abraham (peace be upon him) became a nation unto himself — but his seeds had not yet fully borne fruit. Moses (peace be upon him) brought a great law — but his people could never fully live by it. Jesus (peace be upon him) revealed the depth of the spirit — but distortion followed in his wake.

And finally, the stage was set for the greatest transformation in the history of humanity. This stage was established at the geographical heart of the world, at the intersection of trade routes, in a city where both the depths of ignorance and the heights of potential existed side by side: Mecca.

This part was written to understand that city. For without understanding the place into which revelation descended, it is not possible to fully grasp what revelation means. Mecca is not merely a geographical point. Mecca is a summary of humanity's condition at that moment.

The Geography of Mecca: The Anatomy of a City

Mecca was built in a narrow valley surrounded by mountains, at an elevation of approximately 277 metres above sea level, in the Hijaz region of present-day Saudi Arabia. Its agricultural productivity was extremely low. In one verse, God says:

*"Our Lord, I have settled some of my
descendants in an uncultivable valley near
Your sacred House."*

(Ibrahim, 14:37)

This supplication of Abraham (peace be upon him) encapsulates the geographical reality of Mecca: an uncultivable valley. No agriculture can be practised; a

livelihood cannot easily be sustained. This harsh geography had made Mecca economically entirely dependent on trade. And this dependence had profoundly shaped the character of the city.

But the same supplication also explains why this barren valley was chosen: beside the Sacred House. The Kaaba was the soul of this city. And the presence of the Kaaba lifted Mecca beyond being merely a city of trade, loading it with a sacred weight. This dual identity — city of trade and sacred city — is the key to understanding Mecca.

The Arabian Peninsula occupied an extraordinarily strategic position with respect to trade routes. The caravan routes extending through Yemen to the Indian Ocean and through Syria to the Mediterranean all passed through Mecca. The tribe of Quraysh had become a great commercial power by controlling these routes. The Quran states this reality explicitly:

*"For the accustomed security of the Quraysh
— their accustomed security in the journeys
of winter and summer."*

(Quraysh, 106:1–2)

The winter journeys went to Yemen; the summer journeys to Syria. This trade had made the Quraysh wealthy — but at the same time had confined them to a thoroughly worldly, calculating mentality. Everything was evaluated according to commercial interest. This mindset would be profoundly shaken by the coming of revelation.

The Kaaba: A Sanctity Reaching from the Depths of History

The most fundamental feature distinguishing Mecca from the other cities of Arabia is the presence of the Kaaba. The Kaaba was built by Abraham (peace be upon him) and his

son Ishmael (peace be upon him) and is defined as the first place established for humanity's invitation to tawhid:

"Indeed, the first House established for the people was that at Mecca — blessed and a guidance for the worlds."

(Al Imran, 3:96)

When it was first built, the Kaaba was the symbol of tawhid. Abraham (peace be upon him) founded this place to call people to God. And this call continued through the generations. But over time, just as had happened with previous communities, this sacred place too underwent distortion.

By the sixth century CE, 360 idols had been placed inside the Kaaba. Every Arab tribe had its own idol. The Kaaba had ceased to be the house of tawhid and had become a museum of shirk. This transformation symbolised not merely a religious degeneration but the collapse of the entire value system of society.

Yet the fact that the Kaaba was still regarded as sacred even in this corrupted state reveals an important truth: the fitra of man does not cease to search for the sacred. The idols are a deviation of this innate search. And this deviation, when correctly channelled, can be transformed into a saving force. The call of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) addressed precisely this innate search.

The Social Structure of Mecca: A System of Inequality

The social structure of Mecca was built upon the tribal system. The tribe was the foundation of both the political and the economic unit. The worth of an individual was directly proportional to the power of the tribe to which they belonged. A person from a powerful tribe enjoyed all

rights. A person from a weak tribe or without a tribe had virtually no protection.

The most savage manifestation of this system was the institution of slavery. Slaves were regarded not as human beings but as property. They could be bought and sold, tortured, and killed. It is no accident that among the first Muslims were names such as Bilal al-Habashi, Sumayya, and Yasir — people who were slaves or from weak tribes. Islam first reached the oppressed.

The situation of women was also extraordinarily grave. Female infants were considered a source of shame and were buried alive. The Quran describes this savagery with striking force:

"And when one of them is given good tidings of a girl, his face becomes dark, and he suppresses grief. He hides himself from the people because of the ill of which he has been informed. Should he keep it in humiliation or bury it in the ground? Unquestionably, evil is what they decide."

(Al-Nahl, 16:58–59)

This picture represents not merely individual cruelty but the cruelty of the system itself. The burying of female infants had become a social norm. Norms are not questioned. And an unquestioned norm becomes an oppression transmitted from generation to generation.

The distribution of wealth was also extraordinarily unequal. While Abu Sufyan, Abu Jahl, and other leading figures of the Quraysh possessed immense fortunes, the great majority of society lived in poverty. This economic inequality overlapped with political inequality. Wealth bought power. Power produced more wealth. And this cycle had come to be accepted as an unchangeable order.

The Cultural Life of Mecca: Lights Within the Darkness

Yet to define the Mecca of the Age of Ignorance — the Jahiliyya — solely as darkness would be to do history an injustice. This society also contained elements of genuine value. And the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) did not destroy these values entirely — he purified and elevated them.

The first was the sanctity of the word. In Arab culture, poetry and speech were the highest forms of art. Poets were the conscience of society. Beautiful speech was the highest virtue. This culture prepared an extraordinarily fertile ground for the acceptance of revelation. The matchless eloquence of the Quran was born within this culture — and transcended it.

The second was hospitality. The harsh desert conditions of Arabia had made hospitality a vital value. To close the door on a guest was among the greatest of shames. This value was transformed by Islam into a universal sense of brotherhood.

The third was fidelity to one's word. In Arab culture, loyalty to a given pledge was the foundation of honour. The title al-Amin — the Trustworthy — had been given to the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) by his own community before the mission began. This was a reflection of the value the society placed on honesty.

These values were preserved and deepened by Islam. But the shirk, oppression, and jahiliyya that had been built upon them were uprooted from their foundations. This was not the destruction of a civilisation — it was the purification of a civilisation.

Mecca and the World: On the Threshold of a Turning Point

In the sixth century CE, the world was in the depths of a profound crisis. In the East, the Sasanian Empire, and in the West, the Byzantine Empire, were waging bloody wars against each other. Both empires were in a process of internal decay — both politically and morally. Christianity, in Byzantium, had been turned into a political instrument and had largely lost its spirit. Zoroastrianism had dissolved in the power games of the Sasanian court.

Arabia, meanwhile, was a geography caught between these two great powers, wrestling with its own internal conflicts. But for precisely this reason, it stood outside all established balances. It was not under the full dominion of either Byzantium or the Sasanian Empire. This space of independence meant that it was a land where a fundamental change could take root and grow.

The wisdom of God is clearly visible in this choice. Revelation descended not to the centre of an established empire, but to a geography on their margins — independent of them, not yet imprisoned in settled patterns. And in this geography, the greatest transformation in the history of humanity began.

To understand Mecca is to understand this transformation. For revelation did not descend into a void. It descended onto a particular land, to a particular people, at precisely the right moment of a particular history. This 'right moment' is expressed in the Quran through a deeply meaningful concept:

*"Indeed, God is ever Knowing and
Acquainted with all things."*

(Al-Ahzab, 33:1)

He knows all things — including where, when, and to whom revelation is to be sent. Mecca was the place chosen by this divine knowledge.

The City Was Ready — But Did Not Know It

Mecca at the close of the sixth century was a city of contradictions. Both sacred and defiled. Both powerful and oppressive. Both a society that prized the word and one that buried female infants. Both at the centre of trade and at the margins of morality. These contradictions did not represent a single disease — they represented multiple diseases.

And within this city, in the Year of the Elephant — around 570 CE — a child was born. His father had died before he was born. His mother passed away when he was still young. His grandfather and uncle cared for him. He could not read or write. He had no slaves, no power, no army. But he carried one thing: the purity of the fitra. And this purity was the seed of the greatest revolution.

In the next part, we will examine more deeply the moral and cultural collapse of the society in which that child grew up: the order of the Jahiliyya.

Bibliography and References

The Holy Quran — Al-Balad 90:1; Ibrahim 14:37; Quraysh 106:1–2; Al Imran 3:96; Al-Nahl 16:58–59; Al-Ahzab 33:1

Ibn Hisham — Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah [The Life of the Prophet] (The Meccan period)

Ibn Sa'd — Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra [The Great Classes]
(Information on the Companions and the period)

Ibn Kathir — Al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya [The Beginning and
the End] (The history of Mecca and the Jahiliyya period)

Al-Tabari — Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk [The History of
Prophets and Kings] (The historical background of Mecca)

Mustafa al-Siba'i — Sirah Encyclopaedia (The social
structure of Mecca)

Martin Lings — Muhammad: His Life Based on the
Earliest Sources (The cultural and geographical portrait of
Mecca)

Karen Armstrong — Muhammad: A Biography of the
Prophet (An analysis of Meccan society)

W. Montgomery Watt — Muhammad at Mecca (The
political and commercial structure of Mecca)

Philip Hitti — History of the Arabs (The history of Arabia
and the role of Mecca)

Elmahlı Hamdi Yazır — Hak Dini Kur'an Dili [The True
Religion: The Language of the Quran] (Commentary on
Surah Quraysh)

CHAPTER IV — The Final Prophet and the Great Transformation

Part II — The Order of the Jahiliyya

*"Then is it the judgement of the Jahiliyya
they desire? But who is better than God in
judgement for a people who are certain in
faith?"*

(Al-Ma'idah, 5:50)

A Bridge from the Previous Part: From the Anatomy of the City to the Anatomy of the Order

In the previous part we examined the geography of Mecca, the history of the Kaaba, the order of trade, and the general outlines of its social structure. We saw the contradictions of the city: a sacred space alongside a corrupted life; a reverence for the word alongside a disregard for the human being. Now we enter into the heart of these contradictions.

The Jahiliyya is not merely a historical period. The Jahiliyya is a mentality. And this mentality can be reproduced in every age, in different forms. For this reason, to understand the order of the Jahiliyya is not only to read the past — it is to recognise the present.

In this part we will examine the Jahiliyya in all its dimensions. But we will place one reality at the very heart of this chapter: the oppression of women. For one of the most reliable ways of measuring the moral health of a society is to look at how that society regards women. And the Jahiliyya failed this test in the gravest possible manner.

What Is the Jahiliyya? A Misunderstood Concept

The word Jahiliyya derives from the Arabic root *jahl*. It is most often translated as 'ignorance' in the sense of a lack of knowledge. But this translation is incomplete. The Jahiliyya is not merely ignorance. The Jahiliyya means: not knowing — or not wishing to know — the truth; being devoid of a moral framework; placing the drives of the *nafs* and tribal interest ahead of everything else.

Islamic scholars have defined the Jahiliyya as 'the social condition deprived of the guidance of revelation.' This definition is of the utmost importance. For the Jahiliyya is not only a historical period — it is a characteristic

applicable to every age and every society in which revelation is disregarded.

The Quran uses the term Jahiliyya in four different contexts: the thought of the Jahiliyya (Al-Ma'idah, 5:50), the period of the Jahiliyya (Al Imran, 3:154), the pride of the Jahiliyya (Al-Fath, 48:26), and the display of the Jahiliyya (Al-Ahzab, 33:33). These four usages show how comprehensive a concept the Jahiliyya is. It encompasses not only belief, but forms of thought, attitude, and behaviour.

The Foundations of the Jahiliyya Order: Three Pillars

The order of the Jahiliyya was built upon three interlocking foundational pillars. These pillars fed one another and held one another upright.

The first pillar: tribal law. Right and wrong were determined according to tribal interest. The strong of the tribe are right. The member of a weak tribe is wrong — no matter how just their cause. This understanding of law justified blood feuds, wars, and oppression across the generations.

The second pillar: authority based on force. Whoever is stronger, rules. Justice is what the powerful define it to be. In this understanding, law is in the service of power — not power in the service of law.

The third pillar: blind submission to the tradition of the forebears. 'Our fathers did thus.' This justification legitimises every form of oppression. For tradition is not questioned. And an unquestioned tradition becomes an oppression transmitted from generation to generation.

In the order built by these three pillars together, those who always suffered the heaviest harm were the same groups: slaves, the poor, and women. These three groups were

compelled to carry the heaviest burden of the Jahiliyya order.

Women: The Deepest Wound of the Jahiliyya

The condition of women in the Age of the Jahiliyya constitutes one of the most painful pages in the history of humanity. To understand this pain, it is sufficient to know a single fact: female infants were buried alive. This was not the product of savagery — it was the product of a system. The father who buried his daughter was not regarded as criminal in the eyes of his society. On the contrary, he was seen as one who 'preserved his honour.'

The Quran strikes this horror with the following verse:

*"And when the girl buried alive is asked —
for what sin she was killed..."*

(Al-Takwir, 81:8–9)

This verse announces that on the Day of Resurrection, that girl-child will be asked a question. The question will not be put to that innocent being. The question will be put to the one who buried her. And this question has been left to the Day of Resurrection — because in this world, it could not be brought to account. The Quran has not left this oppression without judgement.

The Legal Status of Women in the Jahiliyya

In the Jahiliyya, a woman was not a legally free individual. She could not be an heir — on the contrary, she could be transferred as an inheritance. When her husband died, the male relatives of the husband could take possession of the woman as though she were an item of property. Marriage and divorce were left entirely to the unilateral will of the man. The woman had no voice in these matters.

Divorce was arbitrary and unlimited. A man could divorce his wife, then take her back, then divorce her again, and

continue this cycle indefinitely. The woman, caught in this cycle, was counted as neither married nor divorced — she was left, as it were, suspended in mid-air. When the Quran brought this oppression to an end, the language it used was clear: divorce was limited to three pronouncements, and the woman was protected.

The mahr — the bridal gift — was regarded not as the woman's right but as the income of her father or tribe. The woman had no right to dispose of any wealth. Even what she earned through her own labour was not considered hers.

And upon all of this, polygamy was unlimited. A man could have ten, twenty, or even more wives. The rights of these women were not guaranteed. Justice among wives could not be spoken of. And in this order, the woman did not carry the dignity of a human being — she occupied the position of a piece of property.

The Social Worth of Women in the Jahiliyya: A Source of Shame

In Jahiliyya society, the birth of a female child was received not as a cause for joy but as a cause for shame. The Quran lays bare this psychology in all its nakedness in the verses of Surah Al-Nahl we also quoted in the previous part. The father hides himself from the people in shame. He faces two choices: to raise her in humiliation, or to bury her in the ground. Both are the products of shame.

Where did this shame come from? In tribal culture, a female child would, when grown, become the property of another tribe. She represented a 'loss' to her father. Moreover, female children were taken captive in wars — a situation that was counted as a stain on the tribe's honour. If a tribe could not protect its women, that tribe was weak.

This understanding positioned woman as a burden and a source of danger. And this positioning prepared the ground for the normalisation of savagery. The burying alive of female infants was not a savagery that appeared suddenly. It was the ultimate manifestation of a devaluation accumulated over many long years.

Devaluation always begins in this way. First, a group of human beings is not counted as fully human. Then the oppression inflicted upon them is not recognised as oppression. And finally, the oppression is legitimised. The Jahiliyya's view of women is the most painful historical example of this process.

The Value That the Prophets Gave to Women: The Consistent Voice of Revelation

Now let us step to the other side of this picture and see a truth plainly: the Lord of the Worlds, in no period of human history, has regarded women as worthless. When the lives and missions of all the prophets are examined, it becomes clear that the value accorded to women carries a divine consistency.

Among those saved on the ark of Noah (peace be upon him) were women who had believed. Salvation was determined not by gender but by faith. The daughters of Lot (peace be upon him) were deemed worthy of protection by their father. The wives of Abraham (peace be upon him) — Sarah and Hagar — assumed active roles in the course of revelation. Hagar (peace be upon her) is the owner of that famous running that gave rise to Zamzam. Her desperate yet trusting run is observed today by millions of pilgrims as a sacred rite.

Women played a decisive role in the life of Moses (peace be upon him). His mother placed him in the river to save him from death — she is one of the most courageous mothers in all of history. His sister followed him and found

him a wet-nurse at the palace. The daughter of Pharaoh raised him in the palace. And the daughter of Shu'ayb recommended Moses (peace be upon him) to her father — a recommendation that changed the course of history.

*"One of them said: O my father, hire him.
Indeed, the best one you can hire is the
strong and the trustworthy."*

(Al-Qasas, 28:26)

This verse is of the utmost importance. A woman evaluates Moses (peace be upon him) and gives advice to her father. And this advice carries enough weight to be recorded in the Quran. It is therefore clear that revelation has not erased the mind, the voice, or the judgement of women. On the contrary, it has placed them on record.

In the time of Jesus (peace be upon him), women formed a significant portion of the first believers. Mary (peace be upon her) is the only woman in the Quran to whom an entire surah is devoted. She passed two great tests — both her virginity and her motherhood. And God described her as 'chosen above the women of the worlds':

*"O Mary, indeed God has chosen you and
purified you and chosen you above the
women of the worlds."*

(Al Imran, 3:42)

This verse was revealed into a world in which the Jahiliyya counted the female child a source of shame. And into that world it said: among those chosen by God is a woman. And that woman is the mother of the greatest miracle in history.

The Condition of Women in the Rest of the World Before Islam

To fully understand the Jahiliyya's view of women, it is necessary to step back one pace and look at the rest of the

world in that period. For Arabia was not alone in this regard — on the contrary, it reflected the general picture of the age.

In Roman law, even in the sixth century CE, a woman was not counted as a fully legal person. A married woman's right to property was extremely limited. Her inheritance rights were far behind those of male siblings. In the public sphere, her voice was virtually nonexistent.

In Indian tradition, sati — the practice of burning the widow alive upon the death of her husband — was widespread. A widowed woman was regarded as virtually worthless in society. This practice continued for centuries.

In China, the tradition of foot-binding left the feet of young girls permanently crippled. This was a systematic physical torture carried out in the name of an aesthetic ideal. The woman was rendered unable to move freely — rendered immobile both physically and symbolically.

In Europe, canon law subjected women to dependence on men in many areas. Throughout the Middle Ages, women were kept in a secondary position both legally and theologically.

The Jahiliyya, in other words, was not unique to Arabia. The Jahiliyya was the general condition of humanity in that era. Without understanding this context, the magnitude of the revolution that Islam brought to women's lives cannot be fully grasped.

The Other Diseases of the Jahiliyya: Blood Feuds, Oppression, Shirk

Alongside the question of women, the order of the Jahiliyya had other deep diseases as well. Without seeing them, the picture is incomplete.

The first: the culture of the blood feud. Blood feuds between tribes could continue across generations. When a member of one tribe was killed, taking revenge upon the opposing tribe was obligatory. This revenge could transform into wars lasting for decades, even centuries. The famous conflicts known as the War of Busu and the War of Dahis wa al-Ghabra' began from small incidents and became bloody confrontations lasting for many years.

In this cycle, no one ever truly won. For every killing made another killing obligatory. Blood drew blood. And there was no moral authority that could break this cycle. Tribal law legitimised the blood feud. This cycle could not be broken before revelation came.

The second: usury and economic exploitation. The commercial system of Mecca was built upon usury. The wealthy lent money at interest, making the poor still poorer. For one who had fallen into the cycle of debt, escape was virtually impossible. This economic oppression made social inequality permanent.

The third: slavery. Slaves were deprived of human rights. Their emancipation was entirely dependent on the will of their master. A slave who suffered mistreatment had no legal mechanism to appeal to. Bilal al-Habashi was crushed under rocks on the hot sands of the desert for becoming a Muslim. This was not an individual manifestation of savagery — it was a practice sanctioned by the system.

The fourth: shirk and polytheism. Three hundred and sixty idols inside the Kaaba. Different deities for every tribe. This polytheism was not merely a theological deviation — it was also the source of social division. When every tribe had a different 'god,' it was impossible to establish a common moral ground.

The Continuing Forms of the Jahiliyya: Where Are We Today?

The Jahiliyya is not a period buried in history. The Jahiliyya is a mentality. And this mentality continues its existence today in different forms.

Violence against women continues today in every geography of the world. Economic exploitation persists through different mechanisms. The modern form of blood feud culture — nationalist violence — continues to shake the world. And most importantly, shaping truth according to the interests of the nafs — the most fundamental disease of the Jahiliyya — operates in today's information age in far more sophisticated forms.

To see this reality is to cease seeking the Jahiliyya only in the past. And to cease seeking it only in the past is the first step toward recognising it in the present.

Islam transformed a Jahiliyya fourteen centuries ago. But the principles that Islam offers are not specific to the Jahiliyya of that day. These principles address the Jahiliyya of every age. The condition is that those principles are genuinely understood and lived. And this understanding requires being a two-winged believer — that is, possessing both faith and reason together.

Part Closing

At the Very Heart of the Darkness

When we have seen the order of the Jahiliyya in these dimensions, the magnitude of what we will narrate in the next part becomes more clearly apparent. For revelation did not descend into a void. Revelation descended into the

very heart of this order. To a society that counted women worthless came a religion that accorded women the greatest of worth. To a society that regarded burying a slave in the sand as 'normal' came an order in which slaves were counted as brothers. To tribes that killed one another in blood feuds came the words: 'The believers are brothers.'

This was not merely a religious reform. This was the greatest civilisational revolution in the history of humanity. And this revolution began in the Cave of Hira.

In the next part we will examine that moment: the first revelation.

"The Jahiliyya was darkness. But no darkness can prove the absence of a light. The light was coming. From the cave."

Bibliography and References

The Holy Quran — Al-Ma'idah 5:50; Al-Fath 48:26; Al-Ahzab 33:33; Al-Takwir 81:8–9; Al-Nahl 16:58–59; Al-Imran 3:42; Al-Qasas 28:26; Al-Baqarah 2:228–232

Ibn Hisham — Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah [The Life of the Prophet] (Detailed accounts of the Jahiliyya period)

Ibn Kathir — Al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya [The Beginning and the End] (The social and cultural history of Jahiliyya Arabia)

Fakhr al-Din al-Razi — Mafatih al-Ghayb [Keys of the Unseen] (Commentaries on Surahs Al-Takwir and Al-Nahl)

Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır — Hak Dini Kur'an Dili [The True Religion: The Language of the Quran] (Comprehensive commentary on the verses relating to women)

Sayyid Qutb — Fi Zilal al-Quran [In the Shade of the Quran] (The contemporary dimensions of the concept of Jahiliyya)

Imam al-Ghazali — Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din [The Revival of the Religious Sciences] (Chapters on family, marriage, and the rights of women)

Mustafa al-Siba'i — Al-Mar'ah bayna al-Fiqh wa al-Qanun [Woman Between Jurisprudence and Law] (A comparative analysis of women's rights in Islamic law)

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi — Hanımlar Rehberi [A Guide for Women] (On Islam's view of women)

Martin Lings — Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources (The Jahiliyya period and the first Muslim women)

W. Montgomery Watt — Muhammad at Mecca (A political and social analysis of Jahiliyya society)

Leila Ahmed — Women and Gender in Islam (The transformation brought by Islam before and after its advent)

Karen Armstrong — Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet (The question of women in the Jahiliyya)

Nabia Abbott — Aishah: The Beloved of Mohammed (The status of women in the early Islamic period)

CHAPTER IV — The Final Prophet and the Great Transformation

Part III — The First Revelation

*"Read! In the name of your Lord who
created."*

(Al-Alaq, 96:1)

A Bridge from the Previous Part: From Darkness to Light

In the previous part we saw the full depth of the Jahiliyya order. A society in which female infants were buried. An order in which women were counted as property. A culture in which blood feuds continued across generations. A city in which the Kaaba overflowed with idols. For a human being living within this picture, hope was extraordinarily difficult to find.

But it was at precisely this point that the greatest moment in human history was lived. A single word. A single command. And with that command, the course of history changed.

This part was written to tell of that moment. But in order to understand that moment, it is first necessary to understand the man who lived it. For revelation did not descend upon an abstract concept. Revelation descended upon a human being. And that human being had lived a life of forty years up to that point.

Forty Years: Muhammad (Peace and Blessings Be Upon Him) Before Revelation

Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) was born in Mecca in 570 CE — the Year of the Elephant. His father, Abdullah, had died before he was born. His mother, Aminah, closed her eyes to the world when the child was only six years old. At the age of eight, his grandfather Abd al-Muttalib also passed away. His uncle Abu Talib took him in and raised him.

These losses, one after another, shaped his character. He had tasted loneliness — but had learned to find strength within it. He had known pain at an early age — but had transformed pain not into complaint but into depth.

In his youth he was engaged in trade. His honesty and reliability earned him the title al-Amin — the Trustworthy. Even those who would later count themselves his enemies were the ones who gave him this title. Khadijah (may God be pleased with her) kept him as her trade agent on account of this trustworthiness, and later proposed marriage to him. This marriage became one of the most important supports of his life.

Yet within all this outer world, there was a continuing search running through his inner life. The idols of Mecca seemed meaningless to him. The oppressions of society troubled him. From time to time he would withdraw to the Cave of Hira — staying there for days, contemplating. These withdrawals were not an escape from society. They were the striving of a soul that sought meaning to draw near to truth.

Islamic scholars describe this period as tahannuth — devoting oneself to worship, contemplating, purifying oneself. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), even before revelation came, was listening to the voice of the fitra. And that voice led him to Hira.

The Cave of Hira: The Most Silent Place in History

Hira is a cave near the summit of the Mountain of Light (Jabal al-Nur), approximately three kilometres north of Mecca. The cave is extremely small — only a few people can fit inside it. From it, the Kaaba can be seen. The noise of Mecca does not reach it.

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) climbed to this cave again and again. He would descend from time to time to be with his family, then climb back up. These retreats sometimes lasted for days. What did he do there? He thought. He asked after the secret of creation. He asked why humanity was in the state it was. He sought an answer.

And that night — in the last ten days of Ramadan, in the year 610 CE — the answer came. But not as he had expected. In a way no one could have expected.

That Night: The Moment History Broke

Aisha (may God be pleased with her) narrates: 'The revelation began for the Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him) first in the form of true dreams. Every dream he saw would come true like the breaking of the dawn. Then solitude was made beloved to him; he would withdraw to the Cave of Hira and devote himself to worship there. He would take provisions for this purpose. Then he would return to Khadijah and take provisions again for the same period. Until finally, truth came to him while he was in Hira.'

That night, Gabriel (peace be upon him) came. And the first contact was profoundly shaking. According to the transmission in the hadith, Gabriel (peace be upon him) embraced the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and pressed him — so intensely that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) felt he could bear it no longer.

Then he released him. Then he pressed him again. He released him again. And on the third occasion he said:

*"Read! In the name of your Lord who
created — created man from a clinging
substance. Read! And your Lord is the Most
Generous — Who taught by the pen — taught
man that which he knew not."*

(Al-Alaq, 96:1–5)

These five verses are the beginning of the greatest transformation in the history of humanity. But in that moment, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) could not yet fully know this. The only thing he knew was that something immense was happening within him. And this feeling, causing him to tremble, brought him down from the cave.

Khadijah (May God Be Pleased with Her): The First Faith and a Great Witness

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) returned home trembling. 'Cover me, cover me,' he said. Khadijah (may God be pleased with her) covered him. When his trembling had passed, he told her what had happened — and ended with a question filled with fear: 'I feared something would happen to me.'

The answer Khadijah (may God be pleased with her) gave at this moment is one of the most beautiful and most perceptive examples of companionship in history. She listened to her husband. She thought. And she said:

'No, by God, God will never put you to shame. You maintain ties of kinship, you speak the truth, you bear others' burdens, you earn for those who have nothing, you are hospitable to guests, and you endure hardship in the way of truth.'

This answer is the product of a profound understanding. In evaluating the revelation, Khadijah (may God be pleased with her) took her husband's character as her measure. She said: 'God protects you — because you are living this life.' This was not merely a consolation. This was the most solid road that leads to faith: character and integrity.

Khadijah (may God be pleased with her) then took the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) to her cousin Waraqah ibn Nawfal. Waraqah was a scholar who had embraced Christianity and knew Hebrew and the Gospel. He listened to what the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) told him and said: 'This is the *Namus* — the same as what God sent down to Moses. Would that I were young! Would that I were alive when your people drive you out!'

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) was astonished: 'Will my people drive me out?' Waraqah's answer is historic: 'Yes. No one has ever brought what you have brought without being met with enmity. If I live to see that day, I will support you with all my strength.'

A most important truth is concealed here: the first witness of the first revelation was Khadijah — a woman. And one of the first people to confirm the truth of the revelation was Waraqah — a man of the People of the Book. These two testimonies are not accidental. Revelation began upon the broadest possible ground of legitimacy.

The Faith of Khadijah: The First Muslim in History

Khadijah (may God be pleased with her) believed without hesitation the moment she heard the events from the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). She is the first Muslim in Islam. And this reality is profoundly significant:

the greatest transformation in the history of humanity began with a woman's faith.

Khadijah (may God be pleased with her) did not merely believe. She spent her wealth in the cause of Islam. She stood by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) in his most difficult days. During the years of the boycott she endured hunger alongside him. And in 619 CE she passed away, leaving a deep wound in the heart of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). That year is remembered as the Year of Sorrow — for Khadijah and Abu Talib both passed away in the same year.

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) remembered Khadijah for the rest of his life. Years later, Aisha (may God be pleased with her) once asked him about this. His answer was: 'When people denied me, she believed in me. When people abandoned me, she supported me. She aided me with her wealth. And God gave me children through her.'

This is one of the most beautiful descriptions of a spouse's worth ever spoken. And it came from the mouth of a prophet. On a land where the Jahiliyya buried female infants, the first herald of revelation was a woman.

The Cessation of Revelation: The Period of Fatra

After the first revelation, revelation ceased for a period. This period is called the fatra — the interval. This cessation was an extraordinarily difficult time for the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and shook him deeply. Why had revelation ceased? Had he made some error?

Scholars have offered various interpretations on the wisdom of this fatra period. The most widely held view is that this period was for the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) to prepare for the next revelation. A person must be prepared before bearing a great burden. And this

preparation also includes longing. Longing deepens attachment. Deepened attachment strengthens the relationship.

And when the second revelation came, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) was far more ready for it:

*"O you who covers himself with a garment —
arise and warn, and your Lord glorify, and
your clothing purify, and uncleanness
avoid."*

(Al-Muddaththir, 74:1–5)

This verse announces that the period of personal search has closed and the period of universal mission has begun. 'Arise and warn.' These two words summarise the next twenty-three years of the life of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him).

The Message of the First Revelation: A Civilisation in Five Verses

Let us return to the first five verses of Surah Al-Alaq and open, layer by layer, the depth these verses carry. For these five verses are not merely a beginning — they are a manifesto that contains the very essence of the whole of Islamic civilisation.

The first verse: 'Read! In the name of your Lord who created.' Two elements together: reading and in the name of the Lord. Knowledge is united with faith. Reason is bound to God. This is the first and clearest expression of the two-winged believer's understanding. Reading is commanded — but not ordinary reading: in the name of your Lord. That is to say, meaning is not severed from its source.

The second verse: 'He created man from a clinging substance.' Man was created from alaqā — a clinging substance, a blood clot. That is, from the weakest, most

elemental of beginnings. This reminder is the foundation of humility: 'Know where you came from.' Pride begins with forgetting one's origins. The first revelation is a reminder of origins.

The third verse: 'Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous.' The repeated command 'Read' is a sign of insistence. Seeking knowledge is not a one-time act — it is a continuous process. And this process rests on the generosity of God. That is to say, the pursuit of knowledge is supported by divine grace.

The fourth verse: 'Who taught by the pen.' The pen. Writing. Record. This verse defines the transmission and preservation of knowledge as a divine act. Teaching is the reflection in the human being of one of the attributes of God. For this reason, education is a sacred act in Islam.

The fifth verse: 'He taught man that which he knew not.' Man did not know. God taught. This is the proclamation that human knowledge is limited — and that this limit can be transcended through God's teaching. That is to say, both humility — 'I do not know' — and hope — 'I can learn' — were given simultaneously.

When these five verses are read together, the following picture emerges: a society that knows — but does not grow arrogant through knowing. A society that learns — but does not sever itself from God in the course of learning. Two-winged: using both reason and faith. And the first stone placed at the foundation of this picture is the word 'Read.'

Why 'Read'? Why Was This the First Command?

This question has occupied Islamic scholars across the centuries. Why did the first command of the first revelation become 'Read'? Why not 'believe'? Why not 'worship'? Why not 'perform the prayer'?

Imam al-Razi approaches this question as follows: because reading is the door to all the other commands. To believe, one must first understand. To worship, one must first know what one is doing. To distinguish right from wrong, one must first read — that is, understand, evaluate, interpret.

But the word 'read' must not be limited to its narrow meaning here. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) did not know how to read or write. This fact is of the utmost importance. The command 'Read' was given to someone who was illiterate. This shows that the command 'Read' is not exclusively about reading a text.

To 'read' means: read the universe. Read the human being. Read history. Read your own interior. Read the wisdom behind events. Read the signs in the order God has created. In this broad sense, 'reading' is in essence to contemplate, to understand, and to interpret.

And with this command the following message was given: Islam is not a blind submission. Islam is a life lived through understanding. To understand requires reading. To read requires questioning. To question requires courage. And courage is nourished by faith.

The First Addressee of Revelation: The Voice of a Single Human Being, Not a Crowd

There is another dimension of the first revelation: it descended first upon a single human being. Not upon a society, not upon an institution, not upon a group of leaders. Upon a single human being. This choice is not accidental.

For every great transformation begins first within a single person. To transform a society, a single person must first be transformed. And this person must carry a character capable of internalising and bearing the transformation.

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) had built this character across forty years — without being aware of it. Every honest transaction, every outstretched hand of help, every pain felt for the poor, every ascent to Hira — all of these were shaping the character needed to carry that great moment.

God first builds His prophet — then charges him with the mission. This is the most beautiful manifestation of divine pedagogy. And this manifestation tells us: great responsibilities are not assumed in an instant. Character is first built. And character takes shape in the course of life — in everyday choices.

The Effects of the First Revelation: The Shaking of a Society

When the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) began the mission following the first revelation, Mecca experienced a shock on two fronts. One front believed and was changed. The other refused and fought.

The first believers drew a most meaningful profile. Khadijah — a wealthy and respected woman. Ali — young and still a child. Abu Bakr — a merchant and respected figure. Zayd ibn Harithah — a freed slave. Bilal al-Habashi — an Abyssinian slave. This profile is not accidental. Islam reached people of different strata simultaneously. Rich and poor alike. Free and enslaved alike. Arab and non-Arab alike.

This diversity is the earliest manifestation of the understanding of equality that Islam offered. What determined a person's worth in society was no longer wealth, lineage, or freedom. Even in the first days of the mission this message was clear: the most honourable before God is the one most conscious of God.

The profile of the first opponents was equally clear: the leading figures of the Quraysh. Abu Jahl, Abu Lahab, Utbah ibn Rabi'ah. These were the guardians of Mecca's social and economic order. And this order was in direct conflict with the understanding of equality that Islam brought. Rejecting the prophet was not, for them, a matter of belief. It was a matter of interest.

Part Closing

What Changed That Night

What changed in the Cave of Hira that night was not merely the life of a single human being. That night, the direction of history changed. To humanity's great question — 'How should we live?' — a complete answer at last began to be given.

Those five verses were not merely five sentences. Those five verses were the foundation of a new civilisation — one in which knowledge and faith are united, in which reason serves faith and faith serves reason, in which a human being can both read and prostrate.

The manifesto of the two-winged civilisation was written in five short verses. And this manifesto descended, on the shoulders of the man who carried that night, along the dark path from Hira.

In the next part we will see the practical counterpart of this manifesto: how the command 'Read' transformed an entire society.

*"That night, a man descended from the cave, trembling.
And that trembling man stepped into a world in which
nothing would ever be the same again."*

Bibliography and References

The Holy Quran — Al-Alaq 96:1–5; Al-Muddaththir 74:1–5; Al Imran 3:96; Al-Baqarah 2:151

Al-Bukhari — Sahih al-Bukhari, Kitab al-Wahy [The Book of Revelation] (The hadith accounts of the first revelation; the narration of Aisha)

Muslim — Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Iman [The Book of Faith] (The process of revelation and the condition of the Prophet)

Ibn Hisham — Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah, Vol. I [The Life of the Prophet] (Chapters on Hira, the first revelation, and Khadijah)

Ibn Sa'd — Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra [The Great Classes] (Khadijah and the first Muslims)

Ibn Kathir — Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah [The Prophetic Biography] (A comprehensive analysis of the first revelation)

Fakhr al-Din al-Razi — Mafatih al-Ghayb [Keys of the Unseen] (Commentary on Surah Al-Alaq; the layers of meaning of the command 'Read')

Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır — Hak Dini Kur'an Dili [The True Religion: The Language of the Quran] (Commentary on Surahs Al-Alaq and Al-Muddaththir)

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi — Isharat al-I'jaz [Signs of Miraculousness] (The wisdom of the first command of the Quran)

Mustafa al-Siba'i — Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah [The Prophetic Biography] (The historical context of the first revelation)

Martin Lings — Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources (The scene at Hira and the first revelation)

Karen Armstrong — Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet (The psychological dimension of the first revelation)

Maxime Rodinson — Mohammed (A historical analysis of the revelation process)

Ibrahim Kalin — Ben, Öteki ve Ötesi [I, the Other, and Beyond] (The concept of 'reading' in Islamic epistemology)

CHAPTER IV — The Final Prophet and the Great Transformation

Part IV — The Command to Read

*"Read! In the name of your Lord who
created. He taught man that which he knew
not."*

(Al-Alaq, 96:1–5)

A Bridge from the Previous Part: The Command Descended — But What Did We Do?

In the previous part we told of that great night. The coming of Gabriel (peace be upon him), the trembling of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), the first faith of Khadijah (may God be pleased with her). And we opened the five verses that carried that night, layer by layer. We saw what the command 'Read' means, and why knowledge was united with faith.

But now there is a question before which we must pause. Perhaps the most unsettling question in this book. And to pass over it without asking would be to read the command 'Read' as nothing more than historical information.

The question is this: that command descended into a cave fourteen centuries ago. What have we done with it?

Asking this question requires courage. For the answer calls not for pride but for confrontation. And this confrontation will be carried out with open-heartedness in this part.

The Command Descended Upon Everyone: Not Only Upon a Prophet

The command 'Read' descended upon the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). This is true. But the revelation that began with this command was sent not for the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) alone, but for him to convey to all of humanity. And what was at the essence of this conveyance? Reading. Understanding. Thinking. Questioning.

The Quran does not give this command only once. In Al-Baqarah, in Al-Imran, in Al-An'am, in Yunus, in Al-Nahl — the same call is repeated again and again: 'Do you not think? Do you not reason? Do you not see?' These repetitions are a divine insistence. God desires human thought so intensely that He repeats this call in hundreds of different forms.

And to whom is this call addressed? Not to the prophets. To the community — to us. To you and me. Every person who reads this book and passes their eyes over these lines is the direct addressee of the command 'Read.'

*"Say: Are those who know equal to those
who do not know? Only those of
understanding will take heed."*

(Al-Zumar, 39:9)

Those who know are not equal to those who do not know. This is a divine declaration. But when we look today at the great majority of the Islamic world, we see a very deep wound opened in this declaration. For 'knowing' and 'memorising' have been confused with each other. 'Reading' and 'transmitting' have been taken to be the same thing. And 'repeating' instead of 'understanding' has been counted as virtue.

Memorisation: Reducing God's Greatest Command to the Smallest Thing

Let us be honest now. Today, when 'knowledge' is spoken of in the Islamic world, what does it most commonly mean? Reciting the Quran from memory. Holding the texts of hadiths like a tape recording in the mind. Repeating whatever the teacher said word for word. Continuing, unquestioned, the tradition seen from the father. All of these have their own value. Memorising the Quran is a great virtue. Knowing the hadith is valuable equipment. But these activities do not fulfil the entirety of the command 'Read.' For the command 'Read' encompasses understanding. And understanding requires asking questions, investigating context, connecting to the present, and deepening.

Consider a child. They begin reading the Quran at the age of four. But they recognise the letters, they pronounce the words — they have no knowledge of the meaning. They grow. At fourteen they complete the Quran in recitation. But they still have no knowledge of the meaning. At twenty-four they perform the five daily prayers. But they do not know what the surahs they recite are saying. At thirty-four they tell their children 'read the Quran.' The cycle continues.

Is this cycle worship? Yes. Is it valuable? Yes. But is it the full response to the command 'Read'? No. For God did not say 'repeat.' God said 'read.' And reading contains understanding.

"If We had sent down this Quran upon a mountain, you would have seen it humbled and coming apart from fear of God. And these examples We present to the people that perhaps they will give thought."

(Al-Hashr, 59:21)

'That they will give thought.' God sent down the Quran so that it might be thought about. Not so that sounds might be made. Not so that rhythms might be kept. Not so that it might be memorised but not understood. So that it might be thought about. This clear.

The Religion Inherited from the Father: The Most Dangerous Submission

In the great majority of Muslim societies today, religion is not learned — it is inherited. The child believes what the father believed. The community does what the neighbourhood does. The congregation repeats what the imam says. And this chain continues across the centuries.

But what is wrong with this? The following: within these chains, the truth of what is believed is never questioned. The question 'Is this true?' is not asked. 'What is the evidence for this?' is not said. 'Does the Quran say this, or is it tradition?' is not investigated. The chain is correct because it is a chain. And the chain is not broken — because breaking it is counted as disrespect.

We already know the Quranic counterpart of this picture. For God used it again and again when describing the peoples of the Jahiliyya:

*"And when it is said to them: Follow what
God has revealed, they say: Rather, we will
follow that upon which we found our fathers.
Even though their fathers understood
nothing and were not guided?"*

(Al-Baqarah, 2:170)

This verse was revealed regarding the peoples of the Jahiliyya. But today it is not possible to read this verse and pass it off as 'a criticism left in the past.' For the same pattern operates within Muslim societies today as well. 'My father used to do it this way.' 'Our imam used to say so.' 'In our neighbourhood it has always been understood

thus.' These sentences are the today's versions of Al-Baqarah 2:170.

And notice: the verse does not describe the imitation of forebears as 'disrespect' — it describes it as 'failure to reason.' 'Even though their fathers understood nothing?' God asks this question. For the issue is not respect — it is truth. Respect can be shown to a father; but the father's error is still an error. And knowing the wrong to be wrong is the first step.

Becoming a Flock: Consenting to Be Used

What happens to a society that does not read, submits without question, and does not go deep? It is used. This is an inevitable consequence. For knowledge is power. And the one who lacks knowledge is shaped in the hands of the one who possesses it.

The great majority of the Islamic world today is in precisely this position. Others determine world politics. Others write the rules of the economy. Others construct the language of the media. Others define which ideas are 'extremist,' which values are 'reactionary.' And Muslims, for the most part, either reactively oppose these definitions or silently accept them. Both are two different forms of submission.

Why? Because we do not read. Because we do not read, we cannot analyse. Because we cannot analyse, we do not develop an independent perspective. Because we have no independent perspective, we think with the framework of others. And a person who thinks with the framework of another is, in essence, thinking with the thoughts of the one who drew that framework.

This picture is not accidental. It is a result built, consciously or unconsciously. The most enduring legacy of colonialism is not physical occupation. It is mental

occupation. And mental occupation teaches not reading but memorisation — not questioning but submission.

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: 'Seek knowledge, even if it is in China.' This hadith makes travelling the world in pursuit of knowledge legitimate — even necessary. But today Muslims memorise this hadith while not going to China. That is to say, the command is reduced to a symbolic saying. Meaning does not translate into practice.

The Full Response to the Command 'Read': Five Dimensions

To understand the full response to the command 'Read,' it is necessary to approach this command in five dimensions. For this command contains a call far broader than merely reading books.

The first dimension: reading the Quran in order to understand it. This is the most foundational dimension. But reading in order to understand is different from reading in order to recite. To understand the Quran requires first learning its language, investigating its context, consulting the commentaries, and comparing the interpretations of scholars. This is not a task of a few minutes — it is a journey that lasts a lifetime.

The second dimension: reading one's history. The Quran is full of historical events. The accounts of the prophets, the rise and fall of societies, the lessons of civilisations. To read these is not merely to acquire information — it is to learn how to read the present. Ibn Khaldun said: 'One who does not know history cannot interpret the present.'

The third dimension: reading the human being. Reading one's own nafs. Reading the people around one. Reading the dynamics of society. This dimension encompasses the fields of psychology, sociology, and anthropology. And the

foundation of this reading is the Quran's view of the human being: 'O man, what has deceived you?'

The fourth dimension: reading the cosmos. The Quran commands again and again the observation of the universe — the heavens, the earth, living creatures, plants, water. All of these are *ayat* — signs — that God has created. That is to say, they are signs to be read. Science is the activity of reading these signs. And to consider this activity 'distant from religion' contradicts the spirit of the Quran.

The fifth dimension: reading the present. Understanding world politics. Analysing economic systems. Deciphering the language of media. Seeing power relations. This is a political reading. And without this reading, a Muslim cannot know where they stand in the world.

When these five dimensions operate together, the command 'Read' finds its full response. And the person who carries all five of these dimensions is the two-winged believer: the one who uses both faith and reason together.

Why Do We Not Read? An Honest Reckoning

To ask this question is uncomfortable. But it cannot be passed over without being asked. Why do Muslim societies not read? Why do they not investigate? Why do they not go deep?

The first reason: the education system. In the great majority of the Islamic world, the education system rewards memorisation rather than critical thinking. Knowing the correct answer is valued more than asking questions. And this system produces children. The children grow up — but their reflex to ask questions has been extinguished on the school bench.

The second reason: religious authority. In some circles, asking questions on religious matters is interpreted as 'disrespect' or 'doubt.' If the imam said it, it must be

correct. If the mufti issued a fatwa, it cannot be debated. This understanding may have begun in order to protect religious authority — but it ends by killing thought.

The third reason: cultural pressure. 'Who are you to be asking?' is one of the most widespread silencing tools in Muslim societies. To desist from asking questions in the name of smallness, ignorance, or humility is in reality to desist from truth.

The fourth reason: the comfort zone. Questioning brings discomfort. For the questioning person sometimes discovers that they have been believing something wrong. And changing a wrong belief feels like changing one's identity. This psychological cost prevents many people from questioning.

The fifth reason: the expectation of an outcome. 'What will come of reading?' This question is extraordinarily common among young people today. The connection between reading and finding employment has been severed. The relationship between going deep and gaining social status has been destroyed. And in this void, reading seems like a meaningless burden.

These five reasons feed one another. And the common consequence of all of them is this: a society that does not read becomes a society that cannot think. And a society that cannot think is governed by what others think.

The First Muslims and the Revolution of Reading

Now let us turn to history. And let us look at how the first Muslims responded to the command 'Read.' For this response is both a lesson and an inspiration for today.

At the Battle of Badr (624 CE), the Muslims won a great victory against the Meccans. The great majority of the Meccan prisoners of war knew how to read and write. The

Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) determined the ransom for these prisoners as follows: every prisoner who taught ten Muslim children to read and write would be set free. This decision is one of the earliest examples of 'educational reform' in history. To free prisoners of war not in exchange for money, but in exchange for knowledge. This understanding shows how the command 'Read' found practical expression in life.

The Companions memorised the Quran — but they also understood it. During his caliphate, Umar ibn al-Khattab (may God be pleased with him) consulted the views of the Companions when making administrative decisions. He was able to say 'I do not know.' He practised *ijtihad*. He developed interpretations in line with changing conditions. This was to read the Quran not as a frozen text but as a living guide.

The understanding of knowledge of the first generation was this: knowledge is for understanding. Understanding is for living it. Living it is for serving humanity. When this chain is broken, knowledge loses its meaning. And meaningless knowledge becomes memorisation.

From the House of Wisdom to the Present Day: A Map of the Decline

In the second and third centuries of the Islamic calendar, the Islamic world was living the command 'Read' in its broadest meaning. In Bayt al-Hikmah, works in Greek, Persian, and Syriac were being translated into Arabic. Not only the Islamic sciences, but medicine, mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, and geography — every field was being investigated. For in the view of these scholars, to understand the universe was to come to know God.

Ibn al-Haytham, a thousand years ago, systematised the scientific method. Observe. Formulate a hypothesis. Test with experiment. Record the result. This method is the

foundation of today's modern science. And the one who developed it was a Muslim — a Muslim who took the command 'Read' seriously.

Al-Biruni, in the eleventh century, examined India. He investigated its culture, its language, its science. He carried the mathematical accumulation of the Hindu tradition into the Islamic world. To understand another culture, he learned that culture's language. This is an example of unbiased investigation — of genuine reading.

Then what happened? Why did this brilliant period end? Because the command 'Read' was over time transformed into the command 'repeat.' The gate of *ijtihad* closed. The books of the great scholars came to be seen not as a starting point to be surpassed but as an unsurpassable final point. And with this understanding, the Islamic world slowly ceased to read.

The West, at precisely that moment, began to read. Europeans returning from the Crusades carried the accumulated learning of Islamic civilisation into their own libraries. The commentaries of Ibn Rushd were translated into Latin. Ibn Sina's medical work became a textbook in European universities. The knowledge accumulated by the Islamic world prepared the Renaissance of the West. And Muslims, watching others reap the fruit of knowledge they themselves had produced, were left in astonishment.

Today: Standing Before the Mirror

When one looks today at world rankings for scientific publication output, the combined scientific production of 1.5 billion Muslims falls behind that of some countries with far smaller populations. When one looks at the list of Nobel Prize-winning scientists, the share of Muslims is close to negligible.

This picture does not stem from any intellectual deficiency in Muslims. History has proven again and again how productive Muslims are capable of being. This picture is a systemic problem. And at the core of that system lies the collapse of a reading culture.

Today, in a Muslim household, what is a child typically taught? Most often: perform the prayer. Keep the fast. Stay away from bad companions. Respect your elders. All of these are valuable. But is the following also taught: ask. Investigate. Read in order to understand. Strive to find the truth. Question what you know. Most often, no. And this deficiency accumulates across generations to produce the picture we see today.

If a society does not tell its children 'ask' — those children, when they grow up, become adults who 'do not ask.' Adults who do not ask form societies that 'submit.' And societies that submit are willing to be governed. In history and today, this truth does not change.

The Call of the Command 'Read' to the Present Day: Three Urgent Steps

Before this picture, there is no need to stand in helplessness. For if the problem has been identified, solution is also possible. And the command 'Read' gives the name of both the problem and the solution. From this command today, three urgent steps can be drawn.

The first step: reading the Quran in order to understand it. This is first and foremost a personal decision. A person who wishes to understand the Quran reads a translation with commentary. They read tafsir. They investigate why surahs were revealed. They learn Arabic, or at the very least grasp the foundational concepts. This journey takes a lifetime. But the first step is the decision.

The second step: reading history, politics, and the world. Today's Muslim must understand not only the religious sciences, but world history, economics, politics, and technology. For these fields are today determining the destiny of humanity. The Muslim who remains ignorant of these fields lacks the right to speak in them. And one without a voice in them is simply governed.

The third step: teaching children to ask questions. This is perhaps the most long-term but the most enduring step. Changing the mentality of a generation begins with allowing that generation's children to ask questions. A parent who does not belittle the question 'Why?', who can say 'I don't know, let us look together' — is living the command 'Read' in its most practical form.

Part Closing

The Command 'Read' Is Still Waiting

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) descended from Hira that night. And the command he carried was directed not only to him but to all of humanity. This command has been spoken for fourteen centuries. It is repeated countless times. It appears in every Friday sermon, every religious lesson, every commentary.

Yet it remains unanswered.

For hearing the command 'Read' is one thing — fulfilling it is another. Hearing it is enough for the ear. Fulfilling it changes life. And changing life requires stepping out of the comfort zone.

Every person reading this book is, at this moment, the addressee of this command. The command 'Read' also

descended upon you. It is also being said to you. And before this command there are two choices: either you hear it and pass on. Or you hear it and begin.

To begin requires no great leap. One question is enough. The question 'Why?' And to ask that question is to step into the greatest revolution in history.

"God's first command was 'Read.' Humanity's first error was to hear it — but not to understand. This error continues today."

Bibliography and References

The Holy Quran — Al-Alaq 96:1–5; Al-Zumar 39:9; Al-Baqarah 2:170; Al-Hashr 59:21; Yunus 10:100; Al-Nahl 16:43; Al-Mujadilah 58:11

Al-Bukhari — Sahih al-Bukhari (The hadith on the prisoners of Badr and the literacy ransom)

Ibn Hisham — Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah [The Life of the Prophet] (The understanding of knowledge among the first Muslims)

Ibn Abd al-Barr — Jami' Bayan al-'Ilm wa Fadlih [A Comprehensive Account of Knowledge and Its Virtue] (The importance of knowledge and its early applications)

Imam al-Ghazali — Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din, Vol. I [The Revival of the Religious Sciences] (The relationship between knowledge, action, and understanding)

Ibn Khaldun — Muqaddimah [Prolegomena] (The decline of Islamic civilisation and the state of learning)

Ibn al-Haytham — Kitab al-Manazir [Book of Optics] (The Islamic foundations of the scientific method)

Al-Biruni — Kitab al-Hind [The Book of India] (An example of unbiased inquiry and comparative reading)

Fakhr al-Din al-Razi — Mafatih al-Ghayb [Keys of the Unseen] (Commentary on Surah Al-Alaq; the layers of meaning of the command 'Read')

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi — Munazarat [Discussions] (A critique of ignorance in the Islamic world)

Sayyid Qutb — Fi Zilal al-Quran [In the Shade of the Quran] (The relationship between Jahiliyya and reading culture)

Ali Shariati — On the Sociology of Islam (The intellectual condition of Muslim societies)

Mustafa İslamoğlu — Kur'an'ı Anlamak [Understanding the Quran] (The culture and method of reading the Quran)

Ibrahim Kalin — Ben, Öteki ve Ötesi [I, the Other, and Beyond] (Islamic epistemology and the modern world)

George Makdisi — The Rise of Colleges (The transformation of educational institutions in Islam)

Ziauddin Sardar — Islam, Postmodernism and Other Futures (Muslim confrontation with the knowledge crisis)

CHAPTER IV — The Final Prophet and the Great Transformation

Part V — The Medina Model

"The believers are but brothers."

(Al-Hujurat, 49:10)

A Bridge from the Previous Part: How Is a Reading Society Built?

In the previous part we saw that the command ‘Read’ is not only an individual but a social summons. We examined how fragile a person who does not investigate, does not question, and does not go deep becomes. And we recalled that every great transformation begins first within a single human being.

But what happens when reading individuals come together? How is a society built from thinking people? And how do the institutions, the law, the economy, and the defence of that society take shape?

The most concrete, most enduring, and historically rare answer to these questions was given in Medina. The

process that began in 622 CE with the Hijra — the migration of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) from Mecca to Medina — was not merely an emigration. It was the beginning of the most revolutionary social construction project in the history of humanity.

This part was written to tell of that construction. And throughout this narrative we will show, again and again, a single truth: Islam, in the seventh century, established the most modern, most just, and most trustworthy social order the world had seen. And this order was built not upon the standards of that age, but upon principles that would never grow old in any age.

The Hijra: Not a Flight, but a Decision to Build

The word hijra in Arabic means ‘to leave.’ But to read the journey of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) from Mecca to Medina as a mere act of leaving prevents one from seeing the true magnitude of this event.

The Hijra was a decision to build. What could not be built in Mecca would be built in Medina. What was oppressed in Mecca would be liberated in Medina. What remained a seed in Mecca would become a tree in Medina.

This decision was taken by the command of God. And the timing of this command carries profound meaning. For thirteen years, the mission was carried out in Mecca with patience, under oppression. These thirteen years were not only suffering. They were a construction of character. The identity of the first Muslims was tempered under this pressure. They were not carrying a religion easily acquired — they carried a truth earned at great cost.

And when these people of solid character arrived in Medina, the real construction began.

The Structure of Medina: A City Before the Hijra

Before the arrival of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), Medina was in the grip of deep internal conflict. Two great Arab tribes lived in the city: the Aws and the Khazraj. These two tribes had waged bloody confrontations against each other for many long years. These conflicts had torn apart the social fabric of the city and utterly destroyed any atmosphere of trust.

Three major Jewish tribes also lived in the same city: the Qaynuqa, the Nadir, and the Qurayza. These tribes were economically powerful and generally played the rival Arab tribes against each other. There was no central authority in the city, no shared law, no reliable ground for agreement.

Looking at this picture from the outside, one might say: it is impossible to build unity in this city. Centuries of blood feuds, inter-tribal conflicts of interest, and the tensions produced by different religious identities living side by side stand like an insurmountable wall before any social project.

And it was into this city that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) came. And he demolished this wall.

The Mosque: Not a Place of Worship but a Centre of Civilisation

When the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) arrived in Medina, the first thing he did was to build a mosque. This carries a profound meaning. For that mosque was not merely a place in which prayers were performed.

The Prophet's Mosque was at the same time: a court of law, where disputes were resolved; a council, where social decisions were taken; a school, where the Ahl al-Suffah — the Companions who stayed in the mosque to learn — were

educated; a guesthouse, where travellers and those in need were sheltered; a field hospital, where the wounded were treated during times of war; and a diplomatic centre, where envoys were received.

This multi-functionality is not accidental. It is the most concrete manifestation of Islam's refusal to separate worship from life. Servitude to God was not confined to particular hours and particular places. The whole of life was the domain of servitude. And the multi-functional structure of the mosque was the architectural expression of this understanding.

In today's world, the view that 'religion must withdraw from the public sphere' is extremely widespread. The Medina Model stands at the precise opposite of this view. And history shows that when religion withdraws from life, life loses its meaning. And a life without meaning ultimately produces violence, selfishness, and decay.

The Constitution of Medina: The First Written Constitution in History

Shortly after arriving in Medina, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) concluded a comprehensive agreement with all the groups in the city. Islamic historians refer to this document as the Sahifah or the Charter of Medina. Western scholars describe it as 'the world's first written constitution.'

This document is revolutionary in several respects.

The first revolutionary feature: pluralism. The agreement brought together under a single political roof not only Muslims but the Jewish tribes, the Arab tribes, and different religious identities. The rights of each group were guaranteed. Each group retained autonomy in its internal affairs. But a shared obligation of common defence against external threats was assumed.

The second revolutionary feature: the rule of law. The agreement rested not on personal will but on written rules. The understanding that 'the strong are right' was replaced by the understanding that 'law is applied equally to all.' This was the complete reversal of the tribal law of the Jahiliyya.

The third revolutionary feature: universal security. One of the most striking clauses of the agreement was this: whoever takes refuge in Medina, from whatever religion, is under guarantee. This was a guarantee that existed nowhere in the world in the seventh century.

*"God does not forbid you from being
righteous and acting justly towards those
who have not fought you because of your
religion and have not driven you out of your
homes."*

(Al-Mumtahanah, 60:8)

This verse encapsulates the spirit of the Constitution of Medina. Justice and goodness toward people of different beliefs and identities is an obligation of Islam. This is not tolerance — it is the recognition of rights. Tolerance says 'I accept you with forbearance.' The recognition of rights says 'your existence is legitimate and worthy of protection.'

When the Constitution of Medina is evaluated through the eyes of today, the extraordinary advancement of this document in the seventh century becomes clear. Similar constitutional documents appeared in Europe only in the thirteenth century — Magna Carta, 1215. And even those documents did not reach the comprehensiveness of the Constitution of Medina.

The Muhajirun and the Ansar: The Economic Model of Brotherhood

The Muslims who had emigrated to Medina — the Muhajirun — had for the most part left everything behind. Their homes, their property, their trading connections had remained in Mecca. They were empty-handed, compelled to start from nothing.

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) resolved this problem with the most beautiful model of social solidarity in history: the Mu'akhat — the Brotherhood.

Every Muhajir was declared a brother of one of the Ansar — the Muslims of Medina. This brotherhood was not an abstract expression of affection. It carried concrete economic obligations. The Ansari brother shared his home. He provided for the emigrant's livelihood. He built trade together with him. And this sharing came not from compulsion but from willing generosity.

The conduct of the Ansar was recorded in the Quran in letters of gold:

*"And those who had settled in the home and
had adopted faith before them love those
who emigrated to them and find not any
want in their breasts of what the emigrants
were given but give preference over
themselves, even though they are in
privation."*

(Al-Hashr, 59:9)

'Even though they are in privation.' This sentence describes the summit of humility and generosity. And this summit was nourished not by an ideology but by faith. Believing gave rise to sharing. Sharing built trust. And trust became the most solid foundation of society.

This model is the most powerful historical example of what today's economic theorists call 'social capital' — the body of social relationships built upon trust, solidarity,

and mutual responsibility. And Medina built this capital from nothing in the space of a few years.

Women in Medina: The Concrete Face of the Revolution

One of the most striking dimensions of the Medina Model is the fundamental change brought to the place of women in society. In a community where female infants were buried in the age of the Jahiliyya, women in Medina were endowed with rights rare in history.

The first: the right of inheritance. Islam gave women the right of inheritance. This was a provision that existed nowhere in the world at that time. In Rome, in Greece, in China, and in the Indian tradition, women either received no inheritance at all or received an extremely limited share. Islam set a clear inheritance share and placed it under legal guarantee.

The second: the mahr. It was no longer a bride price. The mahr was a guarantee belonging directly to the woman. It was given not to her father, not to her tribe, but to the woman herself — and remained under her own disposal.

The third: the right to education. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) made special arrangements for women to learn. Aisha (may God be pleased with her) became one of the greatest scholars of her age. The women among the Companions asked questions directly of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), received legal opinions from him, and these opinions were recorded.

The fourth: the right to trade. Khadijah (may God be pleased with her) had engaged in trade even before Islam. But Islam placed this right within a legal framework and guaranteed it to all women. A woman could manage what she earned herself.

The fifth: the right to a voice in marriage and divorce. Forced marriage was prohibited. The woman's consent became a condition of marriage. In the seventh century, this was a provision impossible to imagine in the great majority of the world.

"And due to the wives is similar to what is expected of them, according to what is reasonable."

(Al-Baqarah, 2:228)

This verse was revealed in the seventh century. Reciprocal rights. Reciprocal responsibilities. Not one-sided. This understanding existed in no legal system anywhere in the world at that time. Islam was the first to bring it.

Law in Medina: The Sovereignty of Justice, Not of the Powerful

Perhaps the most revolutionary dimension of the Medina Model is its understanding of law. In the Jahiliyya, whoever was most powerful was right. In Medina, law was made independent of power.

The most striking example of this is found in a decision concerning the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) himself. In a case of theft, it was sought to intercede on behalf of the accused on the grounds that they came from a noble tribe. The Prophet's response was entered into history:

"By God, if Fatimah the daughter of Muhammad were to steal, I would cut off her hand."

(Al-Bukhari, Hudud, 14)

This statement is not merely the expression of a legal principle. It is the proclamation of the cornerstone of civilisation: everyone is equal before the law. The prophet's daughter, the slave, the noble, the foreigner —

all equal. This equality was a revolutionary stance in the seventh-century world. And it is a stance that even today has not been fully realised in many societies.

The law in Medina was applied not only to Muslims but equally to everyone living in the city. In a dispute between a Jew and a Muslim, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) ruled in favour of the Jew — because the evidence was on the Jewish side. This is an example of justice unmatched anywhere in the world in the seventh century.

The Economy of Medina: An Order Without Exploitation

The economic dimension of the Medina Model is also extraordinarily striking. In the Jahiliyya, usury had become the basic engine of the economy. The wealthy lent money at interest, making the poor steadily poorer, and this cycle could not be broken. Islam prohibited usury absolutely:

"God has permitted trade and has forbidden usury."

(Al-Baqarah, 2:275)

This prohibition is not merely a religious rule. It is the foundation of economic justice. Usury systematically ensures that those who accumulate capital grow wealthier still, while the poor fall into ever-deeper debt. Without breaking this cycle, genuine economic justice cannot be established.

In addition, the zakat system was established. Zakat is not merely a form of charity — it is a legal obligation. Everyone possessing a certain level of wealth is required to transfer a defined proportion each year to those in need in the community. This is a mechanism that both reduces poverty and balances the accumulation of wealth.

Market regulation was also introduced in Medina. Profiteering, hoarding, and fraud were prohibited. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) inspected the market himself. When he saw a merchant concealing wet grain beneath dry, he issued a warning and said: ‘One who deceives us is not of us.’ This is a consumer protection policy applied by the state in the seventh century.

The Environment in Medina: Respect for Creation

One of the dimensions of the Medina Model that is least discussed today — yet most relevant — is its understanding of the environment. During the Medina period, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) introduced regulations aimed at protecting both the surroundings of the city and its natural resources.

Certain areas around Medina were declared hima — protected zones. In these areas, trees could not be felled and hunting could not be carried out. This is among the earliest known examples of environmental protection in history.

Water sources were placed under protection. The overburdening of animals was prohibited. The felling of trees was discouraged; and to the planting of trees great value was attributed:

"If a Muslim plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a person, or an animal eats from it, it is regarded as a charitable gift from him."

(Al-Bukhari, Mazalim, 30)

Every tree planted, a charitable act. This understanding fundamentally transforms the relationship with nature. Nature is not a resource to be exploited — it is a value entrusted to us and requiring protection. This

understanding is the expression, fourteen centuries ago, of the concept of 'sustainability' that the West came to discover at the close of the twentieth century.

The Modernity of Medina: The Twenty-First Century in the Seventh

Now let us step back and look at the whole picture. And let us ask: where does the order established by the Medina Model stand when assessed by today's standards?

Written constitution: the Constitution of Medina, 622 CE. Europe's first constitutional document, Magna Carta: 1215. The difference: 593 years.

Religious pluralism and minority rights: the Constitution of Medina provided legal guarantee to all religions. In Europe, religious freedom was placed on legal footing with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. The difference: 1,026 years.

Women's right of inheritance: Islam, in the seventh century. In France, women gained the right to own property only in 1938, and full inheritance rights only in the twentieth century. The difference: thirteen centuries.

Equality before the law: Medina, 622 CE. In the West, the principle that 'everyone is equal before the law' was established through the revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The difference: twelve centuries.

Consumer protection and market regulation: the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) conducted market inspections in the seventh century. Modern consumer protection legislation developed in the twentieth century.

This comparison is made not to present Islam as superior, but for the correct reading of history. For without knowing these facts, it is not possible to understand why Islamic civilisation rose. And without understanding the reasons

for the rise, the reasons for the decline cannot be grasped either.

The Medina Model was not modern. The Medina Model was the source of modernity. The modern world was nourished from this source, directly or indirectly. The science and understanding of law transmitted through Andalusia prepared the ground for the European Renaissance. This fact is today accepted by a large part of Western academia.

The Atmosphere of Trust in Medina: The Most Precious Capital

The most foundational element underlying all these institutional successes of the Medina Model is trust. Without trust, no institution can function. And Medina, in a short time, built the most trustworthy social environment in the world.

Where did this trust come from? What was its source?

The first: fidelity to one's word. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) kept every promise he gave. He implemented to the letter even the agreements he made with his enemies. The Treaty of Hudaibiyyah contained clauses that appeared disadvantageous to the Muslims on the surface. But the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) kept his word. And this fidelity was transformed, in time, into the greatest strategic advantage.

The second: transparency. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) explained his decisions. He shared his reasons. He took the views of the Companions. Consultation — meshveret — was turned into an institutional practice:

"And consult them in the matter."

(Al Imran, 3:159)

This command is directed at the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). And he applied it without exception. Before the Battle of Uhud, although his own view was different, he followed the decision of the majority of the Companions. This is the greatest sign of leadership: to take the collective mind as the basis, not one's own will.

The third: accountability. Umar ibn al-Khattab (may God be pleased with him), when he later became caliph, was once asked: 'Who will hold you to account?' His answer was entered into history: 'This people.' And indeed, in the tradition of Medina, leaders could be held to account. When an unjust action was taken, a Companion could stand and object. This objection was not disrespect — it was the guarantee that the system was working.

The Voice Rising from Medina: The Glad Tidings of a Civilisation

When the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) came from Mecca to Medina, he had at his side neither a great army nor immense wealth. He had with him a few hundred people who had preserved their faith despite oppression and cruelty. And with these people, the seeds of history's greatest civilisation were sown.

What happened within ten years? The whole of Arabia entered Islam. Wars between tribes that had lasted for centuries came to a halt. Slaves were given their freedom. Rights were recognised for women. Usury was prohibited. Justice was placed on a legal foundation. And the civilisation that rose upon this foundation became, in a short time, one of the greatest centres of power in the world.

This transformation cannot be explained by the sword. The sword conquers geography — but does not conquer hearts. The secret of the Medina Model's conquest of hearts lay elsewhere: in justice, trust, and honour.

When people see a just order, they turn toward it. They flourish in an environment that inspires trust. When they feel that their honour is being protected, they belong. Medina offered all three of these things together. And these three things are a treasure rarely found in the world.

Part Closing

The Model Lived — But Where Are We?

The Medina Model is not an experimental project valid only for the ten years in which the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) lived. This model is built upon universal principles. And universal principles can take different forms according to time and place — but their essence does not change.

But as a community that knows this model and knows this history, where are we? Is there justice among us? Is there trust? Is there honour? Is there accountability? Are women being given their rights? Is the law applied equally to the powerful and the weak?

These questions are not accusations. These questions are the inevitable consequence of genuinely understanding the Medina Model. For to understand that model is not merely to know history. To understand that model is to hold a mirror up to the present.

And this mirror should disturb us. Disturbance is the beginning of change. And change is the first step in the rising of a civilisation back to its feet.

In the next part, we will examine what kind of civilisation rose on the foundation that Medina established: the Foundations of Islamic Civilisation. For Medina was a beginning. And the building that rose from that

beginning is one of the most magnificent structures in the history of humanity.

"Medina was not a city. Medina was an idea. And that idea is still alive."

Bibliography and References

The Holy Quran — Al-Hujurat 49:10; Al-Hashr 59:9; Al-Mumtahanah 60:8; Al-Baqarah 2:228, 2:275; Al Imran 3:159

Al-Bukhari — Sahih al-Bukhari, Hudud 14 (The Prophet's declaration of equality before the law)

Al-Bukhari — Sahih al-Bukhari, Mazalim 30 (The hadith on planting trees and charitable acts)

Ibn Hisham — Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah, Vol. II [The Life of the Prophet] (The Medina period; the text of the Constitution of Medina)

Ibn Sa'd — Al-Tabaqat al-Kubra [The Great Classes] (The Brotherhood of the Muhajirun and Ansar)

Ibn Kathir — Al-Bidaya wa al-Nihaya [The Beginning and the End] (The construction of Medina and the early arrangements)

Hamidullah, Muhammad — The Prophet of Islam (A comprehensive analysis of the Constitution of Medina)

Hamidullah, Muhammad — Muslim Conduct of State (The constitutional structure of Medina)

Fakhr al-Din al-Razi — Mafatih al-Ghayb [Keys of the Unseen] (Commentaries on Al-Baqarah 275 and Al-Hashr 59)

Elmalili Hamdi Yazir — Hak Dini Kuran Dili [The True Religion: The Language of the Quran] (Commentary on the Medina-period verses)

W. Montgomery Watt — Muhammad at Medina (An academic analysis of the Medina period)

Karen Armstrong — Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet (The modernity of the Medina Model)

Marshall Hodgson — The Venture of Islam, Vol. I (The civilisational importance of Medina)

Bernard Lewis — The Arabs in History (The Medina period and its influence on the Arab world)

Mustafa al-Siba'i — Al-Mar'ah bayna al-Fiqh wa al-Qanun [Woman Between Jurisprudence and Law] (A comparative view of the rights Islam brought to women)
Ibrahim Kalin — Ben, Oteki ve Otesi [I, the Other, and Beyond] (The pluralistic understanding of the Medina Model)

CHAPTER IV — The Final Prophet and the Great Transformation

Part VI — The Foundations of Islamic Civilisation

*"You are the best nation produced for
mankind."*

(Al Imran, 3:110)

A Bridge from the Previous Part: From Foundation to Building

In the previous part we saw the foundation laid by the Medina Model: a written constitution, equality before the law, the rights of women, economic justice, environmental protection — all realised in the seventh century, centuries ahead of the rest of humanity.

Now we will see the building that rose upon that foundation. For Medina was a beginning. The civilisation born from that beginning reached its zenith within a few generations. And this zenith constitutes one of the most luminous pages in the history of humanity.

But this part will not speak only of that zenith. This part will also ask the heaviest question: how did we come from that zenith to this decline? A civilisation that led humanity in medicine, astronomy, mathematics, and philosophy — how has it produced the picture we see today in places like Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Yemen? How did this geography, which was once the light of the world, cease to

be a place that people looked to with curiosity about the morality of Islam, wondering whether to become Muslim?

This question is painful. But without asking it, we cannot find the answer.

The Foundations of Civilisation: Four Principal Pillars

Islamic civilisation rose upon four foundational pillars. These pillars were not independent of one another — they formed a whole that fed one another and strengthened one another. And all four pillars drew their nourishment from the foundation the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) laid in Medina.

The first pillar: tawhid. That is, a world-view grounded in the oneness of God. This is not merely a theological principle — it is a paradigm that shapes the whole of civilisation. Tawhid renders the universe coherent, comprehensible, and meaningful. If the universe is the work of a single divine will, then there is order in the universe. If there is order, that order can be investigated. If it can be investigated, science is possible. This logic lies at the foundation of Islamic science.

The second pillar: knowledge. An understanding that counts learning as an act of worship, regards investigation as obligatory, and believes that pursuing knowledge brings one closer to God. This understanding legitimised the production of knowledge both religiously and worldly. Muslim scholars both performed the prayer and built the telescope. They both memorised the Quran and wrote works of anatomy. They saw this duality not as contradiction but as wholeness.

The third pillar: justice. The understanding of law established in the Medina Model was preserved as civilisation expanded. Justice was not a discourse — it was

an institutional practice. The qadi courts, the waqf system, the hisba — market regulation — all were mechanisms that carried justice into everyday life.

The fourth pillar: universality. Islamic civilisation was not Arab civilisation. It was a universal project in which people from different corners of the world came together around the same values. Al-Biruni from Iran, al-Farabi from Central Asia, Ibn Sina from Persia, Ibn Rushd from Andalusia — different languages, different cultures, different geographies. Yet all bearers of the same civilisation. This universality was one of the greatest sources of the civilisation's power.

The House of Wisdom: The World's Mind Under One Roof

The House of Wisdom — Bayt al-Hikmah — founded during the reign of Caliph Harun al-Rashid and reaching its zenith under Caliph al-Ma'mun, is the most emblematic institution of Islamic civilisation. Located at the heart of Baghdad, this centre was the greatest intellectual workshop of its age.

What was done in Bayt al-Hikmah? Works in Greek, Persian, Syriac, and Sanskrit were translated into Arabic. The logic of Aristotle, the philosophy of Plato, the mathematics of Pythagoras, the geometry of Euclid, the medicine of Hippocrates — all of these were preserved and developed by Muslim thinkers through translation.

But Bayt al-Hikmah was not merely a translation centre. Original research was also conducted here. Al-Khwarizmi founded algebra. Ibn al-Haytham developed the theory of optics. Al-Biruni calculated the circumference of the earth. These calculations would, centuries later, determine the routes of European navigators.

The most striking feature of Bayt al-Hikmah was its pluralism. Here, Muslims, Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians worked together. The shared aim was the pursuit of truth. And this shared pursuit was made possible by the bringing together of minds from different backgrounds.

This picture was the most concrete institutional expression of the two-winged civilisation. Faith did not block the path of investigation. Investigation did not threaten faith. Both served the same purpose — truth — under the same roof.

The Faces of the Golden Age: A Gallery of Two-Winged Believers

To make the zenith of this civilisation concrete, one must look at those who carried it. For civilisations are built not with abstract concepts but with real human beings. And when one looks at the profiles of these individuals, a common feature is visible in all of them: they were two-winged.

Ibn Sina (980–1037): He is known as the Aristotle of medicine. His *Al-Qanun fi al-Tibb* was read as a textbook in European medical faculties until the seventeenth century. He also wrote works in philosophy, astronomy, chemistry, and music. But Ibn Sina was at the same time a man of deep faith. He would rise for the night prayer and would pray before tackling difficult problems. He did not see knowledge and faith as two separate compartments of his life — he lived them as two complementary dimensions.

Ibn al-Haytham (965–1040): He is the founder of modern optics. He proved experimentally that light emanates from objects, not from the eye. He described the camera obscura. He is the first figure to use the scientific method — observation, hypothesis, experiment, verification — in a

systematic manner. But Ibn al-Haytham was at the same time a scholar who knew the Quran by heart and determined prayer times through astronomical calculation. Science and religion were, for him, two windows onto the same truth.

Al-Biruni (973–1048): He is perhaps the least known historically yet one of the greatest figures. He calculated the circumference of the earth approximately a thousand years ago with an accuracy extraordinarily close to today's value. He examined India, learned Sanskrit, and wrote comprehensive works that introduced Indian science to the Islamic world. He conveyed different cultures and different religions with great impartiality. This intellectual honesty came from his faith: truth belongs to God; wherever it may be found, one does not hesitate to receive it.

Al-Khwarizmi (780–850): He is the founder of algebra. The word 'algorithm' derives from the Latin pronunciation of his name. His work *Al-Kitab al-mukhtasar fi hisab al-jabr wal-muqabala* [The Compendious Book on Calculation by Completion and Balancing] transformed mathematics at its roots. Every computer you use today, every encrypted message, every financial model, is built upon the algebraic foundations laid by al-Khwarizmi. He was at the same time a person who allocated his hours regularly to worship and who began his scholarship in the name of God.

Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406): He is recognised as the founder of sociology. With his *Muqaddimah*, he showed that history is not merely a sequence of events but that societies move within certain patterns and cycles. His theory of *asabiyyah* — social cohesion — analyses the role of the social bond in the rise and fall of civilisations. It continues to be a foundational reference in the literature of sociology and political science to this day.

Each of these figures was not a specialist in a single field alone. Ibn Sina had philosophical works; al-Biruni had astronomical studies. Al-Khwarizmi had mathematical theories; Ibn Khaldun had a philosophy of history. This breadth was not accidental. It was the natural consequence of the two-winged mind: faith sanctifies curiosity. Curiosity removes limits.

Andalusia: The Light in Which the West Awakened

One of the most striking manifestations of the zenith of Islamic civilisation is Andalusia. This civilisation, which existed on the territory of present-day Spain and Portugal from 711 CE for approximately eight hundred years, produced the brightest light in the world during the period when Europe was living through what it would later call its ‘dark ages.’

Cordoba in the tenth century was the largest city in Europe. Its population approached half a million. While people in the rest of Europe lived on earthen floors, the streets of Cordoba were lit by night. While the major cities of Europe had no sewage systems, Cordoba had a sophisticated water network.

But the true significance of Andalusia was not physical comfort. Andalusia was a centre of knowledge transmission. Translations from Arabic into Latin carried the knowledge produced by the Islamic world to Europe. Aristotle, Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, al-Khwarizmi — Europeans first came to know these figures through Andalusia. And this acquaintance lit the fuse of the European Renaissance.

The Western historian Thomas Arnold writes: ‘The rebirth of medieval Europe was made possible to a great degree by what had been learned from the Muslims.’ This is not a compliment — it is history’s own assessment.

Andalusia was also the zenith of a model of coexistence. Muslims, Christians, and Jews produced together in the fields of art, science, and trade. This joint production entered history as ‘convivencia’ — living together. And this model was the large-scale historical manifestation of the Constitution of Medina.

The Moral Foundation of Civilisation: Why Did They Rise?

To understand why this civilisation rose so rapidly, one must look at the everyday morality of Islamic societies in that era. For civilisations are composed not of institutions but of people. And the morality these people lived is the true reason for this ascent.

Fidelity to one’s word was a foundational virtue of that era. To trade with a Muslim merchant was a guarantee. For he kept his word. This trust made Muslim merchants the backbone of a trade network stretching from China to Spain. The Silk Road operated largely on the trustworthiness of Muslim traders.

Guardianship of what was entrusted to one was the bedrock of social norms. When something was entrusted to a person, it was guarded at the cost of one’s life. This understanding made possible the construction of complex partnership structures, long-term investments, and trust-based economic relationships.

Respect for knowledge was the determinant of social status. When a great scholar arrived in a city, the city’s leading figures would receive him. For a student to travel on foot for months in pursuit of learning was regarded as heroism. This culture placed the production and transmission of knowledge at the centre of society.

The sense of justice had become, beyond an individual virtue, a social reflex. When the strong oppressed the

weak, it was met not only with a legal but with a social sanction. Society would not tolerate it.

This moral foundation was the true bearer of civilisation. Upon this foundation, institutions rose. From this foundation, science took root. From this foundation, art was nourished. And the dissolution of this foundation was the true beginning of the decline of civilisation.

The Rupture: Where Did It Begin?

But this brilliant picture began, at a certain point, to change. This change was not sudden. It was a slow, insidious, internal dissolution. And this dissolution began from within, before any external assault came.

The first rupture: separating knowledge from politics. As the Abbasid dynasty consolidated its power, knowledge came increasingly under the control of political authority. Politics began to decide which views were legitimate. Scholars could work only within the limits approved by those in power. This boundary eroded the independence of scholarship.

The second rupture: the narrowing of the gate of *ijtihad*. The understanding that ‘the great scholars have already said everything; all that remains for us is to imitate them’ gained ground. This view appeared, on its surface, to express humility. But at its core it was the freezing of thought. And frozen thought cannot produce answers for a changing world.

The third rupture: the Mongol Trauma of 1258. The burning of Baghdad, the destruction of centuries of accumulated scholarly treasure, gave rise in the Islamic world to a deep defensive reflex. The impulse to ‘protect what we have’ overtook the impulse to ‘produce something new.’ And the protective instinct gradually began to perceive change as a threat.

The fourth rupture: the dissolution of the moral foundation. Slow but deep. Fidelity to one's word diminished. Betrayal of trust increased. Respect for knowledge was transformed into the instrumentalisation of knowledge. The sense of justice began to side with the powerful. This dissolution brought down the institutions along with it. For institutions are composed of people. And when the morality of people dissolves, the institutional framework remains — but its substance is lost.

From Where to Where: A Painful Reckoning

Now it is necessary to ask that question. Plainly. Without flinching.

Once, Ibn Sina wrote medicine; today in some Muslim societies people seek the cure for illness from sorcerers. Once, al-Khwarizmi founded algebra; today in some regions girls are not sent to school. Once, al-Biruni examined different civilisations with curiosity; today in some geographies a journalist arriving from another country is murdered by beheading. Once, in Andalusia, Muslims, Christians, and Jews produced science together; today in some communities a person of another religion is not even regarded as a human being.

This comparison is not made to demean those people. They too are descendants of this civilisation. But the true source of the condition in which they find themselves is not a religion — it is a collapse. And to attempt to conceal this collapse by saying 'this is what the religion commands' is the greatest injustice both to the religion and to those people.

In Pakistan, a person is curious about Islam. They investigate. And what do they find before them? Groups that impose bans on educating girls; organisations that detonate bombs against people of a different school of thought; custodians of 'tradition' who do not let women

out of doors. And seeing this picture, they ask: 'Is this Islam?'

This is not Islam. This is the reproduction of a Jahiliyya that has inherited the shell of Islam but lost its spirit. Perhaps the greatest achievement of Iblis is precisely this: to leave the name of Islam in the hands of an understanding that is the enemy of the spirit of Islam.

"You are the best nation produced for mankind; you enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in God."

(Al Imran, 3:110)

'The best nation.' This is not a claim to greatness — it is a burden of responsibility. To be the best requires enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong. The oppressions carried out today in some parts of the world under the name of 'Muslim' represent the precise opposite of this verse. And seeing this contradiction is the first step in the rebuilding of civilisation.

Without Morality There Is No Civilisation: The Example Reversed

We have seen how decisive the moral foundation was in the rise of Islamic civilisation. Now let us see the reverse of this truth: without morality, there is no civilisation either.

Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya, Syria — what do these countries have in common? In all of them, Islam is demographically the majority religion. In all of them, the discourse in the name of Islam is strong. Yet in all of them, the basic moral indicators are extremely weak.

No fidelity to the word. No trust in state institutions. No dignity accorded to women. No rule of law. No respect for the different. No value placed on knowledge.

This picture does not show the failure of Islam — it shows the consequence of Islam not being lived. The distinction is critical. Islam is not leading to this picture. On the contrary, this picture is proof that Islam is not being lived.

Let us conduct a thought experiment: if those societies had applied the medicine of Ibn Sina — that is, based on observation, experiment, and reason — what would their hospitals be like? If they had carried the spirit of the Constitution of Medina — that is, minority rights, freedom of religion, the rule of law — what would their politics be like? If they had carried the curiosity of al-Khwarizmi — that is, the passion for learning, discovery, and progress — what would their schools be like?

The answer is clear. When the moral foundation is established, everything changes. And when the moral foundation dissolves, every activity conducted in the name of Islam grows distant from representing Islam.

Those Who Become Muslim from Every Corner of the World: What Are They Looking For?

It is at precisely this point that a profoundly meaningful truth must be seen. Today, millions of people around the world choose Islam every year — in Western countries, in the Far East, in Africa. And the great majority of these people are not making this decision by taking Pakistan or Afghanistan as their model. On the contrary, many are making this decision in spite of those geographies.

So what do these people find in Islam? What is the quality that draws them?

The understanding of justice. The universal justice described in the Quran — a justice that measures human worth not by lineage, wealth, or colour but by essence. This understanding of justice is an extraordinarily rare value in today's world. And those who find it hold onto it.

Meaning. The answers given by the secular world to the question ‘why do you live?’ fail to satisfy the great majority. Consumption, career, success — these offer temporary satisfactions, not lasting meaning. Islam, on the other hand, offers the human being a universal framework of meaning: you were created for a purpose. This purpose carries both individual and social dimensions.

Community. In today’s world, loneliness is perhaps one of the most widespread conditions. Islam offers a community. The person kneeling side by side in the mosque is a brother or sister, regardless of culture, language, or colour. This brotherhood is not abstract — it is practical and concrete.

Moral consistency. There is consistency between Islam’s discourse and the way of life it requires. There is no ‘say this but do that.’ There is ‘this value matters, and order your life accordingly.’ This consistency offers a reliable foundation to people who are searching.

But when these people investigate Islam and find the Pakistani or Afghan model in front of them, they pause. They ask: ‘Is this the real Islam?’ And the answer that is given to this question carries critical importance for the rebuilding of civilisation.

Who Represents the Real Islam?

This is the question that Muslims today need to debate most. And the answer is not political — it is moral.

The real Islam is represented not by those who apply the rules most rigidly, but by those who most correctly reflect the character of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). And what was that character?

Compassion. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) enjoined compassion even in war. Do not cut down

trees. Do not harm the elderly, women, or children. Treat the prisoner well. These commands were given in the seventh century, in a world that considered showing mercy to an enemy a sign of weakness.

Humility. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), while head of state, would help a person up from the ground. He would visit the destitute. He would eat at the same table as his servant. This humility came not from weakness but from seeing oneself as small before God.

Respect for knowledge. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) freed the prisoners of Badr in exchange for teaching literacy. This was something no combatant party in the seventh century had done. This value placed on knowledge was the strongest sign of civilisation.

Justice. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) applied justice even against his own relatives. He would protect the rights of the non-Muslim neighbour before those of the Muslim. He stood not on the side of the powerful but on the side of the right.

This is the true foundation of Islamic civilisation. And without rebuilding this foundation, it is not possible to correct institutions, economies, or politics.

Chapter IV Closing

From the Great Transformation to the Great Question

This chapter completed a great journey across six parts. From the world of contradictions that was Mecca, to the depths of the Jahiliyya, from there to the historic night in the Cave of Hira, to the universal voice of the command

‘Read,’ to the revolutionary structure of the Medina Model, and finally to both the zenith and the painful decline of this civilisation.

Throughout this journey, a single truth showed itself again and again in different forms: Islam made a two-winged civilisation possible. When faith and reason worked together — from that first revelation at Hira to the brilliant days of Bayt al-Hikmah, from there to the light of Andalusia and the birth of a civilisation that would influence people from every corner of the world — a line was drawn.

And when these two wings parted — when faith was left without reason, when reason was left without faith — civilisation halted. It halted and regressed. And today, in some geographies, that civilisation has a name but no soul.

But this is not the end. For those two wings still exist within the human being. Lulled to sleep; suppressed; covered over. But not destroyed.

In the next chapter we will look at how these two wings came together again: the Golden Age of Islam. The scholars of Bayt al-Hikmah, the thinkers of Andalusia, and the two-winged believers of that era. For without seeing the zenith, it is not possible to know how to rise again.

"Once we carried the mind of the world. Then we let go of that mind. Then we forgot that we had let go. And the most painful of all: we forgot that we had forgotten."

Bibliography and References

The Holy Quran — Al Imran 3:110, 3:159; Al-Baqarah 2:275; Al-Hujurat 49:10; Al-Hashr 59:9

Al-Bukhari — Sahih al-Bukhari (Chapters on the character of the Prophet and the ethics of war)

Ibn Khaldun — Muqaddimah [Prolegomena] (The cycles of rise and decline of civilisations; the theory of asabiyyah)

Ibn Sina — Al-Qanun fi al-Tibb [The Canon of Medicine]; Al-Shifa [The Book of Healing] (The zenith of Islamic science)

Ibn al-Haytham — Kitab al-Manazir [Book of Optics] (The history of the scientific method)

Al-Biruni — Kitab al-Hind [The Book of India]; Al-Qanun al-Mas'udi [The Mas'udi Canon] (The universality of Islamic science)

Al-Khwarizmi — Al-Kitab al-mukhtasar fi hisab al-jabr wal-muqabala [The Compendious Book on Calculation] (The transformation of mathematics)

Fakhr al-Din al-Razi — Mafatih al-Ghayb [Keys of the Unseen] (Commentary on Al Imran, verse 110)

Elmalili Hamdi Yazir — Hak Dini Kuran Dili [The True Religion: The Language of the Quran] (Commentary on the relevant verses)

Sayyid Qutb — Fi Zilal al-Quran [In the Shade of the Quran] (The moral foundation of Islamic civilisation)

Marshall Hodgson — The Venture of Islam, Vols. I–II (A comprehensive history of Islamic civilisation)

Thomas Arnold — The Preaching of Islam (The role of morality in the spread of Islam)

George Saliba — Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance (The connection between Andalusia and the Renaissance)

Jim Al-Khalili — The House of Wisdom (Bayt al-Hikmah and the scientific legacy of Islam)

Karen Armstrong — Islam: A Short History (The rise and fall of Islamic civilisation)

Ziauddin Sardar — Desperately Seeking Paradise (The Muslim identity crisis and the search for renewal)

Tariq Ramadan — In the Footsteps of the Prophet (A contemporary reading of the character of the Prophet)

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi — Hutbe-i Shamiyye [The Damascus Sermon] (The diseases of the Islamic world and the paths to remedy)

CHAPTER V

The Golden Age

The Rise of the Two-Winged Believers

*"God will raise those who have believed
among you and those who were given
knowledge, by degrees."
(Al-Mujadilah, 58:11)*

Introduction to the Chapter: History's Most Luminous Page

There are certain periods in history that fill humanity with both pride and longing when it remembers them. Pride — because they show how high the human being is capable of rising. Longing — because they also show when that height was lost.

The Golden Age of Islam spans approximately five centuries, from the eighth to the thirteenth century CE. During this period, Baghdad, Cordoba, Cairo, Samarkand, and Isfahan were the world's centres of thought, science, and art. While Europe was still living through what it would later call its 'dark ages,' the greatest intellectual productions in the history of humanity were being realised in these cities.

But what was it that made this production possible? The answer to this question is the very essence of this chapter: the two-winged believers. Human beings who carried faith and reason, revelation and observation, devotion and inquiry, within the same heart. These people were neither purely devout nor purely scientists. They were human beings who lived both, simultaneously, at the highest level.

In this chapter we will come to know these people — not only their works but their lives, their thoughts, their beliefs, and how they carried that dual structure. For their story does not belong only to the past. It is proof of what is possible today.

Bayt al-Hikmah: The Institutional Home of the Two Wings

Every great civilisation has a space that symbolises its greatness. For Athens it was the Academy; for Rome the Senate; for Florence the palace workshops. For Islamic civilisation, that space is Bayt al-Hikmah.

Bayt al-Hikmah — the House of Wisdom — was founded in Baghdad around 830 CE by Caliph Harun al-Rashid. But it lived its true golden age under Caliph al-Ma'mun. Al-Ma'mun is remembered as one of history's greatest intellectual patrons, for his passion for learning and his investment in Bayt al-Hikmah.

What was done at Bayt al-Hikmah? First and foremost, a great movement of translation was conducted. Works in Greek, Persian, Sanskrit, and Syriac were rendered into Arabic. Aristotle, Plato, Archimedes, Euclid, Hippocrates, Galen — all of these were carried into Arabic under the roof of Bayt al-Hikmah. And they were not merely carried; new layers were added to them, they were criticised, they were developed.

But what distinguished Bayt al-Hikmah from an ordinary library or translation bureau was the original research

conducted there. The algebra of al-Khwarizmi was born here. Astronomical observations were made here. Medical theories were tested here. Bayt al-Hikmah was not a repository — it was a living research centre.

The profile of those who worked there was also most striking: Muslims, Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians served under the same roof, in service of the same aim — truth. This pluralism came not from necessity but from belief. Truth belongs to God; wherever it may be found, to seek it is an act of worship.

Bayt al-Hikmah is also deeply meaningful as a symbol: when a society values knowledge to this degree, and when that value finds an institutional response, the rise of civilisation becomes inevitable. And when that value is lost, even if the shell of its institutions remains, the substance has long since departed.

Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi — The Architect of Mathematics

Who Was He?

Al-Khwarizmi was born in 780 CE in the Khwarazm region of present-day Uzbekistan. He worked at Bayt al-Hikmah, devoted his life to learning, and died in 850 CE. But the legacy he left is present in everyday life a thousand years later.

The name of al-Khwarizmi lives today inside the word ‘algorithm.’ The word ‘algorithm’ derives from the Latin pronunciation of his name — Algoritmi. That is to say, every time a computer programme runs, every time a search engine operates, every time an artificial intelligence

makes a decision: the name of al-Khwarizmi is silently at work.

What Did He Do?

Al-Khwarizmi's greatest work is *Al-Kitab al-Mukhtasar fi Hisab al-Jabr wal-Muqabala* — The Compendious Book on Calculation by Completion and Balancing. This work is the founding text of the science of algebra. The word 'al-jabr' — today's 'algebra' — comes from the title of this book. Al-Khwarizmi set out for the first time in this work a systematic method for solving equations.

Today, if a student is solving the equation $x + 5 = 12$, they are using the system al-Khwarizmi established in the ninth century. If an engineer is designing a bridge, if a physicist is calculating the movement of particles, if an economist is constructing a market model — the algebraic foundation of al-Khwarizmi lies beneath all of them.

Al-Khwarizmi's second great contribution was to carry the Hindu-Arabic numerals into the Islamic world and from there into Europe. The numerals we use today — 1, 2, 3... — are known as 'Arabic numerals'; but in reality they are a system that al-Khwarizmi learned from Indian mathematicians, systematised, and spread to the world. Without those numerals, modern mathematics would not have been possible.

He also made important contributions to astronomy — producing tables calculating the movements of the sun, the moon, and the planets. These tables were used both in determining religious times and in geographical exploration.

His Two-Wingedness: The Unity of Knowledge and Faith

Al-Khwarizmi began every one of his works with the Basmala — in the name of God. This was not a formality.

For al-Khwarizmi, knowledge was an effort to understand the order God had created. The perfect order within mathematics reminded him of the greatness of the Creator.

In the introduction to *Al-Jabr wal-Muqabala* he writes: ‘I praise God, who guided us to this knowledge and made us foremost in it.’ This sentence is not an expression of pride. It is a gratitude that connects knowledge to God. Not ‘I discovered it, I found it’ — but ‘God led us to this knowledge.’

This humility is the fundamental quality that distinguishes al-Khwarizmi from an ordinary genius. Great intelligence can give rise to pride. Al-Khwarizmi’s intelligence deepened his humility. For the more you understand of the universe, the more clearly you see how little you know.

Abu Rayhan al-Biruni — The Observer of the World

Who Was He?

Al-Biruni was born in 973 CE on the territory of present-day Turkmenistan. His life was extraordinarily eventful — filled with political upheavals, periods of exile, and journeys. He worked at the court of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni, travelled with him to India, and there conducted one of the most original comparative civilisational studies in history. He died in 1048 CE, at the age of seventy-five.

Al-Biruni was perhaps the most universal mind of Islamic civilisation. He produced works in mathematics, astronomy, geography, physics, pharmacology, history, and philosophy. It is estimated that he wrote 146 works

throughout his life — a number that approaches the very limits of what a single human being can produce.

What Did He Do?

One of al-Biruni's greatest achievements was calculating the radius of the earth by an extraordinarily precise method. The calculation he made by measuring the angle of the horizon from the summit of a mountain is accurate to within one percent of today's value. This was a result obtained in the eleventh century, without any modern measuring instrument, by the power of reason and observation alone.

His work *Kitab al-Hind* — The Book of India — is one of the fundamental academic sources for understanding Indian civilisation, still consulted today. When al-Biruni went to India, he learned Sanskrit. He did this not as an act of pride but of respect: 'If I wish to understand them, I must speak their language.' This approach was lived in practice a thousand years before today's discourse of 'intercultural dialogue.'

He also made groundbreaking contributions to geography — anticipating by mathematical inference the existence of the American continent approximately five hundred years before Columbus set foot there. He calculated that there must be undiscovered landmasses to the north and south of the world.

He measured the specific gravity of minerals and stones with great accuracy. He identified that light travels faster than sound. He explained that seasonal changes result from the earth's rotation on its axis.

His Two-Wingedness: Respect for Difference and the Breadth of Faith

Al-Biruni displayed a most remarkable disposition when examining different civilisations: transmission without

judgement. When describing the religious beliefs, traditions, and scientific understandings of the Hindus, he refrained from saying ‘these are wrong, Islam is right.’ He conveyed everything as it was, then added his own assessment.

This disposition came from a strong faith. Weak faith fears difference and tries to destroy it. Strong faith can confront difference, can understand it, and can be enriched by that understanding. Al-Biruni’s faith directed him to explore the intellectual heritage of all humanity with curiosity.

Al-Biruni writes: ‘Seeking truth is harder than finding it. For the road to truth passes through a forest full of misunderstandings and prejudices.’ This sentence is both a scientific methodology and an expression of profound humility.

Abu Nasr al-Farabi — Al-Muallim al-Thani: The Second Teacher

Who Was He?

Al-Farabi was born in 872 CE in the city of Farab, on the territory of present-day Kazakhstan. He came from a Turkic family. He studied in Baghdad, lived in Aleppo, and spent the final years of his life in Damascus. He died in 950 CE, at approximately eighty years of age.

In the Islamic world, the title Al-Muallim al-Awwal — the First Teacher — is given to Aristotle. Al-Farabi is remembered as Al-Muallim al-Thani — the Second Teacher. This title reflects his success in bringing Aristotle into conversation with Islamic thought. He taught Aristotle to the Muslims — but not merely by transmitting him; by interpreting him and developing him.

Al-Farabi led an extraordinarily modest life. There were periods when he earned his living as a garden watchman in Aleppo. Great philosophers are more often than not either very wealthy or dependent on powerful patrons. Al-Farabi rejected neither wealth nor the court — but he also refused to be dependent upon them.

What Did He Do?

Al-Farabi's greatest contribution was to demonstrate, both in theory and in practice, that philosophy and Islam can coexist. Before him, the question of whether Greek philosophy and Islamic belief were compatible carried an extremely tense dimension. Al-Farabi resolved this tension by revealing the natural unity between reason and faith.

His work *Al-Madinah al-Fadilah* — *The Virtuous City* — is one of the most important classics in the history of political philosophy. In this work al-Farabi asks: how is an ideal society to be built? His answer carries both philosophical and Islamic elements together: at the head of the virtuous city must be a leader who possesses the qualities of both philosopher and prophet. That is to say, wisdom and revelation must meet at the highest level.

Al-Farabi also broke new ground in music theory. His work *Kitab al-Musiqā* — *The Book of Music* — is a comprehensive study that approaches music through both its mathematical and its spiritual dimensions. According to al-Farabi, music is not merely an aesthetic experience but a mathematical harmony that reflects the order of the soul.

In logic, he did not confine himself to commenting on Aristotle but made his own contributions. He worked in linguistics. He also developed original thinking in psychology and metaphysics.

His Two-Wingedness: The Meeting of Philosophy and Faith

Perhaps al-Farabi's greatest legacy is this: he proved with his own life that a Muslim can be both a person of deep faith and a thinker of unlimited breadth. Doing philosophy is not a betrayal of faith. Having faith does not require abandoning philosophy.

Al-Farabi says: 'There are two roads to happiness: one through religion, the other through philosophy. But these two roads, when they arrive at truth, converge. For truth is one.' This perspective is the philosophical manifesto of the two-winged believer's understanding.

A detail from al-Farabi's life summarises his character beautifully: after his death, extremely few possessions were found in his room. A bed, a few vessels, and pages written full. He carried his greatness not outside but within.

Abu Ali al-Husayn ibn Sina — Al-Shaykh al-Ra'is: The Sultan of the Sciences

Who Was He?

Ibn Sina was born in 980 CE in the village of Afshana in present-day Uzbekistan. His father held a position in the Samanid court and placed great importance on his son's education. Ibn Sina memorised the Quran and the great works of Arabic literature by the age of ten. He began the practice of medicine at sixteen. At eighteen, he had read Aristotle's *Metaphysics* forty times without being able to understand it; when he read al-Farabi's commentary, he understood it — and immediately prostrated himself in gratitude. This scene is one of the most beautiful symbolic

expressions of the two-winged believer's understanding: he prostrated because he understood.

His life was extraordinarily eventful. Political upheavals hurled him from one city to another. He was imprisoned, escaped, moved from court to court. But in the midst of all this chaos he never ceased writing. There are texts he dictated on horseback, lines he composed in prison. He continued thinking and producing until his death. He died in 1037 CE, at the age of fifty-seven.

What Did He Do?

Ibn Sina's masterwork in medicine, *Al-Qanun fi al-Tibb* — The Canon of Medicine — is one of the most influential books in the history of medicine. This fourteen-volume encyclopaedia treats systematically the general principles of medicine, pharmacology, the organs and their diseases, treatment methods, and clinical pharmacy. The work was taught as a textbook in European universities until the seventeenth century. That is to say, Ibn Sina was the teacher of European doctors for six hundred years.

Ibn Sina identified in the eleventh century that contagious diseases spread through contaminated water and air. He was the first to propose quarantine. Eight hundred years before the discovery of microbiology, he established the fundamental practice of microbiology.

He also broke new ground in psychology — examining the relationship between soul and body, and the connection between emotions, thought, and brain function. His thought experiment known as the 'Floating Man' is one of the most famous examples in the history of philosophy: if a person were suspended in void, touching nothing, would they be aware of their own existence? This question addresses a subject similar to that of Descartes' 'I think, therefore I am' — a full century earlier.

In philosophy, his encyclopaedia *Al-Shifa* — The Book of Healing — consists of sections on logic, mathematics, the natural sciences, and metaphysics. This work is the most comprehensive study that systematises the philosophical heritage of Islamic thought.

His Two-Wingedness: The Man Who Prostrated Because He Understood

The two-wingedness of Ibn Sina was woven into every stage of his life. He would perform ablution before going to visit patients. A night in which he could not resolve a difficult medical case he would spend praying in the mosque and supplicating. At dawn he would feel the solution arrive — and would write it down.

This is not a legend — it is a reality narrated in his own biography. Ibn Sina experienced prayer not only as worship but as a method of opening the mind. To turn toward God was for him both an act of servitude and a scholarly practice.

Ibn Sina says: ‘Knowledge draws the human being closer to God. For as knowledge increases, the greatness of creation becomes visible. And when greatness is seen, the majesty of the Creator is felt more clearly.’ This sentence summarises, in a single statement, the foundational philosophy of the Golden Age of Islam.

Abu Ali al-Hasan ibn al-Haytham — The Father of the Scientific Method

Who Was He?

Ibn al-Haytham was born in 965 CE in Basra, Iraq. He was invited to the court of the Fatimid caliph in Egypt, who

asked him to develop a project to control the flooding of the Nile. When he realised the project was impossible, he feigned madness to protect himself from the caliph's anger — and maintained this performance until the caliph's death. During this period of enforced house arrest, he wrote the *Kitab al-Manazir* — the Book of Optics. Sometimes the greatest works are born in the most difficult conditions.

What Did He Do?

Ibn al-Haytham is recognised as the founder of the modern scientific method. Before him, authority was the determining factor in scientific inquiry: Aristotle said this, Galen wrote that. Ibn al-Haytham said instead: 'What matters is not what is said — but what observation shows.' This sentence is one of the most revolutionary thoughts in the history of science.

His greatest discovery in optics was to prove that light does not emanate from the eye but issues from objects and travels to the eye. The view that had prevailed since ancient Greece was wrong. The eyes did not send out rays — they received them. This discovery laid the foundation for the camera, the telescope, the spectacle, and ultimately photography.

He was the first to describe the camera obscura in a systematic manner. He proved experimentally that light travels in straight lines. He formulated the laws of reflection and refraction mathematically. He explained the mechanism by which rainbows form. He calculated how the atmosphere refracts light.

But the true legacy of Ibn al-Haytham lies not in particular discoveries but in the method he developed: observe; formulate a hypothesis; design the experiment; measure the results; repeat; verify or refute. This method is the process taught today as 'the scientific method.' And this

process was ‘discovered’ by Western scientists approximately six hundred years after Ibn al-Haytham.

His Two-Wingedness: The Scientific Practice of Humility

The scientific method of Ibn al-Haytham is in truth the product of a profound humility. To say ‘not authority but observation is the determining factor’ is to say ‘even Aristotle can be wrong.’ This was an extraordinarily courageous stance for that era.

But this courage came not from pride but from faith. Ibn al-Haytham writes: ‘The person who seeks truth is seeking the order of the universe that God has created. That order emerges not through theories that a human being has constructed in advance, but through the universe itself.’ That is to say, observation is listening to the voice not of the human being but of the order God has created.

Ibn al-Haytham would invoke the name of God before every experiment, and would be filled with gratitude after every new discovery. For him, doing science was an act of worship. Discovering the order of the universe was reading the art of the Creator.

Badi’ al-Zaman al-Jazari — The Pioneer of Automation

Who Was He?

Al-Jazari, full name Badi’ al-Zaman Abu al-’Izz Isma’il ibn al-Razzaz al-Jazari, was born in 1136 CE in the region of al-Jazira (the land between the Tigris and the Euphrates), in present-day southeastern Turkey. He served as chief

engineer to the Artuqid rulers in Diyarbakir. He died in 1206 CE.

Al-Jazari is one of the most original engineering minds in history. Yet he long failed to receive the place in history that he deserved. It was only when Western historians of science discovered his work in the twentieth century that the extent to which he was a groundbreaking thinker became apparent.

What Did He Do?

Al-Jazari's masterwork is *Al-Jami' bayna al-'Ilm wal-'Amal al-Nafi' fi Sina'at al-Hiyal* — known briefly as the *Kitab al-Hiyal* or *Book of Ingenious Devices*. This work is an engineering encyclopaedia containing the designs and construction instructions for fifty different mechanical devices across six categories.

Among the devices invented or developed by al-Jazari: the crank mechanism — which converts rotary motion into reciprocal motion and is the fundamental principle of the steam engine; al-Jazari designed this mechanism six hundred years before the Industrial Revolution. The segmental valve — used today in all plumbing and many industrial systems; this valve is al-Jazari's invention. The combination lock — security locks requiring more than one cipher combination were present in al-Jazari's designs. The programmable automaton — al-Jazari designed a mechanical device consisting of musician figures capable of playing different rhythms. This is the earliest known programmable device in history. In other words, the ancestor of computers was imagined in the twelfth century by a Muslim engineer.

He designed water clocks and sundials that were the most precise time-measuring instruments of their age. He developed irrigation pumps. He designed fountains and water systems.

His Two-Wingedness: Engineering, Art, and Faith

The work of al-Jazari is not merely a technical manual. The design of every device is accompanied by artistic drawings. These drawings are masterpieces of miniature art. Engineering and art were not separate domains for him.

In the introduction to his work, al-Jazari writes: ‘God created man in a beautiful form and endowed him with understanding and knowledge, so that man might give thanks for these blessings.’ Engineering was, in his view, a manifestation of the gift of understanding bestowed by God. Every device he invented was an expression of gratitude for the capacity of mind given to him.

Al-Jazari sowed the intellectual seeds of the Industrial Revolution that would begin six hundred years later. The crank mechanism would be embedded at the heart of the steam engine. The programmable automaton would be the first dream of the computer. And the man who sowed these seeds was a Muslim engineer who performed the five daily prayers and wrote his work in gratitude to God.

Abd al-Rahman ibn Khaldun — The Philosopher of History

Who Was He?

Ibn Khaldun was born in 1332 CE in Tunis. He spent his life in the midst of political upheavals. He worked in the service of different dynasties in Morocco, Spain, Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria — and was closely involved with courts. He was imprisoned, sent into exile, suffered great losses. He died in Cairo in 1406 CE.

This eventful life gave him something unique: real-world experience. Ibn Khaldun was not a scholar who learned

only from books. He lived power, collapse, tribal dynamics, wars, wealth, and poverty at first hand. And he transformed this experience into the most original work in the history of the social sciences: the Muqaddimah.

What Did He Do?

The Muqaddimah — the Prolegomena or Introduction — is one of the cornerstones of the philosophy of history and sociology. This work was written as the introduction to a large history — but over time it came forward as the greatest work in its own right.

In the Muqaddimah, Ibn Khaldun asked: why do some societies rise, others fall? Why do civilisations follow a cyclical movement? Why does power change hands? He sought the answers to these questions not through mystical or theological means but through an observational and systematic method.

The theory of asabiyyah — social cohesion — is his most original contribution. Asabiyyah is a sense of tribal or social solidarity, group consciousness, and shared identity. According to Ibn Khaldun, civilisations rise on the strength of a powerful asabiyyah. But prosperity and luxury gradually erode this asabiyyah over time. When asabiyyah weakens, civilisation decays from within. And a new force arriving from outside with a stronger asabiyyah topples it. This cycle is the fundamental law of historical movement.

Ibn Khaldun was also the pioneer of economic history. He analysed the supply-demand relationship, the mechanism of inflation, and the effect of taxation on the economy in the fourteenth century. The principle known today as the ‘Laffer Curve’ — that beyond a certain point, as the tax rate increases, tax revenue begins to fall — was expressed by Ibn Khaldun six hundred years earlier.

Sociology, the philosophy of history, demography, economics, theory of education — Ibn Khaldun broke new ground in all of these. The Western thinker Arnold Toynbee described him as ‘the greatest philosopher of history that humanity has ever produced.’

His Two-Wingedness: Reading God Through History

Ibn Khaldun read history not merely as human activity but as the manifestation of divine laws upon humanity. This is the deepest dimension of the Muqaddimah: the rise and fall of societies is not random. These changes rest upon certain divine laws.

*"Indeed, God will not change the condition of
a people until they change what is in
themselves."*

(Al-Ra'd, 13:11)

Ibn Khaldun read this verse as the foundational axiom of social science. Societies change; but this change is bound to certain internal dynamics. If asabiyyah is strong, society resists change and rises. If asabiyyah has dissolved, even the slightest external pressure can bring a society down.

Ibn Khaldun, for all his scholarly greatness, was a person of deep faith. He performed the Hajj. He wept before the Kaaba. He opened the preface to his work with praise and gratitude to God. To write history for him was to attempt to understand the social laws God had created. And this understanding made his work something far deeper than a purely analytical study.

Other Great Names That Must Not Be Forgotten

The figures examined in this chapter are the best known of the Golden Age. But that era was not limited to these

names alone. To see the breadth of that civilisation, other names must also be mentioned.

Ibn Rushd (1126–1198): The great philosopher and physician of Andalusia. He commented on Aristotle so comprehensively that in the West he was known simply as ‘the Commentator.’ He defended the compatibility of philosophy and religion, and his views profoundly influenced Europe. Thomas Aquinas cannot be understood without Ibn Rushd.

Ibn al-Nafis (1213–1288): He discovered the pulmonary circuit of blood circulation three hundred years before the Western scholar Harvey. He correctly described that the blood leaving the right ventricle of the heart travels to the lungs, is purified there, and returns to the left ventricle.

Al-Battani (858–929): One of the greatest names in the history of astronomy. He calculated the length of the solar year with extraordinary accuracy. He identified the precession of the sun’s equinoctial point. He made important contributions to trigonometry. Both Copernicus and Tycho Brahe explicitly acknowledged their debt to al-Battani in their works.

Ibn Zuhr (Avenzoar, 1094–1162): The Andalusian physician — a pioneer of clinical medicine. He was the first to conduct surgical experiments on animals and then apply the results to human beings. He identified many diseases through direct observation. He wrote important works on the relationship between nutrition and health.

Jabir ibn Hayyan (721–815): Recognised as the founder of chemistry. The word ‘chemistry’ derives from his name — Geber. He systematically defined fundamental chemical processes such as acid synthesis, distillation, crystallisation, and sublimation. The seeds of the modern chemistry laboratory concept lie in his work.

Ibn Battuta (1304–1368): One of the most widely travelled people in history. He covered 117,000 kilometres, journeying across geographies stretching from China to Africa, from Central Asia to Andalusia. His travel memoir, the *Rihla*, is an incomparable source documenting the world of that era.

Ibn Jubayr (1145–1217): The Andalusian traveller and literary figure — one of the great names in travel literature. His observations on the eastern Mediterranean, Egypt, and the Hijaz are a primary source for the historical geography of the period.

Al-Razi (854–925): A pioneer in medicine and chemistry. He was the first physician to distinguish between smallpox and measles. He developed the use of alcohol and sulphuric acid in medicine. He conducted studies in brain surgery.

The Common Feature of These Figures: The Anatomy of Two-Wingedness

Each figure examined in this chapter worked in a different field, lived in a different geography, produced in a different era. Yet in all of them a common structure is visible. Understanding this structure carries the concept of the two-winged believer from the abstract to the concrete.

First: all of them both worshipped and investigated. Ibn Sina would rise for the night prayer and would pray until a difficult case was resolved, then write at dawn. Ibn al-Haytham would invoke the name of God before every experiment and feel gratitude after every discovery. Al-Jazari wove gratitude to God into every page of his work. This was not performative religiosity — it was a lived faith.

Second: for all of them, curiosity did not conflict with faith — it was nourished by faith. To investigate the order of the universe meant, for them, to understand the order God had created. To solve an equation was to grasp a portion of divine perfection. To understand a disease was to read the divine art in the human body.

Third: all of them were humble. This humility came not from inadequacy but from a wisdom that felt its own smallness upon seeing greatness. They were modest not because of how much they knew, but because they could see how much they did not know.

Fourth: all of them were universal. None of them said ‘this knowledge is for Muslims alone.’ The algebra of al-Khwarizmi, the optics of Ibn al-Haytham, the mechanical principles of al-Jazari, the geography of al-Biruni — all of these were offered to the common heritage of humanity. And this universal offering became one of the most powerful forms of the transmission of Islam.

Chapter Closing

The Zenith — Why Was It Lost?

This chapter was written to come to know those great figures. But this knowing cannot be left as nostalgia. Coming to know these figures gives rise to both pride and responsibility.

The pride is this: this civilisation is ours. The medicine of Ibn Sina, the mathematics of al-Khwarizmi, the engineering of al-Jazari, the sociology of Ibn Khaldun — these are the products of the Muslim mind. And that mind was two-winged.

The responsibility is this: that zenith was lost. And the reason for its loss was not an assault coming from without. It was an abandonment coming from within. Reason was abandoned. Questioning was forbidden. Investigation was declared heresy. Memorisation was sanctified. And the two-winged believer was squeezed into a one-winged mould.

In the next chapter we will see the process of this abandonment: the schools of law, politics, and the ruptures. That chapter is the dark mirror of this one. Without understanding how the fall from the zenith occurred, we cannot know how to rise again.

But let us proceed to that dark chapter knowing this: these figures existed. That zenith was lived. The two-winged believer is not a dream — it is a reality proven by history. And that reality is possible today.

"They prostrated — and built the telescope. They fasted — and solved algebraic equations. They recited the Quran — and wrote the theory of optics. And for them, these two things never contradicted each other."

Bibliography and References

The Holy Quran — Al-Mujadilah 58:11; Al-Ra'd 13:11; Al-Imran 3:190–191

Al-Khwarizmi — Al-Kitab al-Mukhtasar fi Hisab al-Jabr wal-Muqabala [The Compendious Book on Calculation] (The founding text of algebra)

Ibn Sina — Al-Qanun fi al-Tibb [The Canon of Medicine]; Al-Shifa [The Book of Healing] (The zenith of medicine and philosophy)

Ibn al-Haytham — Kitab al-Manazir [Book of Optics] (The foundation of optics and the scientific method)

Al-Biruni — Kitab al-Hind [The Book of India]; Al-Qanun al-Mas'udi; Tahdid Nihayat al-Amakin (The universal understanding of science)

Al-Farabi — Al-Madinah al-Fadilah [The Virtuous City]; Kitab al-Musiqā [The Book of Music] (The unity of philosophy and Islam)

Al-Jazari — Al-Jami' bayna al-'Ilm wal-'Amal al-Nafi' fi Sina'at al-Hiyal [The Book of Ingenious Devices] (The history of mechanical engineering)

Ibn Khaldun — Muqaddimah [Prolegomena] (The founding text of sociology and the philosophy of history)

Ibn Rushd — Tahafut al-Tahafut [The Incoherence of the Incoherence]; Commentaries on Aristotle (The reconciliation of philosophy and religion)

Jim Al-Khalili — The House of Wisdom (The scientific legacy of Islam; comprehensive popular history of science)

George Saliba — Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance (The Andalusia-Renaissance connection)

Howard Turner — Science in Medieval Islam (The scientific legacy of the Islamic Golden Age)

Seyyed Hossein Nasr — Science and Civilization in Islam (The philosophical foundations of the Islamic scientific tradition)

Marshall Hodgson — The Venture of Islam, Vol. II (A historical analysis of the Golden Age)

Donald Hill — Islamic Science and Engineering (Al-Jazari and the history of Islamic engineering)

Fakhr al-Din al-Razi — Mafatih al-Ghayb [Keys of the Unseen] (Commentary on the relevant verses)

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi — The Words (A contemporary defence of the unity of faith and knowledge)

CHAPTER VI

Schools of Law, Politics, and Ruptures

Part II — Schools of Law, Sects, and the Knowledge–Power Tension

"Indeed, those who have divided their religion and become sects — you are not at all associated with them. Their affair is only to God."

(Al-An'am, 6:159)

Bridge: From Fitna to Sectarianism

In the previous part we examined the martyrdom of Uthman (may God be pleased with him), the Battle of the Camel, the martyrdom of Hasan (may God be pleased with him) by poisoning, and the events of Karbala. These events represent the first great political ruptures of the Muslim community. But political ruptures were transformed over time into theological ruptures. And theological ruptures gave birth to the schools of thought.

In this part we will examine these schools. But in doing so we will approach them not from a single perspective but from a universal vantage point. The four Sunni schools of law, the different branches of Shia, the Ismaili understanding brought by the Fatimid state, the Kharijites, the Mu'tazila, the Murji'a, and more. We will examine how each arose, what each represents, and what mark each has left on history.

And throughout this narrative we will keep a single truth in mind: a school of law is an instrument. The aim is to arrive at truth. When the instrument becomes the aim, both the instrument and the aim are lost.

The Hadith of the 'Seventy-Three Sects': A Warning or a Destiny?

One of the most debated hadiths in the history of Islamic schools is the following: the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: 'The Jews were divided into seventy-one sects. The Christians into seventy-two. My community

will be divided into seventy-three. All of them are in the Fire, except one.’ The Companions asked: ‘Which one is that?’ The answer came: ‘Those who follow my path and the path of my Companions.’

This hadith appears in important collections such as Abu Dawud and al-Tirmidhi. But scholars have assessed the chain of transmission differently. Some have found it reliable; others have classified it as weak. Even those who accept it as sound have noted that the expression ‘seventy-three sects’ is symbolic of great number rather than a precise figure.

But the real issue is how this hadith has been used in history. Every school and every sect claimed to be the ‘saved sect’ of the hadith. The Sunni Ash’aris claimed it. The Sunni Maturidis claimed it. The Shia claimed it. The Kharijites claimed it. The Mu’tazila claimed it. Even Wahhabism and Salafism made this claim. And thus the very warning against dividing into seventy-three sects was turned into the justification for sectarian division.

This irony is one of the most striking paradoxes in history. And seeing this paradox is indispensable for reading the question of schools of thought correctly.

I. The Sunni Schools of Law: Four Summits of the Ijtihad Tradition

The Birth of the Schools: From Need to Institution

The four great Sunni schools of law — Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi’i, and Hanbali — arose in response to a practical need that emerged alongside the expansion of the Islamic world. Islam spread rapidly from Arabia to Central Asia,

from North Africa to Spain. In these different geographies, new questions arose that had not existed in the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). Islamic law needed to answer these questions.

It was at this point that the great jurists came into play. Each, proceeding from the Quran and the Sunnah, began to produce legal solutions to new questions. The methods they employed differed to some degree; these differences gave rise to different legal schools. And over time these schools became the recognised madhhabs.

An important point must be underscored: the imams of the four schools did not regard one another as rivals. Imam al-Shafi'i was a student of Imam Malik and held him in deep respect. Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal was a student of Imam al-Shafi'i. The disagreements between these imams took place within a framework of mutual respect. Not 'you are wrong, I am right' but rather 'my assessment of this question is thus, yours is thus' — this was the prevailing spirit.

Imam Abu Hanifah (699–767): The Jurist of Reason

The founder of the Hanafi school, Imam Nu'man ibn Thabit, is known as Abu Hanifah. He was born in Kufa, in present-day Iraq, and was of Afghan origin. His father was the son of a Companion who had stood in the presence of Ali (may God be pleased with him).

Abu Hanifah grew up in the vibrant commercial environment of Kufa. This environment gave him practical intelligence and the ability to address problems within their concrete contexts. He accorded great importance to rational inference — *ra'y* and *qiyas* — in jurisprudence. On questions where the revealed text offered no explicit ruling, he drew logical inferences from the available knowledge.

Abu Hanifah's most striking characteristic was his method of teaching through debate with his students. Rather than teaching a question by simply declaring 'it is thus,' he would ask his students, take their views, and engage in discussion. And on many occasions, when faced with objections from students, he would revise his own position. This is an academic pedagogical method of discussion practised in the eighth century.

Abu Hanifah twice refused the Abbasid caliph's attempt to appoint him as chief qadi. This refusal was met with political pressure and he was imprisoned. According to the transmitted accounts, he died in prison in 767 CE. He chose his scholarship over his freedom.

The Hanafi school is today the most widespread in the world. It prevails in Turkey, Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Central Asia, and the Balkans. Approximately thirty-five percent of the world's Muslims are Hanafi.

Imam Malik (711–795): The Voice of Medina

Malik ibn Anas was born in Medina and never left the city throughout his life. This directly shaped his understanding of jurisprudence. Medina was the city in which the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) had lived. In his view, the practices of the people of Medina were the most reliable reflection of the Prophet's Sunnah. This understanding gave rise to the concept of 'the practice of the Medinans' — one of the foundational principles of the Maliki school.

Imam Malik's greatest work, the Muwatta, is the first systematic compilation of hadith and jurisprudence in Islam. This work, compiled from the scholars of the Companions and the Successors who were still living, was the greatest scholarly project of its time.

Imam Malik too confronted political pressure. During the reign of the Abbasid caliph al-Mansur, a fatwa he issued

on the matter of forced divorce ran contrary to the interests of those in power. He was flogged as punishment. His arm is reported to have been dislocated. But he did not retract his view.

The Maliki school is today widespread in North Africa, West Africa, Sudan, and parts of the Gulf. It accounts for approximately twenty-five percent of the world's Muslims.

Imam al-Shafi'i (767–820): The Architect of Legal Methodology

Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi'i was born in Gaza. He studied under both Imam Malik and the students of Abu Hanifah. His familiarity with these two great schools gave him a unique capacity for synthesis.

Al-Shafi'i's greatest contribution was the systematisation of the methodology of Islamic law — *usul al-fiqh*. His work *al-Risala* is the first and most important text in the principles of jurisprudence. He established the Quran, the Sunnah, *ijma'* (consensus), and *qiyas* (analogy) as the hierarchy of legal sources. This framework remains the foundational methodological reference of Islamic law today.

The Shafi'i school is today widespread in parts of Egypt, East Africa, Southeast Asia — Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei — and Yemen. The great majority of Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim country, follows the Shafi'i school.

Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (780–855): The Guardian of the Sunnah

Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Hanbal was born in Baghdad. His passion for hadith led him to learn from hundreds of teachers across millions of narrations. It is reported that he memorised over a million hadiths — a figure recorded as beyond the reach of any other human being in history.

Ibn Hanbal is the hero of the Mihna period. The Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun declared the doctrine that the Quran was created — makhluq — as official state policy and pressured scholars to conform. Ibn Hanbal refused this view and was imprisoned, flogged, and subjected to torture. But he did not retract his position. The caliphs changed; the Mihna policy was eventually lifted. Ibn Hanbal emerged with both his scholarship and his honour intact.

The Hanbali school is today the official school in Saudi Arabia and is widespread in Qatar and some Gulf states. But an important note: the Hanbali school and Wahhabism are not the same thing. There are serious differences between the methodology of Ibn Hanbal and the Wahhabism founded by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab in the eighteenth century. Failing to see this distinction is a grave historical error.

II. Shia: From Political Grief to Theological System

The Birth of Shia: From Politics to Theology

The word 'Shia' in Arabic means 'supporters' or 'partisans.' Its full name is 'Shi'at Ali' — the partisans of Ali. Initially this word expressed only a political stance — the view that Ali (may God be pleased with him) was the rightful holder of the caliphate. It carried no theological dimension.

But after Karbala, this political stance acquired a profound theological and emotional dimension. The martyrdom of Husayn endowed the political supporters of Ali with a deep bond to the lineage of the Prophet. And this bond

gradually began to produce an independent theological system.

The foundational theological principle of Shia Islam is the imamate. According to this principle, after the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), the leadership of the community belongs, by divine appointment, to Ali and to the imams descended from his lineage. The imam is not merely a political leader but also the religious authority and the bearer of divine knowledge. This understanding differs fundamentally from the Sunni understanding of the caliphate.

Twelver Shia: Imamiyyah

The largest branch of Shia Islam is the Imamiyyah, or Twelver Shia. Today the great majority of Iran's population, approximately half of Iraq, a significant portion of Lebanon, and Azerbaijan belong to this understanding.

According to the Imamiyyah, there is a lineage beginning with Ali and continuing through twelve imams. These imams are Ali, Hasan, Husayn, and the nine imams who follow. The twelfth imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, entered the 'Major Occultation' in 874 CE — that is, he is still living but in a concealed state. He will emerge near the Day of Resurrection.

In the theology of Imamiyyah, the imams are held to be ma'sum — protected from error. This is a fundamental point of divergence from the Sunni understanding. According to Sunnis, no one except the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) possesses ma'sumiyya. The Imamiyyah, however, hold all twelve imams to be ma'sum.

The Imamiyyah became the official school of Iran with the foundation of the Safavid state in the sixteenth century. This produced not only religious but also far-reaching geopolitical consequences. The Sunni-Shia tension

between Iran and the Ottomans took shape to a great degree in this period. And the traces of this tension are still felt today in the politics of the Middle East.

Zaydiyyah: The Shia Branch Closest to Sunni Islam

The Zaydiyyah is the branch of Shia Islam closest in its understanding to Sunni Islam. It accepts Zayd ibn Ali — a grandson of Husayn — as the fifth imam, and separates from the Twelver Shia after the fourth imam. Zayd ibn Ali launched an armed uprising against Umayyad rule and was martyred in 740 CE.

The theology of the Zaydiyyah is much more moderate than that of the Imamiyyah. It does not attribute ma'sumiyya to the imams. It adopts a more balanced stance toward the Companions. For this reason, Sunni-Zaydiyyah dialogue has historically been less fraught with tension than other Sunni-Shia relations.

Today the Zaydiyyah live predominantly in Yemen. The Houthi movement in Yemen identifies itself with the Zaydiyyah tradition. However, Islamic scholars have noted that today's Houthi movement has deviated considerably from classical Zaydiyyah understanding.

Ismailiyyah and the Fatimid State: A Batini Reading

The Ismailiyyah is a branch that separated from other Shia branches on the question of the seventh imam. The Imamiyyah accepts Musa al-Kazim — the son of the sixth imam Ja'far al-Sadiq — as the seventh imam. The Ismailiyyah follows Ismail — another son of Ja'far al-Sadiq — or his son. They are therefore also known as the 'Seveners.'

The most distinctive feature of the Ismailiyyah is its understanding of imposing 'batini' — inner, hidden —

layers of meaning upon the Quran and religious texts. Beneath every *zahir* — outward — meaning lies a *batini* meaning, accessible only to the imam or those appointed by him. This understanding is a theological characteristic that sharply distinguishes the Ismailiyyah from other branches of Islam.

The Fatimid State (909–1171) is the greatest political structure founded by the Ismailiyyah. Beginning in North Africa and seizing Egypt, the Fatimids founded Cairo in 969 CE. Al-Azhar University was founded during the Fatimid period, with the aim of spreading Ismaili doctrine. This historical fact is of the utmost importance: one of the most prestigious institutions of Sunni scholarship today was built by a Shia-Ismaili state.

The Fatimid State was extremely powerful both militarily and intellectually. With its libraries, observatories, and madrasas, it was one of the important centres of learning of its age. But the *batini* theology of the Ismailiyyah kept it in perpetual tension with the Sunni world. Imam al-Ghazali wrote a sharp polemic against the Ismailiyyah entitled *Fada'ih al-Batiniyyah* — The Infamies of the Batinists.

The Fatimid State was brought to an end in 1171 by Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi (Saladin). Saladin restored Egypt to the Sunni Abbasid caliphate. Al-Azhar was converted to Sunni education.

Nizariyyah: The Aga Khan Community

The Ismailiyyah experienced another internal division before the collapse of the Fatimid State. The Nizari branch, under the leadership of the Aga Khan, continues today with approximately fifteen million adherents worldwide, widespread in India, Pakistan, Central Asia, and East Africa. The current Aga Khan, Shah Karim al-

Husayni, describes himself as the forty-ninth imam in the line of Ali.

The religious practices of the Nizariyyah differ considerably from other branches of Islam. The five daily prayers are interpreted for them as a symbolic practice carrying a batini meaning. This interpretation is regarded by Sunni scholars and other Shia scholars as a departure from Islam's foundational understanding of worship.

III. The Kharijites: The First Takfiri Movement

The Birth of the Kharijites: From Siffin to Extremism

The Kharijites are the first extremist movement in the history of Islam. At the Battle of Siffin (657) between Ali and Muawiyah, the two sides decided to submit to arbitration — tahkim. A group within Ali's forces violently opposed this: 'Judgement belongs to God alone! Human beings cannot arbitrate!' — and they separated from Ali's army. They were accordingly named the Kharijites — 'those who go out.'

The fundamental characteristic of the Kharijites was this: they regarded a Muslim who committed a major sin as a disbeliever. This is the historical beginning of the concept of takfir. In their view, Ali had committed a major sin by accepting arbitration and had therefore become an unbeliever. Muawiyah was already an unbeliever. They proceeded to declare all those who were not of their number to be unbelievers.

This understanding set in motion an extraordinarily dangerous dynamic: Muslims began to declare one

another unbelievers. And takfir did not remain merely a theological label — it became justification for killing. The Kharijites formed the group that martyred Ali in 661 CE.

The Kharijites played a role in many different uprisings throughout history. But they were never able to establish a lasting state in any of them. For a society built upon takfir divides from within in short order. When one looks today at the theological background of groups such as ISIS and similar organisations, the traces of the Khariji understanding are clearly visible. They too perform takfir; they too kill those not of their number. History repeats the same error in a different guise.

The great majority of Sunni scholars have defined the Kharijites as a deviant sect. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) foretold this movement: ‘There will be a people who emerge from religion as an arrow emerges from its target; their sign is that they shave their heads.’ This hadith is understood as an early identification of the Kharijites.

IV. The Mu‘tazila: The Moment Reason Seized the State

The Mu‘tazila: Islamic Rationalist Theology

The Mu‘tazila arose in Basra in the eighth century. Wasil ibn Ata is accepted as its founder. The theology of the Mu‘tazila is built upon five foundational principles: Tawhid, ‘Adl (divine justice), Wa’d and Wa‘id (the promise and the threat of God), al-Manzilah bayna al-Manzilatayn (the intermediate position), and al-Amr bi’l-Ma’ruf wa’l-Nahy ‘an al-Munkar (enjoining good and forbidding evil).

The Mu'tazila's most distinctive feature is the elevated position it accords to reason. In their view, reason is capable of determining good and evil independently of revelation. Revelation confirms what reason can attain and offers additional knowledge in domains beyond its reach. This understanding makes the Mu'tazila the most rationalist school in the history of Islamic thought.

The Mu'tazila also maintained that the Quran was makhluq — created. According to this view, the Quran is not the eternal speech of God that has always existed, but a text created at a particular moment in time. This theological position led to a major conflict with the other scholars of the age.

The Mihna Period: The Moment Reason Seized the State

The most critical period for the Mu'tazila began when the Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun (813–833) invited them to his court. Al-Ma'mun adopted the Mu'tazilite view and in 833 CE declared it official state policy. Scholars who did not accept the doctrine that the Quran was created were subjected to pressure. This period is known as the Mihna.

The Mihna presents the first and most striking 'freedom of thought' paradox in Islamic history: a school that greatly valued reason attempted to force its own views upon others. The Mu'tazila championed reason — yet forcibly restricted the reason of others. This is a pattern that repeats itself again and again throughout history: restricting freedom in the name of freedom.

The resistance of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal to the Mihna brought the dominance of the Mu'tazila to an end. During the reign of Caliph al-Mutawakkil (847–861), the Mu'tazila lost its official position. And the Mihna policy remained as a great stain on history.

The Mu'tazila is today particularly celebrated in the West as 'the Islamic Enlightenment.' This assessment is both correct and incomplete. It is correct because the Mu'tazila accorded great value to reason, and this enriched Islamic thought. It is incomplete because during the Mihna it turned reason into an instrument of state power. And this transformation calls into question the sincerity of the value it placed on reason.

V. Ash'ariyyah and Maturidiyyah: Two Summits of Sunni Theology

Imam al-Ash'ari: The Search for the Middle Way

Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari (874–936) was initially trained in the Mu'tazilite school. He worked under his teacher al-Jubbai. But when he reached the age of forty, he recognised that some foundational questions could not be satisfactorily answered by his teacher's views. And he separated from the Mu'tazila.

Al-Ash'ari sought to go beyond both the pure rationalism of the Mu'tazila and the literal reading of the texts characteristic of the Hanbali school. Reason could be used in matters of faith — but within the boundaries drawn by revelation. This search for balance formed the foundation of the Ash'ariyyah school of kalam.

Ash'ariyyah is today the most widespread school of kalam in Sunni Islam. It has spread alongside the Shafi'i and Maliki schools. Al-Azhar University has traditionally taught Ash'arite kalam.

Imam al-Maturidi: A Somewhat Wider Space for Reason

Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (853–944) was born and lived in Samarkand. At roughly the same time as al-Ash'ari, and independently of him, he developed a system of kalam in opposition to the Mu'tazila. The views of the two schools largely overlap; but on certain questions al-Maturidi grants reason a somewhat wider domain.

Maturidiyyah is the theological school of the Hanafi madhhab. It prevails in predominantly Hanafi geographies such as Turkey, Central Asia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The differences between these two schools — Ash'ariyyah and Maturidiyyah — continue to be debated in theological literature, but in practice the adherents of the two schools do not regard each other as deviant.

VI. Wahhabism and Salafism: The Most Controversial Movement of the Modern Age

Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab: A Rupture in the Eighteenth Century

Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792) was born in the Najd region of Arabia. He observed the Islamic world of his era and felt deep disquiet. Showing reverence at graves, supplicating to saints, Sufi practices — these he defined as bid'ah incompatible with tawhid. And he systematised this understanding.

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab formed an alliance with the local tribal leader Muhammad ibn Saud. This alliance is the most decisive example in the modern Middle East of the union of religion and political power. Ibn Saud provided military force; Ibn Abd al-Wahhab provided religious legitimacy. And from this alliance the foundations of the Saudi state were born.

Wahhabism has been criticised by many important Sunni scholars. The own brother of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, Sulayman ibn Abd al-Wahhab, wrote a work rejecting his brother's views. Ottoman scholars described the Wahhabis as 'the modern version of the Kharijites.'

The most fundamental problem with Wahhabism is its tendency toward takfir. The students and followers of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab counted visiting graves as shirk and declared those who maintained this practice to be unbelievers. This understanding of takfir, combined in the twentieth century with the use of oil wealth to spread Wahhabism worldwide, gained an extraordinarily dangerous momentum.

Is Salafism the Same as Wahhabism?

This question is of the utmost importance and is more often than not answered incorrectly. Salafism, at its core, means taking the salaf al-salih — the first three generations of Muslims — as a model. This understanding rests upon Ibn Hanbal, Ibn Taymiyyah, and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah. In the broad sense, Salafism is a far older and far wider concept than Wahhabism.

But today the word 'Salafi' is more often than not used to mean Wahhabi. This terminological confusion has been instrumentalised both to legitimise Wahhabism and to discredit genuine Salaf understanding.

The truth is this: Ibn Taymiyyah is a great scholar; but the selective extraction and radicalisation of some of his views has given rise to a violent movement bearing his name. If you read Ibn Taymiyyah directly, you will find deep differences at many points with the doctrine of ISIS. But ISIS justifies itself by making references to Ibn Taymiyyah.

VII. Sufism: The Inward Journey

The Origin and Legitimacy of Sufism

Sufism is a tradition of knowledge and life that places the inner dimension of Islam — its spiritual depth — at the centre. Beyond the *zahir* — outward — dimension of religious practice, it investigates the *batini* — inward — dimension. Closeness to God, purity of heart, the discipline of the *nafs*, and spiritual maturation are the central subjects of Sufism.

The roots of Sufism rest directly in the Quran and the Sunnah. The periods of contemplation the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) spent at Hira, the spiritual depth of the Companions, and the concept of *ihsan* — worshipping God as though one sees Him — are the first seeds of Sufism.

In the hadith on *ihsan*, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) says: ‘*Ihsan* is that you worship God as though you see Him. If you do not see Him, know that He sees you.’ This hadith is one of the foundational references of Sufism.

During the Golden Age of Islamic civilisation, Sufism forged a deep relationship with both knowledge and art. Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207–1273), Ibn Arabi (1165–1240), Yunus Emre (1238–1320), Haji Bektash Wali (1209–1271) — these were both great mystics and great poets and thinkers. Their works have deeply influenced both Muslims and non-Muslims across the centuries.

Critiques Directed at Sufism

Sufism has throughout history encountered serious criticisms from both within and without. These criticisms cannot be dismissed.

The first criticism: the Quranic and Prophetic basis of some Sufi practices is debated. Supplicating at graves, interposing saints as intermediaries, using music as an act of worship — these have been assessed by the great majority of Sunni jurisprudence as at least debatable, and at times as bid‘ah.

The second criticism: certain Sufi orders, over time, sacralised the authority of the shaykh to such a degree that healthy critical discourse became impossible. The understanding that ‘whatever the shaykh says is correct’ has weakened both individual freedom and social inquiry.

The third criticism: certain Sufi understandings have overlooked the practical, social, and political message of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), focusing exclusively on individual spiritual experience. This divorces religion from social responsibility.

That said, it must be said that the great representatives of Sufism were, for the most part, far removed from these criticisms. The truly great mystics both lived a deep inner life and made great contributions to their communities. To reject Sufism wholesale would be to overlook this great heritage. But to accept it without question is equally mistaken.

VIII. Knowledge and Power: History’s Most Dangerous Relationship

The Scholar and the Sultan: A Recurring Tension in History

There is a dynamic that unites all the schools and affects all of them: the relationship between knowledge and

power. This relationship is perhaps the most critical and most violated tension in the history of Islam.

In the ideal, the scholar speaks the truth; the sultan applies it. The scholar can say to the sultan ‘this is wrong.’ The sultan does not silence the scholar. When this balance is maintained, both knowledge and power preserve their legitimacy.

But in practice this balance was perpetually broken throughout history. Sultans had fatwas written by scholars to legitimise their power. Scholars gained prestige and wealth by drawing near to court circles. And in the process there emerged a fatwa culture that could be summarised as ‘whatever the sultan wants is correct.’

The Abbasid caliph al-Mansur wished to appoint Imam Abu Hanifah as chief qadi; Abu Hanifah refused and was imprisoned. The Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun forced Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal to accept the Mihna policy; Ibn Hanbal refused and was flogged. The Umayyad caliph Hisham punished Imam Malik for his fatwa on forced divorce; Malik did not retreat.

These three examples show the essence of how the greatest scholars of history related to power: they paid a price to speak the truth. And their acceptance of this cost was the very quality that made them great.

Court Scholars: Knowledge in the Service of Power

But not every scholar was able to pay this price. In every period of history, there were scholars who kept close to the sultan, who gave the fatwa that power desired. These figures are known as ‘court scholars’ and are among the most controversial figures in Islamic history.

The existence of the court scholar produces extraordinarily dangerous consequences. For when

someone who speaks in the name of religion becomes the voice of power, they damage both religion and social justice simultaneously. People are compelled to accept the oppression of those in power as ‘what God has willed.’ And this acceptance is profoundly harmful to both faith and reason.

This dynamic continues today. In many Muslim-majority countries, state-controlled religious institutions produce legitimacy for those in power. These institutions at times justify the most manifest injustices through religious terminology. And this justification damages the religious as well as the political health of society.

Part Closing

The School of Law Is an Instrument, Not an End

Throughout this part we have examined an extraordinarily wide geography and an extraordinarily deep historical process. From the four Sunni schools to the Ismailiyyah; from the Zaydiyyah to the Kharijites; from the Mu’tazila to the Ash’ariyyah; from Wahhabism to Sufism; and the tension between knowledge and power.

The essence of all of this narrative is: a school of law is an instrument. Methodological frameworks developed in order to reach truth; structures built in order to answer the needs of people. But instruments become dangerous when they become ends in themselves.

The person who equates their school with truth renders it unquestionable. An unquestionable school, over time, becomes an instrument of power. And a school that has

become an instrument of power imprisons people instead of liberating them.

The greatest scholars in history, while remaining committed to their own schools, did not identify with them. Al-Shafi'i criticised some of Imam Malik's views — yet counted him as his teacher. Ahmad ibn Hanbal disagreed with some of al-Shafi'i's views — yet recognised him as an imam. This balance is profoundly absent from many of today's sectarian conflicts.

In the next part we will examine how these sectarian conflicts became intertwined with Umayyad and Abbasid politics. For sectarian debates are never purely theological. Behind them there always lie political, economic, and social dynamics as well.

"A school of law is a door that opens onto truth. To worship the door itself is to be prevented from reaching truth. The great scholars knew the door — but they also knew how to pass through it."

Bibliography and References

The Holy Quran — Al-An'am 6:159; Al-Hujurat 49:10; Al-Imran 3:103; Al-Baqarah 2:191

Abu Dawud — Sunan, Kitab al-Sunnah (The hadith of the seventy-three sects)

Al-Tirmidhi — Sunan, Kitab al-Iman (Assessment of the hadith on the sects)

Imam Abu Hanifah — Al-Fiqh al-Akbar (The foundational text of Hanafi kalam)

Imam Malik — Al-Muwatta (The founding hadith-jurisprudence compilation of the Maliki school)

Imam al-Shafi'i — Al-Risala (The first systematic work in the principles of jurisprudence)

Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal — Al-Musnad (The summit of hadith scholarship)

Imam al-Ghazali — Fada'ih al-Batiniyyah [The Infamies of the Batinists] (A comprehensive critique of the Ismailiyyah)

Ibn Taymiyyah — Majmu' al-Fatawa [Collection of Legal Opinions] (The foundational reference of Salafi understanding)

Ibn Khaldun — Muqaddimah [Prolegomena] (A sociological analysis of the schools; the knowledge-power relationship)

Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi — Masnavi (The summit of Sufi literature)

Ibn Arabi — Fusus al-Hikam [The Bezels of Wisdom]; Al-Futuh al-Makkiyyah [The Meccan Revelations] (The deepest sources of Islamic Sufi thought)

Al-Shahrastani — Al-Milal wal-Nihal [Religions and Sects] (The classical source on the history of Islamic schools)

Al-Baghdadi — Al-Farq bayna al-Firq [The Differences Among the Sects] (History of sects; early-period classification)

Wilferd Madelung — Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran (Early Shia development)

Marshall Hodgson — The Venture of Islam, Vols. I–II (A comprehensive analysis of the history of the schools)

Farhad Daftary — The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines (An academic history of the Ismailiyyah)

Natana DeLong-Bas — Wahhabi Islam (A study of Wahhabism and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab)

Khaled Abou El Fadl — The Great Theft (A critique of Wahhabism in modern Islam)

Elmalili Hamdi Yazir — Hak Dini Kuran Dili [The True Religion: The Language of the Quran] (Commentary on the relevant verses)

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi — Mektubat [The Letters] (On sectarian unity and avoiding division)

Mustafa Islamoglu — Siyasi Teoloji Elestirisi [Critique of Political Theology] (A contemporary analysis of the knowledge-power relationship)

CHAPTER VI — Schools of Law, Politics, and Ruptures

Part III — The Umayyads, the Abbasids, and the Political Conflicts

*"O mankind, indeed We have created you
from male and female and made you peoples
and tribes that you may know one another.
Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of
God is the most righteous of you."*

(Al-Hujurat, 49:13)

A Note on Lineage: From the Author of This Book

Before beginning this part, I wish to share a personal truth openly. My family lineage traces back to the Abbasid dynasty. This is knowledge that our family tradition has passed down to us.

I say this not as a matter of pride. On the contrary, I say it in order to ask the question most consistent with the spirit of this book: what does coming from Abbasid lineage earn me today? Before God, nothing. For God takes taqwa as His measure, not lineage. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) expressed this most clearly:

*"Whoever is held back by his deeds cannot be
advanced by his lineage."*

(Muslim, Kitab al-Dhikr, 38)

The Abbasid dynasty will be examined in the pages ahead of this book — both in its rise and in its fall. From that dynasty came great scholars and great oppressors. Great civilisations and great destructions. Lineage itself guaranteed neither the rise nor prevented the fall. Every generation was judged by its own taqwa and its own choices.

This truth applies not only to the Abbasid lineage but to all of humanity. The son of Noah (peace be upon him) did not board his father's ark — and drowned. The father of Abraham (peace be upon him) refused his son's call and their paths diverged. Lineage is only a starting point. Taqwa determines where you go from that point.

Now let us enter that history — with both honour and honesty.

I. The Umayyad Dynasty: From Power to Monarchy

Who Were the Umayyads? Roots and Character

The Umayyad dynasty comes from the Banu Umayya branch of the Quraysh tribe to which the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) belonged. Muawiyah ibn Abi Sufyan (602–680) was the founder of this dynasty and its first caliph. Muawiyah's father, Abu Sufyan, was one of the most powerful leaders of Mecca and fought against Islam for many long years. But he embraced Islam at the conquest of Mecca.

Muawiyah proved himself an extraordinarily capable administrator as governor of Syria during the reign of Uthman (may God be pleased with him). He built a strong army and a disciplined administrative structure in Syria.

At the Battle of Siffin against Ali (may God be pleased with him), the side that successfully exploited the pressure of arbitration over Ali's soldiers was Muawiyah's army.

After the martyrdom of Ali (may God be pleased with him) and the withdrawal of Hasan (may God be pleased with him) from the caliphate, Muawiyah became the uncontested leader of the Islamic world. In 661 CE he founded the Umayyad state. But the manner in which this state was founded has been a subject of deep debate in Islamic history: Muawiyah transferred the caliphate to his son Yazid — the first time in Islamic history that a caliph transferred the caliphate to his own lineage by bypassing the mechanism of shura — consultation.

This step is the historical beginning of the transformation of the caliphate into a monarchy. The model of leadership envisioned by Islam was built upon merit and consultation. The Umayyads replaced this with lineage and hereditary succession.

The Strengths of Umayyad Rule

History must be read in a balanced way. To see only the injustices of the Umayyad period is a form of historical blindness. Important achievements were also realised in this period.

The Islamic world reached its widest territorial boundaries during the Umayyad era. Conquests extended westward to Spain and Portugal — Andalusia. The east was reached as far as Central Asia and Sind. The whole of North Africa came under Islamic dominion. This expansion, beyond a military achievement, brought people in different geographies into contact with Islam.

During the reign of Muawiyah, the ongoing conflicts between Arab tribes were largely suppressed. A centralised administrative structure was established. The diwan system — state records — was developed. These

administrative achievements prepared the ground for the brilliant civilisation of the Abbasid period.

Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz (717–720) is the most important figure to emerge from the Umayyad dynasty. His governance was so just that the great majority of Sunni scholars refer to him as ‘the fifth caliph.’ He worked night and day to redress injustices. He abandoned the luxury of the palace. He returned taxes taken unjustly. But he held power for only two years and eight months. And according to the transmitted accounts, he was killed by poisoning. Justice could not endure long in that dynasty.

The Dark Side of Umayyad Rule

The heaviest criticisms of the Umayyad period concern its placing of Arab nationalism ahead of Islam. Islam regards all Muslims as equal brothers. Umayyad rule, however, elevated Arabs above other Muslims. The mawali — non-Arab Muslims — were pushed into a second-class status. They were compelled to pay additional taxes. Joining the army was made more difficult for them. This discrimination directly contradicted the foundational principle of equality in Islam.

Karbala is the greatest stain of the Umayyad period. The martyrdom of Husayn (may God be pleased with him) was not merely the suppression of a political uprising. It was an act of savagery directed against the lineage of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). And the responsibility for this savagery rests upon the Umayyad authority.

Al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf (661–714) is the most controversial figure of the Umayyad period. He was sent as governor to Iraq and established a ruthless authority. He dealt extremely harshly with rebels — but this harshness at times targeted the innocent as well. He besieged Mecca and launched catapults at the Kaaba. This is one of the

greatest shocks in Islamic history. Al-Hajjaj cleared Mecca of rebels; but his methods could not clear consciences.

The knowledge-power relationship during the Umayyad period was also extremely tense. Some scholars were compelled to issue fatwas supporting court policies, or were silenced. Scholars who spoke the truth were met with pressure. This pressure eroded the independence of scholarship.

The End of Umayyad Rule: The Abbasid Revolution

The collapse of the Umayyad dynasty was not merely a military defeat. It was the eruption of accumulated grievance. The oppression of non-Arab Muslims, the deep wound left by Karbala, the reaction against court luxury, and the crises of legitimacy in political power — all of these came together.

In 750 CE the Abbasid movement overthrew Umayyad rule. The last Umayyad caliph, Marwan II, fled to Egypt and was killed there. Abbasid commanders hunted down and killed those of Umayyad lineage in a systematic manner. This massacre is one of the bloodiest transfers of power in history. The Abbasid movement promised justice — but the manner in which it seized power showed from the outset how difficult that promise would be to keep.

One Umayyad prince succeeded in escaping: Abd al-Rahman ibn Muawiyah. He reached Andalusia via North Africa and founded an independent Umayyad emirate there. The Andalusian Umayyad state lived in parallel with the Abbasid dynasty in Baghdad for approximately three more centuries and produced one of the most brilliant periods in Islamic civilisation. What endures in history is justice and civilisation — not lineage.

II. The Abbasid Dynasty: The Zenith of Civilisation and Its Decline

The Abbasid Revolution: The Rise of the Promise

The Abbasids descend from the Prophet's uncle, al-Abbas ibn Abd al-Muttalib. This lineage provided them with a powerful religious legitimacy against the Umayyad dynasty. The message that 'the family of the Prophet is reclaiming power' resonated deeply throughout the Islamic world.

The first Abbasid caliph, Abu al-Abbas al-Saffah (722–754), has gone down in history with the epithet 'the Blood-Shedder.' This epithet reflects the severity of the process by which power was seized. But the real civilisational leap began with his brother Caliph al-Mansur.

Al-Mansur (754–775) founded the city of Baghdad. Built on the banks of the Tigris in 762 CE, this city was named Madinat al-Salam — the City of Peace. Built with its unique circular plan, Baghdad quickly became one of the world's greatest cities. The heartbeat of Islamic civilisation was now here.

The Political Ground of the Golden Age: Harun al-Rashid and al-Ma'mun

Caliph Harun al-Rashid (786–809) is the most famous name of the Abbasid period. His name appears frequently in the Thousand and One Nights — a sign of his place in popular memory. During the reign of Harun al-Rashid, Baghdad reached its political and cultural zenith.

Harun al-Rashid laid the foundations of Bayt al-Hikmah. He initiated the translation movement. He established diplomatic relations with both East and West. His correspondence with the Carolingian emperor

Charlemagne has been entered into history — two powerful civilisations making diplomatic contact in peace.

But the most debated event of Harun al-Rashid's reign is the fall of the Barmakid family. This Persian-origin bureaucratic family, which had governed the state for years, fell from favour overnight. The family patriarch, Yahya al-Barmaki, was imprisoned and his sons were killed. The precise reason remains unknown; but this event shows how fragile the balances of power within the court were.

Caliph al-Ma'mun (813–833) is perhaps the most intellectually inclined member of the Abbasid dynasty. He carried Bayt al-Hikmah to its zenith. He personally invested in the translation movement. He engaged in debate with scholars from different religions and cultures. His passion for learning was beyond question.

But al-Ma'mun is also the architect of the Mihna policy. His declaration of Mu'tazilite kalam as state policy and his forcing of scholars to conform to it was a stance that stood in complete contradiction with the value he placed on learning. It is the most striking historical example of how a great mind can fall into contradiction through intoxication with power.

Learning in the Abbasid Period: The Heart of Civilisation

The most enduring legacy of the Abbasid period is undoubtedly the works produced in the field of learning. The great majority of the figures examined in Chapter V worked under Abbasid patronage or in intellectual environments parallel to the Abbasid era. Al-Khwarizmi worked at Bayt al-Hikmah. Ibn al-Haytham lived in a period that extended from the Abbasid cultural heritage. And Ibn Khaldun is a distant descendant of the Abbasid intellectual climate.

In the Abbasid period, the institutional structure of learning was strengthened. Libraries were built. Hospitals — bimaristan — were established. Observatories were opened. Madrasas became widespread. These institutions prepared the ground for knowledge to be produced and transmitted not only in the hands of the few but across a broad social base.

An important social reality of this period also merits attention: with the Abbasid era, non-Arab Muslims — Persians in particular — gained a far more influential position in the domains of state and learning. This was an institutional confirmation of the universality of Islam. Merit, not lineage, became the determining factor. At least for a certain period.

Political Decline in the Abbasid Period: Decay from Within

But the luminous pages of the Abbasid period cannot conceal the process of decline. This decline began not from without but from within. And it followed an entirely familiar pattern.

The first factor: court luxury and moral collapse. The simplicity shown by the early Abbasid caliphs gave way over time to great palaces, large harems, music, and entertainment. This luxury both exhausted the financial resources and caused the rulers to lose touch with reality.

The second factor: the rise of the Turkish military class. In the ninth century, the Abbasid caliphs began to use soldiers of Turkish origin to strengthen their armies. These soldiers quickly became palace guards. And the guards were transformed over time into a power that made and unmade caliphs. The caliph was still nominally the leader on paper; but real power lay in the hands of Turkish commanders. This is the beginning of the effective end of Abbasid power.

The third factor: the Buyids and the Seljuks. In the tenth century, the Buyid dynasty seized Baghdad. The Abbasid caliph remained only as a religious symbol. In the eleventh century the Seljuks took control. Both showed formal respect to the Abbasid caliph but held real power in their own hands.

The fourth factor: the independence of provincial powers. The Islamic world had spread across such a vast area that it became increasingly difficult for central authority to control. Local dynasties arose in different regions: the Tulunids in Egypt, the Samanids in Iran, the Aghlabids in North Africa. These recognised the superiority of the Abbasid caliph in theory — but operated independently in practice.

The Fall of Baghdad: 1258 — One of History's Darkest Days

In February 1258, the Mongol army under the command of Hulagu Khan besieged Baghdad. The Abbasid caliph al-Musta'sim refused to surrender. But the resistance was hopeless. The city fell.

What happened in the days that followed is described by historians as 'the greatest catastrophe in Islamic civilisation.' Estimates vary, but hundreds of thousands of people were killed. Caliph al-Musta'sim and his family were massacred. Palaces were burned. Libraries were destroyed. The books of Bayt al-Hikmah were thrown into the Tigris. According to the tradition, the waters of the river ran the colour of ink for days.

This was not merely the destruction of a city. It was the annihilation of centuries of accumulated learning and culture. Works that existed nowhere else in the world were erased from history on those days. Humanity will never fully know what was lost in those libraries.

The Abbasid dynasty had effectively come to an end. The Mamluk Sultans of Egypt invited a member of the Abbasid lineage to Cairo as a symbolic 'caliph.' This symbolic caliphate lasted until the Ottoman conquest of Egypt in 1517. After that, the Ottoman sultans declared that they had assumed the title of caliph.

III. Lineage and Taqwa: The Oldest and Most Enduring Tension

The Appeal of Lineage: Why Is It Always Dangerous?

Both the Umayyad and the Abbasid dynasties grounded their legitimacy partly in lineage. The Umayyads were members of the Quraysh. The Abbasids were members of the Prophet's family. These bonds of lineage automatically provided prestige in the eyes of society.

But this appeal of lineage always carries a dangerous tendency: those who possess noble lineage may use it as a privilege they have not earned. The Quran shows this tendency most clearly in the account of the son of Noah:

"And Noah called to his Lord and said: My Lord, indeed my son is of my family; and indeed, Your promise is true. He said: O Noah, indeed he is not of your family; indeed, he is one whose work was other than righteous."

(Hud, 11:45-46)

This verse is the sharpest Quranic expression of the moment when lineage and worth are separated from each other. A prophet's son was not counted as that prophet's

family. For family is founded not on blood but on a shared bond of taqwa.

When the history of the Abbasid and Umayyad dynasties is viewed through this lens, the picture becomes clear. Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz was of Umayyad lineage — but his taqwa made him an exception within his own dynasty. Al-Ma'mun was of Abbasid lineage — but the Mihna policy marks the moment he grew distant from taqwa. Lineage guaranteed neither the rise nor prevented the fall.

The Farewell Sermon of the Prophet: The Measure Valid for All Eternity

At the Farewell Hajj, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) addressed approximately one hundred and twenty-four thousand Companions. And in that historic sermon, he spoke a sentence that closed the question of lineage for all time:

"O people! Your Lord is one, your father is one. Know that an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor a non-Arab over an Arab; a red person over a black, nor a black over a red — except by taqwa."

(Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Musnad, 23489)

This sentence was spoken at the Prophet's final hajj, before the greatest assembly. In terms of the number of witnesses, it is one of the greatest declarations in the history of humanity. And the message was summarised in a single sentence: the only measure is taqwa.

After this declaration, the depth of contradiction carried by the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties' understanding of privilege built on lineage becomes visible. And this contradiction is not unique to those dynasties. Today, in many Muslim societies, discrimination by lineage, the status of sayyid — descendant of the Prophet — and the concept of tribal superiority are alive and powerful.

All of these understandings are contrary to the spirit of the Farewell Sermon. And so long as this contrariness is maintained knowingly, those societies are living in the Prophet's name while practising in reality the precise opposite of his message.

The Great Scholars: They Grew Great Through Taqwa, Not Lineage

Looking at history, the great majority of Islam's greatest scholars came not from noble families but from middle or lower social strata. This is not accidental.

Imam Abu Hanifah was the son of a former slave whose father had worked at the Sasanian court. Al-Khwarizmi came from a modest region of Central Asia. Ibn al-Haytham was born into a middle-class family in Basra. Ibn Khaldun grew up amid the political upheavals of North Africa.

What made these people great was not lineage. Their curiosity, their industry, their honesty, and their taqwa made them great. Many people of noble lineage passed through history without leaving a trace. Many people of no noble lineage transformed the heritage of humanity.

Asabiyyah — group solidarity — makes the rise of a society possible; but the carrier of this asabiyyah is a shared bond of values far more than a bond of blood. This observation of Ibn Khaldun is the most accurate analysis of both the Umayyad and the Abbasid experience.

IV. Knowledge and Power: The Lesson of the Abbasid Period

How Does Power Shape Knowledge?

One of the most important lessons of the Abbasid period is that it shows how power can both elevate and corrupt knowledge. These two dimensions existed simultaneously.

Power elevated knowledge: Bayt al-Hikmah was built with the material support of the caliph. The translation movement was realised with state funding. Observatories were built at the command of sultans. Without these investments, the realisation of that great intellectual production would have been far more difficult.

Power corrupted knowledge: the Mihna policy forced scholars to abandon their views. Court scholars issued the fatwas that power desired. Some scholars could not express their genuine views — they were either silenced or self-censored.

This contradiction is recorded in history as the deepest paradox of civilisation. Knowledge grows when it is free. Under pressure it contracts. But to grow it frequently needs the source — that is, power. And the source inevitably imposes conditions.

The common feature of those who transcended this paradox is as follows: they made use of power — but they were not dependent on it. They were prepared to pay a price for their own truth. And this courage saved them from being mere court intellectuals.

The Responsibility of the Scholar: To Speak the Truth

This picture presents a responsibility that retains its validity today: the stance of the scholar before power.

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) says:

"The most virtuous form of jihad is to speak a word of truth before a tyrannical sultan."

(Abu Dawud, Malahim 17; al-Tirmidhi, Fitān 13)

This hadith sets out the responsibility of the scholar before power with extraordinary clarity. Speaking the truth is not a virtue — it is an obligation. And the price paid in fulfilling this obligation has been defined as the most virtuous form of jihad.

Imam Abu Hanifah, Imam Malik, and Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal fulfilled this responsibility. And they paid the price. Their names in history have endured far more permanently than the names of those who merely lived in comfortable accommodation with those in power.

This truth has not changed today. Religious functionaries who live in harmony with power have an easier life in the short term. But the measure of history is not the short term. The measure of history is fidelity to truth.

Part Closing

Lineage Is the Starting Point, Taqwa Is the Destination

Throughout this part we have examined the history of two great dynasties, the tension between lineage and taqwa, and the paradox of the knowledge-power relationship.

The most fundamental truth emerging from this narrative is this: in history, no lineage has ever guaranteed greatness independently of taqwa. Neither Umayyad lineage nor Abbasid lineage. Even descent from the lineage of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), as the example of Yazid shows, did not make its possessor great.

But taqwa can transcend any lineage. Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz tried to transform, from within, a dynasty built on oppression — with sincerity of intention and by holding

firmly to taqwa. This effort was not sufficient to change the dynasty; but it made him one of the most respected names in history.

As the author of this book, I wish to say this: coming from Abbasid lineage is neither a cause for pride nor an escape from responsibility. This lineage tells me only this: read that history more carefully. Learn from its summits; take heed from its falls. And in the end, do not forget that the only measure is taqwa.

In the next part, we will examine the profound effects of these great political conflicts on the culture of ijtihad and the tradition of scholarship. For politics shapes not only power but thought as well.

"Lineage shows where you began. Taqwa determines where you go. And history remembers only where you went."

Bibliography and References

The Holy Quran — Al-Hujurat 49:13; Hud 11:45–46; Al-Baqarah 2:124; Al Imran 3:33–34

Muslim — Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Dhikr 38 (The hadith on deeds holding back lineage)

Ahmad ibn Hanbal — Musnad, 23489 (The relevant passage from the Farewell Sermon)

Abu Dawud — Sunan, Malahim 17 (The hadith on speaking truth before a tyrannical sultan)

Al-Tirmidhi — Sunan, Fitan 13 (The most virtuous form of jihad)

Al-Tabari — Tarikh al-Rusul wal-Muluk [The History of Prophets and Kings] (The primary source for the Umayyad and Abbasid periods)

Ibn Kathir — Al-Bidaya wal-Nihaya [The Beginning and the End] (A comprehensive Islamic history including the fall of Baghdad)

Ibn Khaldun — Muqaddimah [Prolegomena] (A sociological analysis of the Umayyad-Abbasid periods; the theory of asabiyyah)

Al-Baladhuri — Futuh al-Buldan [The Conquests of the Lands] (The Umayyad conquests and administrative structure)

Al-Ya‘qubi — Tarikh al-Ya‘qubi [The History of al-Ya‘qubi] (The Abbasid period; court life and political dynamics)

Al-Mas‘udi — Muruj al-Dhahab [Meadows of Gold] (The cultural and political history of the Abbasid period)

Hugh Kennedy — The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates (An academic analysis of the Umayyad-Abbasid transition)

Hugh Kennedy — When Baghdad Ruled the Muslim World (A comprehensive English source on the Abbasid period)

David Wasserstein — The Caliphate in the West (The Andalusian Umayyad state)

Thomas Allsen — Mongol Imperialism (The Mongol invasion and the fall of Baghdad)

Elmalili Hamdi Yazir — Hak Dini Kuran Dili [The True Religion: The Language of the Quran] (Commentary on Al-Hujurat 13 and Hud 45–46)

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi — Hutbe-i Shamiyye [The Damascus Sermon] (Political upheavals and the renaissance of Islam)

CHAPTER VII

From Andalusia to the Ottomans

Part I — Andalusia: The Place Where the West Was Born

*"Say: Are those who know equal to those
who do not know?"*
(Al-Zumar, 39:9)

A Bridge from the Previous Chapter: Divided but Productive

In the previous chapter we saw the first great political and theological ruptures of the Islamic world. Periods of civil strife, sectarian divisions, the power struggles of the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties, and the dangerous convergence between learning and politics. Within this picture, one dimension of civilisation was in constant production. While the ruptures were deepening, in another geography seeds were germinating; on another horizon, the dawn of a new civilisation was preparing to break.

That dawn broke in Andalusia.

Andalusia is not merely the name of a geography. Andalusia is the greatest and most enduring manifestation of Islamic civilisation on the European continent. And this

manifestation still continues its influence today — whether we are aware of it or not.

In this part we will examine Andalusia in all its dimensions — from the first days of the conquest to the pain of its fall; from the magnificence of Cordoba to the Arabic inscriptions hidden in Spain's cathedrals. And most importantly: the decisive role played by the knowledge Andalusia produced in Europe's emergence from its 'dark ages.'

But in this part we will also see a truth: the collapse of Andalusia cannot be explained solely by the external pressure of the Reconquista. Andalusia dissolved from within as well. And the roots of this dissolution lie, again, in the same place: the disruption of the balance between knowledge and faith. To see this truth will prepare a critical foundation for understanding the Ottoman question we will address in the parts that follow.

I. The Conquest: A Speed History Did Not Anticipate

Tariq ibn Ziyad: A One-Way Ticket

In the spring of 711 CE, an army of 7,000 men crossed the strait known today as Gibraltar from North Africa. The commander was Tariq ibn Ziyad — of Berber origin, Muslim, a warrior. It is narrated that he had the ships burned to eliminate the possibility of returning to the lands left behind. This has entered history as a symbolic gesture: 'There is no going back. Either conquest or martyrdom.'

Standing against them was the army of the Visigoth Kingdom — a kingdom that had rotted from within. A

crisis of governance, wars over succession, and a deep gulf between rulers and people had effectively destroyed Visigoth power from the inside. Tariq ibn Ziyad entered at the very heart of this collapse.

At the Battle of Guadalete (711), the Visigoth army was routed. King Roderic lost his life in battle. And the gates of the Iberian Peninsula were thrown wide open. Within two years, the greater part of the peninsula passed into Muslim control. This is a geographical transformation of a breadth and speed rare in history.

But this conquest was not merely a military achievement. The understanding of governance that followed the conquest is at least as important as the conquest itself. For conquering a geography is straightforward; building an enduring civilisation there is another matter entirely.

Justice in the First Days of the Conquest: Three Faiths Living Together

The most striking feature of Muslim governance in Andalusia, in its first period, is the understanding of tolerance it displayed. This tolerance came not from naïveté or weakness, but from the foundational principles of Islam.

Muslims, Christians, and Jews lived together in Andalusia. This coexistence entered history as ‘convivencia’ — living together. Christians were able to worship in their own churches. Jews were liberated from the oppression to which they had been subjected under the Visigoths, and under Muslim governance experienced one of the most free periods in their history. This fact is confirmed by many Jewish historians as well.

*"God does not forbid you from being
righteous and acting justly towards those
who have not fought you because of your*

religion and have not driven you out of your homes."

(Al-Mumtahanah, 60:8)

This verse defines the actual practice of Andalusia's first period. People of different faiths worked and produced in the same city, on the same street, sometimes in the same building. This picture was the realisation, in eighth-century Europe, of the model established by the Constitution of Medina in the seventh century.

But it would be misleading to think that this coexistence rested only on an emotional tolerance. The coexistence was also nourished by a practical need: production. When minds from different traditions came together, they produced more. Jewish scholars learned Arabic; Arab scholars read Hebrew texts. Christian philosophers encountered Islamic theology; Muslim physicians deepened their knowledge of Greek medicine. This meeting of minds transformed Andalusia into the most productive intellectual environment of its age.

II. Cordoba: The Light of the World

The Anatomy of a City: Numbers and Reality

In the tenth century, Cordoba — today's Córdoba — was unquestionably Europe's largest and most developed city. The estimated population ranged between 500,000 and one million. To put this figure in perspective: at the same period, London's population was approximately 10,000, and Paris's around 20,000–30,000.

Cordoba had more than 300 mosques, 70 libraries, and 900 bathhouses. Lamps burned along the roads to provide night illumination. While people in other European cities

walked through muddy streets, Cordoba had paved stone roads. The sewage system was functioning. Hospitals were in service.

The palace-city of Madinat al-Zahra, founded by Caliph Abd al-Rahman III, was built near Cordoba. This vast complex — a palace, a city, an administrative centre — was one of the greatest construction projects of its time. Ten thousand workers took part in its construction. Its walls were decorated with marble; its ceilings with golden and silver reliefs.

But to define Cordoba only by stone and marble is to leave the picture incomplete. Its true greatness lay in the minds within it.

The Libraries of Cordoba: A Fortress of Knowledge

Caliph al-Hakam II (961–976) was one of the greatest book collectors in history. His library is reported to have contained 400,000 volumes — a figure that surpasses the total book count of many European countries even in much later centuries.

Al-Hakam did not content himself with collecting books. He invited scholars from different cities to Cordoba. He provided them with salaries. He created conditions for research. This is one of the historical examples of state-funded science policy.

What was held in those libraries? The complete works of Aristotle. The medical books of Galen. The geometry of Euclid. The astronomy of Ptolemy. The philosophy of al-Farabi. The medical encyclopaedia of Ibn Sina. And alongside all these, the original works of Andalusian scholars themselves. The generations who read this accumulation and added new layers to it created the intellectual flowering of Andalusia.

In Cordoba, learning was not the exclusive domain of men. The sources of the period record that the number of literate women in Andalusia was incomparably higher than in the rest of Europe. Female scribes worked in the court of al-Hakam. This is a most remarkable picture for the tenth century — an era in which female literacy was exceptional in Europe.

Learning in Cordoba: One Truth from Three Faiths

The intellectual life of Cordoba rested upon the joint production of three faiths. The most beautiful example of this coexistence is the translation movement itself.

Caliph al-Hakam II sent an envoy to the Byzantine emperor in Constantinople requesting a copy of Dioscorides' medical work *Materia Medica*. The emperor sent it as a gift. But the book was in Greek. In Cordoba there was no one who could translate it. Accordingly, a Christian monk from Byzantium, Nicolaus, was invited to Cordoba. He worked there together with the Jewish scholar Hasdai ibn Shaprut. And with this Christian-Jewish collaboration, the Arabic translation was completed.

This scene can be read as a single anecdote. But in truth it summarises the working principle of a civilisation: take truth from wherever it resides. Work with whoever knows best. Knowledge transcends identity.

Among the figures who emerged from this productive environment of Cordoba are Ibn Rushd (Averroes), Ibn Tufayl, Maimonides — the Jewish philosopher — and many others. Maimonides had mastered both Jewish and Islamic philosophy with equal depth; he wrote works in Arabic and is today recognised as an important figure in both Islamic and Jewish intellectual history.

III. What Andalusia Gave the World: The Awakening of Europe

The Truth the West Does Not Know: The True Mother of the Renaissance

In European historiography, the passage from the ‘Dark Ages’ to the ‘Renaissance’ is generally told as follows: Europeans rediscovered the heritage of ancient Greece and Rome, and this rediscovery brought them into the light. This narrative is both correct and seriously incomplete.

What is missing is this: that heritage of ancient Greece and Rome was not in a place accessible to Europeans. The great majority of those texts had centuries earlier been translated into Arabic, preserved within the Islamic world, and enriched there. Europeans gained access to this heritage not directly but through Andalusia.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, great translation movements began in Toledo, Palermo, and Salerno. Arabic texts were translated into Latin. Among these texts were: Ibn Sina’s *Al-Qanun fi al-Tibb*; Ibn al-Haytham’s *Book of Optics*; al-Khwarizmi’s work on algebra; al-Battani’s astronomical studies; al-Farabi’s philosophical works; and Ibn Rushd’s commentaries on Aristotle.

The commentaries of Ibn Rushd in particular aroused a profound resonance in Europe. Under his Latin name ‘Averroes,’ he became something like a divine authority for European Scholastic thinkers. Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Roger Bacon — all of Europe’s great medieval philosophers read, cited, and debated Ibn Rushd.

The Western historian Will Durant summarises this reality: ‘Muslim Spain gave to European culture its health, its medicine, its philosophy, its mathematics, and its astronomy. And without this transmission, the European Renaissance would have occurred much later, much more slowly — or perhaps not at all.’

The Toledo School of Translation: History’s Greatest Knowledge Transfer

Toledo passed to the Kingdom of Castile during the Reconquista in 1085. But the Christian administration did not destroy the intellectual accumulation of the city. On the contrary, it wished to use it.

In the twelfth century, Toledo was transformed into the world’s greatest centre of translation. Jewish and Mozarab — Arabic-speaking Christian — academics who knew Arabic worked alongside European scholars who knew Latin. A two-stage process was generally followed: someone who knew Arabic would translate the text into Spanish; then a European who knew Spanish would render it into Latin.

A single figure is sufficient to understand the scope of this translation project: within a century, hundreds of works were rendered into Latin across the fields of medicine, philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, optics, chemistry, and history. And these works were used as textbooks in European universities.

The earliest curriculum of the University of Oxford was to a great degree composed of these translations. The University of Paris was similarly nourished by this transmission. That is to say, the European institutions counted today among the world’s most prestigious universities were built in part upon the works of Muslim scholars.

To say this is not to make a claim of superiority. It is history itself. And without knowing this history, it is not possible to read correctly the current condition of either Europe or the Islamic world.

Agriculture, Architecture, and Art: The Visible Heritage

The legacy of Andalusia was not only books and ideas. The land, the stone, and plants also carried this heritage.

Andalusian Muslims brought irrigation techniques from Arabia and Iraq to Europe. The orange, the lemon, sugarcane, rice, cotton, and saffron — all of these entered Europe through Andalusia. Today, hundreds of words in Spanish derive from Arabic: ‘azúcar’ — sugar — from the Arabic ‘sukkar’; ‘almohada’ — pillow — from ‘al-makhaddah’; ‘alcázar’ — fortress — from ‘al-qasr.’ Language preserves its memory even when people forget.

The architectural mark left is still standing today and visited by millions of tourists every year. The Alhambra Palace in Granada is one of the most recognised works of Islamic architecture worldwide. The slender columns, the muqarnas — honeycomb-vaulted — ceilings, the geometric ornamentation, and the gardens in which water serves both aesthetic and cooling functions — all of these are the concrete reflection of Islamic civilisation’s aesthetic understanding.

The Great Mosque of Cordoba — today converted into a cathedral, the Mezquita — was built in the eighth century. Additions were made to it repeatedly. When you enter today, you encounter that magnificent forest of hundreds of columns. This building is a work that far surpasses its era in both technical engineering and aesthetic terms.

IV. The Collapse of Andalusia: A Fortress Demolished from Within

The Reconquista: Pressure from Without

Andalusia was established in 711. And it came to an end in 1492. Eight hundred years. This is the longest-enduring Muslim presence on the European continent.

The Reconquista — the Reconquest — is the name for the process by which the Christian kingdoms reclaimed the Iberian Peninsula from the Muslims. This process advanced gradually over the centuries. It began in the north; first the small Christian kingdoms grew stronger, then united, then advanced southward. Toledo fell in 1085. Cordoba in 1236. Seville in 1248. And finally Granada, in 1492.

But this external pressure alone does not explain the collapse of Andalusia. If Andalusia had remained unified and strong, the Reconquista could not have achieved success to this degree. External pressure conquers a fortress only when the interior has already decayed.

Internal Decay: The Taifa Period and Fragmentation

The greatest mistake of Andalusia was political fragmentation. After the collapse of the Umayyad caliphate centred in Cordoba in 1031, Andalusia was divided into dozens of small principalities — the taifas. These principalities were in constant conflict with one another.

The point to which this conflict arrived is most instructive: some taifa emirs received military assistance from Christian kingdoms. They fought their fellow Muslims with Christian soldiers. Political calculation had long since left religious identity and common destiny behind.

This picture is one of the most striking confirmations of Ibn Khaldun's theory of *asabiyyah*: when social solidarity dissolves, even the smallest external pressure can lead to destruction. The military capacity of Andalusia was still present. But the will that held that capacity together — the sense of shared identity — was in pieces.

The Almoravids and the Almohads: Saviours Who Came Too Late

In response to the fragmentation of Andalusia, two great movements rose from North Africa. The first were the Almoravids (al-Murabitun); the second, the Almohads (al-Muwahhidun).

The Almoravids crossed into Andalusia in 1086. Initially they halted Christian attacks. The Battle of Sagrajas (Zallaqa) in 1086 temporarily stopped the Reconquista. But the Almoravids over time adopted a rigid religious stance and began to restrict the intellectual openness of Andalusia. The works of Ibn Rushd were burned during the Almohad period. Ibn Rushd himself was sent into exile.

This point is of the utmost importance: the forces that tried to protect Andalusia from outside suffocated it from within. Military strength cannot replace intellectual freedom. And without intellectual freedom, civilisation cannot stand.

1492: The Last Day

On 2 January 1492, the last Muslim ruler of Granada — Abu Abdallah, called 'Boabdil' by the Spanish — handed the keys of the city to Queen Isabella of Castile and King Ferdinand. According to the legend, as he was leaving the city he stopped on a hill and looked back at it one last time. He wept. His mother was beside him and said: 'You are

weeping like a woman over what you could not defend like a man.'

This scene is cruel but instructive. It is the summary of a civilisation's last moment. The tears shed over what could not be defended cannot substitute for the sweat that would have been shed in defending it.

In the same year of 1492, something else also occurred: Christopher Columbus, with Spanish financing, discovered America. As Islamic civilisation's last stronghold in Europe was closing its doors, the energy that had gathered before those doors poured toward a new world. This simultaneity is one of history's most ironic moments.

And one more point: the sea charts and navigation techniques used by Columbus rested to a great degree on the works of Muslim geographers. Andalusia closed — but its knowledge served the discovery of new continents.

V. The Legacy of Andalusia: What Cannot Be Lost

The Stones Were Demolished, the Ideas Remained

After the fall of Andalusia, the Christian administration applied a comprehensive transformation policy. Mosques were converted into cathedrals. Arabic was banned. Muslims were forcibly baptised or exiled. In 1609, the last remaining Moriscos — Christianised Muslims — were also expelled from Spain.

Attempts were made to erase the physical traces. But the traces of ideas cannot be erased. Hundreds of Spanish

words derived from Arabic are still spoken today. The Alhambra still stands. The minaret of the Great Mosque of Cordoba is used today as the bell tower of the cathedral — a Christian function superimposed upon Islamic architecture; but that architecture still stands there.

And most importantly: the knowledge transmitted from Andalusia has been absorbed into the body of Europe. Today when a doctor reads a medical textbook, one of its origins is Ibn Sina. When a mathematician studies algebra, its founder is al-Khwarizmi. When an architect draws inspiration from Andalusian ornamentation, behind it lies eight hundred years of civilisation.

Andalusia was defeated physically. But as a heritage, it won.

From Andalusia to Today: What We Lost and Could Not Protect

There is a question that connects the story of Andalusia to the present: why did that civilisation rise so rapidly, stand for eight hundred years, and ultimately collapse from both without and within?

The answer returns to the foundational concept at the spine of this book: two wings.

Andalusia rose because faith and reason worked together. Ibn Rushd both performed the prayer and commented on Aristotle. Maimonides both read the Torah and wrote medical books. Al-Hakam both became caliph and founded a library. This two-wingedness made production possible.

Andalusia collapsed because this balance was broken. Political fragmentation destroyed the common identity. The rigid religious stance of the Almohad period restricted intellectual freedom. Court luxury dulled social sensitivity.

And external pressure toppled a structure whose interior had long since been emptied.

This process is not a coincidence. It is the inevitable consequence of trying to fly on one wing. And this lesson is not unique to Andalusia. It was lived in the Ottoman period as well. It is being lived today in the Islamic world. And it will continue to be lived — until the two wings come together again.

In the next part, we will look at another power rising simultaneously with the collapse of Andalusia: the Seljuks. And this look will prepare a critical foundation for understanding the rise of the Ottomans.

"For eight hundred years a light burned in the West. Those who extinguished it believed the darkness too would be extinguished. But the light had burned. And it had left its mark. And that mark still speaks."

Bibliography and References

The Holy Quran — Al-Zumar 39:9; Al-Mumtahanah 60:8; Al-Hujurat 49:13

Ibn Khaldun — Muqaddimah [Prolegomena] (A sociological analysis of Andalusia; the taifa period and the dissolution of asabiyyah)

Ibn Rushd — Tahafut al-Tahafut [The Incoherence of the Incoherence]; Commentaries on Aristotle (The philosophical heritage Andalusia transmitted to Europe)

Ibn Tufayl — Hayy ibn Yaqzan (The summit of Andalusian thought; a twelfth-century philosophical novel)

Ibn Hazm — Al-Fasl fi al-Milal [The Decisive Treatise on Religions] (The inter-faith intellectual environment of Andalusia)

Al-Tabari — Tarikh al-Rusul wal-Muluk [The History of Prophets and Kings] (The earliest records of the Andalusian conquest)

Richard Fletcher — Moorish Spain (The most comprehensive English source on the history of Andalusia)

Hugh Kennedy — Muslim Spain and Portugal (The political history of Andalusia)

Maria Rosa Menocal — The Ornament of the World (Convivencia and the intellectual life of Andalusia)

George Saliba — Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance (The Toledo translations and the Renaissance connection)

Charles Burnett — The Introduction of Arabic Learning into Europe (The transfer of knowledge from Arabic into Latin)

Will Durant — The Age of Faith (The contribution of Andalusia to European culture)

Elmalili Hamdi Yazir — Hak Dini Kuran Dili [The True Religion: The Language of the Quran] (Commentary on the relevant verses)

Marshall Hodgson — The Venture of Islam, Vol. II (A comprehensive analysis of Andalusian civilisation)

Anwar Chejne — Muslim Spain: Its History and Culture (The cultural history of Andalusia)

CHAPTER VII — From Andalusia to the Ottomans

Part II — The Seljuks: From the Steppe to Civilisation

*"Travel through the land and observe how
was the end of those before."*

(Al Imran, 3:137)

A Bridge from the Previous Part: The West Closes, the East Opens

In the previous part we saw both the splendour and the collapse of Andalusia. The eight-hundred-year presence of Islamic civilisation in the West closed its doors in 1492. The books of Ibn Rushd had been burned. The mosque of Cordoba had been converted into a cathedral. The last

Muslim ruler had shed tears while handing over the keys of the city.

But history does not freeze at a single point. While a door was closing in the West, another was opening in the East. And the power that opened this door came from the most unexpected of geographies: the steppes of Central Asia.

The Seljuks represent one of the most fascinating transformation stories in Islamic history. Within a few generations, they moved from nomadic steppe people to the guardians and bearers of a great civilisation. This transformation is one of the most striking examples in history, both in its speed and its depth.

But in this part we will not tell the story of the Seljuks simply as a tale of triumph. For during the Seljuk period, the seeds were sown of a rupture that would become far more pronounced in the Ottoman era: the first great example of how the delicate balance between knowledge and faith could be transformed into a political instrument. To see this truth is indispensable for understanding the question of Ebu Suud and the transformation of the Ottoman madrasas.

I. Roots: From the Steppe to Islam

The Encounter of the Turks with Islam

The Turks came into contact with Islam primarily through the trade routes of Central Asia and through contact with Abbasid armies, in the eighth and ninth centuries. This encounter took place not through the sword but, for the most part, through trade, cultural interaction, and the preaching of Muslim scholars.

The acceptance of Islam by the Turkish peoples is an extraordinarily important turning point in historical terms. For this acceptance did not merely add a new population to Islamic civilisation; it gave it new energy, new political power, and a new geographical dimension. The Turks did not carry Islam as they received it; they reshaped it through the filter of their own cultural accumulation.

Seljuk ibn Duqaq, the ancestor of the Seljuk clan, became a Muslim in the late tenth century. This personal conversion changed the destiny of his lineage. His descendants would step onto the stage of history not merely as tribal warriors but as the political representatives of Islam.

The Founding of the Seljuk State: From Dandanaqan to Baghdad

In 1040 CE, in the Dandanaqan plain in the Khurasan region of Iran, a historic battle took place. The Seljuk army inflicted a heavy defeat upon the Ghaznavids, the powerful Iranian dynasty of the time. This battle is the starting point of the Seljuks' rise to become the leading actor in Middle Eastern politics.

After Dandanaqan, the Seljuk advance could not be halted. Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Anatolia came successively under Seljuk dominion. In 1055, Tughril Bey entered Baghdad. And there, a most symbolic moment was lived: the Abbasid caliph, despite being effectively powerless, conferred upon Tughril Bey the title 'Sultan of the East and West.'

This moment is the formal registration of the fundamental transformation in the power structure of Islamic history. The caliph was now only the symbol of religious legitimacy. Real power belonged to the military leaders bearing the title of sultan. And this separation — religious

legitimacy and worldly power in different hands — established an order that would continue through the Ottoman period.

II. Manzikert: The Battle That Opened the Door of History

1071: The Opening of a Door

26 August 1071. On the Mush plain of eastern Anatolia, near what is today Manzikert (Malazgirt), two armies faced each other. On one side, the Seljuk army under Sultan Alp Arslan. On the other, the Byzantine army under Emperor Romanos IV Diogenes — the most powerful Christian army of the era.

Though the figures are debated, the Byzantine army was considerably larger than the Seljuk forces. It included mercenaries drawn from Franks, Pechenegs, Georgians, and Armenians. The Byzantine emperor was certain of victory.

The battle ended in a brilliant tactical triumph for the Seljuks. The Byzantine army was routed. Emperor Romanos IV Diogenes was himself taken prisoner. This is the first recorded instance in Byzantine history of an emperor being captured on the battlefield.

Sultan Alp Arslan's treatment of the captive emperor has entered history in the following dialogue. Alp Arslan asked: 'If I had fallen into your captivity, what would you have done?' The emperor replied: 'Perhaps I would have had you killed, or paraded through the streets of Constantinople.' Alp Arslan said: 'My punishment will be far heavier than yours. I forgive you and set you free.'

Is this scene a historical act of generosity, or a political calculation? It may be both. But the result is that one of the most beautiful examples of Islamic military ethics was put on record. The powerful left his mark on history not by crushing the powerless but by pardoning him.

The Consequences of Manzikert: The Door of Anatolia Was Opened

The most enduring consequence of the Battle of Manzikert was the geographical opening of Anatolia to the Turks. Before the battle, Anatolia was the fortress of Byzantium and a powerful part of the Christian world. After the battle, Seljuk and other Turkish peoples began to flow into Anatolia.

This wave of migration was not merely demographic but cultural and civilisational. The Turks carried Islam to Anatolia. But Anatolia also transformed them. The Turkish-Islamic culture that encountered the ancient civilisations of Anatolia, its Christian traditions, and the Byzantine heritage emerged from this interaction enriched. This enrichment formed one of the foundations of the Ottoman civilisation founded a century later.

Manzikert is referred to in Turkish history as ‘the opening of the door.’ And this metaphor is apt. But it was not only the Turks who passed through that door — the next great wave of Islamic civilisation passed through it as well.

III. Nizam al-Mulk and the Nizamiyyah Madrasas: The First Great Union of Learning and Power

Nizam al-Mulk: Between Statesman and Scholar

One of the most important figures of the Seljuk period is Hasan ibn Ali, known as Nizam al-Mulk (1018–1092), who served as vizier during the reigns of Sultan Alp Arslan and Sultan Malikshah. This name is counted among the greatest statesmen in Islamic history. The legacy he left in the fields of politics, law, and education continued to be determinative for centuries after his death.

Nizam al-Mulk wrote a comprehensive manual of statecraft known in history as the *Siyasatnamah* — The Book of Government. This work is one of the most important texts in Islamic political thought. The principles of just governance, relations with scholars, army organisation, intelligence, and economics — all of these are addressed from a perspective that unites practical experience with theoretical knowledge.

But Nizam al-Mulk's most enduring legacy is not the *Siyasatnamah*; it is the education system he established.

The Nizamiyyah Madrasas: Turning Education into a State Project

The Nizamiyyah Madrasa, founded in Baghdad in 1067, is the first great example in Islamic history of a state-funded, institutional education system. Within a short time this model spread widely; Nizamiyyah madrasas were opened in Nishapur, Isfahan, Basra, and other major cities.

These madrasas attracted the greatest scholars of the age. The most famous example is Imam al-Ghazali. Al-Ghazali served as mudarris — lecturer — at the Baghdad Nizamiyyah Madrasa. His teaching there represented the zenith of the era both in the quality of learning and in the number of students.

What did these madrasas teach? Predominantly jurisprudence, kalam, hadith, and Quranic commentary — that is, the religious sciences. Philosophy and the natural sciences were not at the centre of the curriculum. And here

a most important truth makes itself visible: the Nizamiyyah madrasas placed learning on an institutional footing. But this institutional footing centred on a particular understanding of learning — predominantly the religious sciences — while excluding or relegating other fields to a secondary position.

Was this a deliberate choice? In part, yes. Nizam al-Mulk wished to reinforce the religious legitimacy of the state. The religious sciences were the most direct source of this legitimacy. Philosophy and the rational sciences, by contrast, offered a more ambiguous legitimacy and at times created tension with those in power. For this reason, the institutional preference was made in favour of the religious sciences.

This preference is understandable in its moment. But its long-term consequences were extraordinarily determinative for the course of civilisation. For this model deepened across the centuries. In the Ottoman period it took a far more pronounced and far more rigid form. And ultimately, a deep chasm opened between the learning taught in the madrasas and the realities of everyday life.

Imam al-Ghazali and the Nizamiyyah: A View from One Summit

Imam al-Ghazali (1058–1111) is one of the greatest thinkers of the Seljuk period and of all of Islamic history. His professorship at the Nizamiyyah Madrasa placed him in the unquestionably most prestigious intellectual position of his age. Students travelled from distant cities to attend his classes.

But al-Ghazali, while at this summit, experienced a deep crisis. With his work *Tahafut al-Falasifah* — The Incoherence of the Philosophers — he directed sharp criticisms at philosophy. These criticisms were later answered by Ibn Rushd in his *Tahafut al-Tahafut* — The

Incoherence of the Incoherence. This debate is one of the greatest intellectual confrontations in the history of Islamic thought.

It is of the utmost importance to understand al-Ghazali's criticisms correctly. He did not reject philosophy wholesale. He found mathematical and logical reasoning valuable. What he criticised was the metaphysical conclusions of certain philosophers — particularly on questions such as the eternity of the universe and whether God knows particulars. This limited critique was at times interpreted by later generations in the exaggerated form of 'al-Ghazali killed philosophy.'

This interpretation is itself an error, but it also produced an important consequence: certain circles, relying on al-Ghazali's authority, declared the natural sciences and philosophy wholesale incompatible with Islam. Yet al-Ghazali himself placed great value on both mathematics and logic. But words, over time, become detached from their original owners and are made instruments of different purposes.

The transformation al-Ghazali underwent after his teaching period at the Nizamiyyah is also most instructive. He left this prestigious position. He turned to Sufism. For ten years he wandered through different cities and withdrew into seclusion. And during this period he wrote his greatest work: *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* — The Revival of the Religious Sciences.

This work is the essence of al-Ghazali's message: when knowledge is not lived, it dies. Being memorised and transmitted within an institutional framework does not keep knowledge alive. Knowledge finds its true meaning when it is inscribed in the heart, when it transforms behaviour, when it draws the human being closer to God.

Al-Ghazali gave this message from within the greatest institution of learning of the Seljuk period — then lived it by leaving that institution. This is a scene of instruction on multiple levels.

IV. Learning in the Seljuk Period: The Zenith and the First Cracks

Umar Khayyam: Between Science and Poetry

One of the most fascinating figures of the Seljuk period is Umar Khayyam (1048–1131). Mathematician, astronomer, philosopher, and poet. Khayyam, who carried all four of these identities simultaneously, is a powerful example of the two-winged believer concept — one who embraces both religious and worldly knowledge.

In mathematics he solved cubic equations by geometric methods — an extraordinarily advanced work for the mathematics of his era. The method Khayyam used represents a meeting point of algebraic and geometric thinking six hundred years before Newton.

In astronomy he carried out a calendar reform at the command of Sultan Malikshah. The length of the solar year calculated by Khayyam, when compared with the Gregorian calendar used today, differs by only a matter of seconds. This is a near-perfect calculation obtained in the eleventh century without any modern measuring device.

Khayyam's Ruba'iyat — the Rubaiyat — have been read for centuries both in the East and the West. His poems contain deep and at times controversial thoughts on the transience of life, the value of the moment, and the great questions of existence. Whether the wine imagery in

certain poems is used as a Sufi symbol or in its literal sense has been a subject of debate across the centuries.

The existence of Khayyam says something important about the intellectual climate of the Seljuk period: in that era, scientific inquiry and artistic depth could still coexist. The two wings had not yet separated.

The Assassins: The Anatomy of the First Political Terror

One of the darkest pages of the Seljuk period is the movement of Hasan-i Sabbah and the Assassins he founded. This subject must be addressed not from the perspective of sectarian debate but as one of the earliest and most documented examples in history of violence and manipulation being used as a political instrument.

Hasan-i Sabbah (1050–1124) belonged to the Nizari branch of the Ismailiyyah. In 1090 he seized the fortress of Alamut near Qazvin and used it as his base. He conducted an armed struggle against Seljuk power. But the method he used in this struggle was most distinctive: assassination.

The Assassins targeted specific individuals — generally Seljuk officials and Sunni scholars — and killed them. These assassinations were based on political calculations. Nizam al-Mulk himself lost his life in an Assassin assassination in 1092.

The origin of the name ‘Hashishi’ (Assassin) is debated. Its association with hashish — cannabis — derives largely from the orientalist transmission of Western sources. More reliable sources suggest this name was given by enemies as a term of contempt.

The importance of the Assassins is not only historical. This movement is one of the earliest and most thoroughly documented examples in history of violence being

systematically instrumentalised for an ideological purpose, and of a small group being able to threaten far larger powers through tactical violence. The historical roots of certain methods used by today's political violence organisations reach back to this movement.

The Crusades: The Great External Shock

The greatest external challenge of the Seljuk period was the Crusades. The Crusading movement, which began with the call of Pope Urban II in 1095, was organised with the aim of 'liberating' Jerusalem. This call gave rise to a massive mobilisation in Europe.

In 1099 the Crusaders seized Jerusalem. The massacre that followed the capture of the city is one of the darkest pages in history. Muslims, Jews, and even some Christians received their share of this wave of violence. The Muslim historians of the period recorded this event with deep shock and horror.

The Seljuk world at this time was in the midst of political fragmentation. Different Seljuk branches and local chieftains were unable to act together. This fragmentation facilitated the establishment and entrenchment of the Crusaders.

An effective resistance against the Crusaders became possible only when a unified leadership emerged. This leadership was provided not from the Seljuk dynasty but by Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi — Saladin — who had been trained among their commanders. The Battle of Hattin in 1187 and the subsequent return of Jerusalem to the Muslims shows how the legacy of the Seljuk period was carried by one of its commanders.

The conduct of Saladin after the conquest of Jerusalem was written in history in letters of gold. When the Crusaders had conquered the city, they carried out a massacre. When Saladin conquered it, he left the Christian

inhabitants unharmed. Churches were protected. Christian pilgrims were granted the right of worship. This moral superiority carries great historical significance both for that era and for today.

V. The Transmission of the Seljuk Legacy to the Ottomans: Seeds and Their Consequences

The Madrasa System: Both Gift and Burden

The madrasa system founded by Nizam al-Mulk is the direct ancestor of the Ottoman understanding of education. The Ottoman madrasas both inherited and expanded the Seljuk model. And in the course of this expansion, the initial partial preference — the predominance of the religious sciences — was transformed over time into a complete separation.

During the Seljuk period, the relationship between the madrasas and the court was shaped at an institutional level. The sultan financed the madrasa; the madrasa reinforced the sultan's religious legitimacy. This mutual dependence affected both institutions. The sultan wished to keep the scholar under control. The scholar became dependent on the sultan's support. And this relationship eroded the independence of both parties over time.

And here, the truth that this book most urgently wishes to emphasise makes itself visible: this institutional fusion beginning in the Seljuk period — the intertwining of the institution of learning and the institution of power — would reach its culmination in the Ottoman period with the centralised model of Ebu Suud Efendi and Suleiman the Magnificent. In that model, the rational sciences and the religious sciences would proceed on separate tracks in

separate madrasas. And the result, as we will see in the parts that follow, would be the severing of the two wings of civilisation from each other.

Turkish Culture and Islam: The Value of the Synthesis

One of the most valuable legacies of the Seljuk period is the deep synthesis forged between Turkish culture and Islamic civilisation. This synthesis is not merely a superficial cultural blending. It is a creative encounter in which two powerful traditions transformed each other.

The Turkish tradition of customary law — the *töre* — placed merit and justice at the forefront of statecraft. When Islam's emphasis on justice encountered this tradition, a powerful ethic of governance emerged. Alp Arslan's pardon of the captive emperor reflects not only an Islamic value but the noble tradition of the Turks as well.

In the field of architecture, the Seljuks added the Turkish aesthetic sensibility to Islamic architecture. The Seljuk structures of Konya, Kayseri, and Sivas — their mosques, madrasas, and caravanserais — are concrete examples of this synthesis. Their stonework, geometric ornamentation, and caravanserai architecture carry both the Islamic tradition and Central Asian origins.

In the domain of language, Persian became the language of the court and of literature in the Seljuk period. The use of Persian as the scholarly language by a Turkic-speaking dynasty is a reflection of the multilingual nature of the Islamic world. This multilingualism both enriched and disseminated intellectual production.

The Separate Path of the Anatolian Seljuks: Another Summit in Konya

After the fragmentation of the Great Seljuk State, an independent branch was established in Anatolia: the

Sultanate of Rum, with Konya as its capital. This state became an important cultural centre in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

The greatest value Konya gained in this period was Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi. This great mystic of Afghan origin settled in Konya and wrote his immortal work there: the *Masnavi*. This work is one of the summits of Sufi literature, but also a monument of poetry that speaks to the universal human experience.

The presence of Rumi in Konya is not accidental. The Anatolian Seljuks offered a relatively tolerant environment in which people from different cultures and different faiths could live together. This environment prepared the ground for a universal mind like Rumi to flourish.

Rumi says: ‘Come, come, whoever you are, come. Whether you are an infidel, a Zoroastrian, or an idol-worshipper, come. This is not the door of despair. Even if you have broken your vow of repentance a hundred times, come.’ This invitation carries a universality reminiscent of the convivencia of Andalusia. And this universality was nourished by the cultural climate of Seljuk Anatolia.

Part Closing

The Bridge from the Seljuks to the Ottomans

The Seljuks served an extraordinarily important bridging function in Islamic history. While Andalusia was collapsing in the West, a new power was rising in the East. While the Abbasid caliphate was effectively dissolving, the Seljuks assumed the political representation of Islam. While Byzantine dominance over Anatolia was coming to

an end, the Turkish-Islamic synthesis took root in Anatolia.

The most valuable cargo carried by this bridge was not military power alone. The Seljuks endowed the Islamic world with an institutional education system — the madrasas. This system was both a great gift and bore the seeds of a deep problem in the centuries that followed.

The gift was this: knowledge was preserved and transmitted within an institutional framework. Giants like Imam al-Ghazali emerged from within these institutions.

The seed of the problem was this: that institutional framework centred on a particular understanding of knowledge while leaving others outside. And over time, that leaving-outside became an exclusion. Over time that exclusion became a prohibition. And when that prohibition reached the hands of Ebu Suud Efendi in the Ottoman period, it became an institutional wall that definitively separated the two wings of civilisation from each other.

In the next part, we will look at the story of that great rise: the founding of the Ottomans and their ascent to the zenith. We will address both that splendour and the contradictions it carried within it, with honesty.

"The Seljuks came from the steppe and carried civilisation. Civilisation transformed them; they transformed civilisation. But within the burden they carried, there was a crack no one could see."

Bibliography and References

The Holy Quran — Al Imran 3:137; Al-Hujurat 49:13; Al-Mujadilah 58:11

Nizam al-Mulk — Siyasatnamah [The Book of Government] (The foundational text of Seljuk statecraft)

Imam al-Ghazali — Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din [The Revival of the Religious Sciences] (The greatest work born of the Nizamiyyah experience)

Imam al-Ghazali — Tahafut al-Falasifah [The Incoherence of the Philosophers] (Critique of philosophy; its real scope and its misinterpretations)

Ibn Rushd — Tahafut al-Tahafut [The Incoherence of the Incoherence] (Response to al-Ghazali; the Andalusia-Seljuk intellectual dialogue)

Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi — Masnavi (The universal work of Seljuk Anatolia)

Umar Khayyam — Ruba'iyat [The Rubaiyat]; Treatise on Algebra (The unity of science and poetry)

Ibn Kathir — Al-Bidaya wal-Nihaya [The Beginning and the End] (The historical record of Manzikert and the Crusades)

Ibn Khaldun — Muqaddimah [Prolegomena] (A sociological analysis of the Seljuk period)

Al-Tabari — Tarikh al-Rusul wal-Muluk [The History of Prophets and Kings] (Early sources on the Seljuk period)

Claude Cahen — The Formation of Turkey (The process of Turkification of Anatolia)

Carole Hillenbrand — The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives
(An analysis of the Crusades from the Muslim perspective)

Marshall Hodgson — The Venture of Islam, Vol. II (A comprehensive analysis of the Seljuk period)

Andrew Peacock — The Great Seljuk Empire (A current academic source on Seljuk history)

Farhad Daftary — The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines (The Assassins and the Nizari Ismailiyyah)

Elmalili Hamdi Yazir — Hak Dini Kuran Dili [The True Religion: The Language of the Quran] (Commentary on the relevant verses)

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi — Mektubat [The Letters] (Indirect assessments on the transmission of the Seljuk madrasa legacy to the Ottomans)

CHAPTER VII — From Andalusia to the Ottomans

Part III — The Rise of the Ottomans: Splendour and the Crack Within

*"Indeed, God loves those who fight in His
cause in a row as though they are a single
structure joined firmly."*

(Al-Saff, 61:4)

A Bridge from the Previous Part: From Seed to Tree

In the previous part we saw the bridge built by the Seljuks. The madrasas of Nizam al-Mulk had entered history as the first great model of institutional education. But a choice had been made within that model: the religious sciences at the centre, the natural sciences and philosophy at the margins. This choice was understandable in its moment. But it would deepen across the centuries.

The Seljuk state broke apart. Anatolia turned into a mosaic of principalities. The Mongol invasion had devastated the eastern Islamic world. And within this chaos, a small Anatolian principality began, slowly, to grow — at Söğüt, in the valley of the Sakarya.

The name of this principality was the House of Osman — Osmanogulları. And from this small seed would grow one of the most long-lived empires in human history.

In this part we will narrate that growth — both its splendour and the crack within it. Both the gaze of Fatih as he conquered Constantinople and the manner in which the madrasas were divided into two separate worlds during the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent. For the Ottoman Empire is the most comprehensive and most painful historical example of this book's central thesis: how civilisations rise when they are two-winged, and how they stagnate when they remain one-winged.

I. From a Small Principality to an Empire: The Birth of the Ottomans

Osman Bey: A Humble Beginning

Osman Bey (1258–1326), the founder of the Ottoman dynasty, stepped onto the stage of history as the leader of a small principality in the northwest of Anatolia. He had neither a great army nor a great treasury. But he had two things: a powerful vision and an understanding of just governance.

The justice of Osman Bey is made concrete in the stories told of him. He would hear in person the complaints of neighbouring villages. When he learned that an unjust tax had been imposed, he would intervene at once. This approach earned him support from different ethnic and religious groups. Byzantine Christian villagers at times preferred Ottoman rule to Byzantine bureaucrats — because justice transcends the boundaries of identity.

The relationship of Osman Bey with Sheikh Edebali is one of the most beautiful scenes in the founding mythology of the Ottomans. Osman Bey saw in a dream a moon rising from the chest of Edebali and entering his own chest, and from it a great tree rising. Edebali interpreted this dream: ‘My son, sovereignty has been given to you and your lineage.’ And he gave his daughter in marriage to Osman Bey.

Whether this narrative is historical or legendary may be debated. But its symbolic meaning cannot be debated: in its founding, the Ottoman state united religious authority — Sheikh Edebali — with political authority — Osman Bey. This union provided both power and legitimacy. But it was also the harbinger of how dependent religious authority could become on political authority in the centuries that followed.

Orhan and Murad: The Consolidation of the Foundation

Osman Bey's son Orhan (1326–1362) transformed the principality into a genuine state. He established Bursa as the capital, founded the first regular army, opened the first Ottoman madrasa in Bursa, and minted the first Ottoman coin. These steps are concrete signs of a principality's transformation into an institutional state.

The most important event of Orhan's reign was the taking of Gallipoli in 1354. This was the Ottomans' first crossing to the European side. And this crossing fundamentally altered the direction of Ottoman history. The Ottomans were no longer merely an Anatolian principality; they were a power beginning to spread across two continents.

Murad I (1362–1389) made this expansion systematic. Edirne was taken and became the new capital. Wars were fought in the Balkans against Serbs, Bulgarians, and other powers. And in 1389, Murad I was martyred at the Battle of Kosovo. This martyrdom left a deep mark on Ottoman history. But the battle had been won. And the martyrdom of Murad I on the battlefield created a powerful symbolic legacy for subsequent Ottoman rulers: the leader is on the battlefield alongside his people.

II. Yildirim Bayezid and Timur: The Great Shock

Yildirim Bayezid: How Success Can Feed Pride

Bayezid I — known as 'Yildirim,' the Thunderbolt, for the speed of his military campaigns — (1389–1402) transformed the Ottomans into a great power. He besieged Constantinople. He brought the Anatolian principalities under his dominion by force. He inflicted a massive defeat on a Crusader army at Nicopolis (1396). This victory

placed him in the position of Europe's most powerful Muslim ruler.

But in the character of Yildirim Bayezid, a dangerous transformation was taking place — one brought by great successes: pride. The transmitted accounts report that he turned increasingly to luxury and entertainment in court life; that he used excessive harshness in annexing the Anatolian principalities; and that he paid increasingly less heed to the warnings of the scholars around him.

And this pride brought him face to face with one of history's greatest lessons.

The Battle of Ankara (1402): Timur and the Collapse of the Ottomans

Timur — known in the West as Tamerlane — was one of the greatest conquerors and most feared commanders of Central Asia. In 1402, two giant powers faced each other near Ankara.

Before the battle, Timur sent a message to Yildirim Bayezid. The tone of this message was extremely harsh and contemptuous. Bayezid replied with equal harshness. The pride of both sides made war inevitable.

The outcome of the battle was catastrophic from the Ottoman perspective. A significant part of the army was routed. Yildirim Bayezid was himself taken prisoner. And a few months later, he died in captivity. This was a most bitter end — in contrast to Murad I, who had been martyred at Kosovo.

After the Battle of Ankara, the Ottomans entered the 'Interregnum' — the Fetret Devri. The sons of Bayezid fell into a struggle for the throne. This civil war lasted approximately eleven years. The process foreseen by Ibn Khaldun's theory of asabiyyah had revealed itself in the

Ottomans as well: the dissolution of unity had opened the door to external pressure.

But the Ottomans recovered from this shock. And the manner of this recovery showed how deep the roots of the state had grown.

III. Mehmed the Conqueror: The Summit of Two-Wingedness

The Education of a Child: Both Sword and Pen

The greatest name in Ottoman history, Mehmed the Conqueror (1432–1481), has taken his rightful place in history for more than one reason. But the least spoken of and the most important of these reasons is this: Fatih was a two-winged leader.

The education of Mehmed the Conqueror was extraordinarily comprehensive. He learned Arabic, Persian, Latin, Greek, and Serbian. He read mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, history, and strategy. He invited both Muslim and Christian scholars of his era to his court and debated with them. This intellectual curiosity, in a ruler, was an extraordinarily rare quality.

The breadth of Fatih's areas of interest shows how he read the world: he wished to be not merely a conqueror but a builder of civilisation. And this wish was reflected both in what he did and in what he wished to do.

1453: The Closing of an Age, the Opening of an Age

29 May 1453. In the early hours of the morning, Ottoman cannons had repeatedly struck the walls of Constantinople

— the Byzantine capital that had stood for eleven hundred years. And that morning, a breach was opened in the walls.

Mehmed the Conqueror was only twenty-one years old. And when he entered the city, the first thing he did is most significant: he went to the Hagia Sophia. He entered it. He took a handful of earth and placed it on his head. This is the most powerful symbolic expression of humility: this victory is not mine — it is God's.

Then he led the Friday prayer in the Hagia Sophia. This magnificent structure, used as a church since 537 CE, was now a mosque.

What Fatih did thereafter are the works not of a conqueror but of a builder of civilisation. He popularised the name Istanbul for the city, replacing the Greek name Constantinople — though this name had already been in use during the Byzantine period as well. He permitted the Greeks, Armenians, and Jews to remain in the city. He allowed each community to preserve its own religious and legal autonomy — the millet system. He reopened the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate and personally appointed Patriarch Gennadios.

This last detail is of the utmost importance: a Muslim sultan appointing a Christian religious leader. This was a decision born not of power-intoxication but of the union of political intelligence and religious tolerance. After the conquest of Constantinople, not before its entry into Muslim governance, the Greek Orthodox church continued to stand. Indeed, under Ottoman governance in certain periods it breathed more freely than it had under Byzantine rule.

Fatih's Istanbul: A Multi-Voiced City

Fatih wished to build Istanbul not merely as an Ottoman city but as the centre of the world. This vision was reflected in the demographic policy of the city. Greek merchants,

Armenian craftsmen, Jewish scholars, Arab men of learning, Italian traders — all were invited to Istanbul or retained there.

Fatih's court also reflected this plurality. The Italian painter Gentile Bellini came to Istanbul to paint Fatih's portrait. This painting is today exhibited in the National Gallery in London. A Muslim sultan having his portrait painted by a Christian painter — a step controversial both Islamically and politically — shows the unconventional thinking of Fatih.

Fatih had works of the Greek philosophers translated into Turkish. Ptolemy's book of geography was rendered into Turkish. The maps personally prepared by Fatih reflect the most advanced geographical understanding of the era.

And perhaps most strikingly: Fatih was in correspondence with Italian humanists. He maintained intellectual contact with Italy, where the Renaissance was first taking root. This contact contained not only diplomatic but intellectual exchange as well.

The Law Codes of Fatih: Placing Law at the Foundation of the State

Mehmed the Conqueror has entered history not only as a conqueror but as an important architect of law. The law codes — kanunname — he had drawn up systematised the Ottoman state structure both hierarchically and legally.

The law codes of Fatih contain two different legal traditions side by side: Islamic law — sharia — and customary law — 'urf. Customary law consists of regulations introduced by caliphs or sultans that do not directly contradict sharia but go beyond its scope. This dual structure constitutes one of the most original and most debated dimensions of the Ottoman legal system.

This dual structure became a source of tension across the centuries. Religious scholars at times evaluated customary law as lying outside the boundaries of legitimacy. Sultans, on the other hand, defended customary law as an unavoidable requirement of statecraft. And the greatest conflict arising from this tension would be brought to resolution during the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent, at the hands of Sheikh al-Islam Ebu Suud Efendi. But this resolution would at the same time be the beginning of the institutional disruption of that delicate balance between knowledge and faith.

IV. The Continuation of the Rise: From Bayezid II to Selim the Grim

Bayezid II: The Sultan of the Sufi Spirit

After the death of Fatih, Bayezid II (1481–1512) ascended the throne. Bayezid, unlike his father, had an extremely inward-looking character, close to Sufism. He preferred the lodge to the palace and learning to war. For this reason some historians describe him as the ‘dervish sultan.’

One of the most important events of the reign of Bayezid II was the acceptance into Ottoman territories of the Jews expelled from Spain in 1492. When the Jews, crushed under the Inquisition in Spain, took refuge in the Ottomans, Bayezid said: ‘You call Ferdinand a wise king who has impoverished his kingdom and enriched ours?’

These words are the expression of the civilisational self-confidence the Ottomans carried in that period. To accept people from different backgrounds is not a sign of weakness but of strength. And the Jews who came from Spain offered both intellectual and economic contributions to the Ottomans. Printing, medicine, trade

— in many fields, Jewish immigrants added value to Ottoman life.

Selim the Grim: The Gaze Turned Eastward

Selim I — known as ‘Yavuz,’ the Grim — (1512–1520) held a brief but extraordinarily decisive reign. In eight years he approximately doubled Ottoman territory — a speed of expansion rare in history.

The most important victories of Selim the Grim took place in the East. In 1514 he defeated Safavid Shah Ismail at the Battle of Chaldiran. This battle was determinative not only militarily but sectarianly as well. The Ottoman Sunni and the Safavid Shia identity were consolidated. And the tension between these two powers opened a rift that has shaped the politics of the Middle East to this day.

Defeating the Mamluk state in 1516–1517, Selim added Egypt and the Hijaz — Mecca and Medina — to Ottoman territory. This was a development of the utmost symbolic importance: the guardian of the holy cities was now the Ottoman sultan. And with this, Ottoman sultans effectively assumed the title of caliph as well. The tradition that this title was formally transferred to Selim by the last Abbasid caliph in Egypt is debated among historians. But the fact that the Ottomans settled into the position of the religious leader of the Islamic world is beyond debate.

Selim the Grim, despite the brevity of his reign, made the Ottomans an empire spread across three continents. And the legacy of this expansion fell to his son Suleiman the Magnificent. Suleiman would both carry this legacy to its most brilliant period and transform the crack concealed within it into an institutional reality.

V. Suleiman the Magnificent: Splendour and the Rupture Within

Suleiman: The ‘Magnificent’ of the West, the ‘Lawgiver’ of the East

Suleiman the Magnificent (1520–1566) is the Ottoman ruler who held the longest reign and is the most debated in Ottoman history. Europe remembers him as ‘Suleiman the Magnificent.’ The Ottoman tradition describes him as ‘Kanuni’ — the Lawgiver. These two different epithets reflect two different perspectives. And both are correct.

During the reign of Suleiman, the Ottoman Empire reached its widest territorial boundaries. Hungary was conquered; Vienna was approached; the Indian Ocean was entered; dominance over the Mediterranean in North Africa was consolidated. Comprehensive reforms were made in law. Architecturally, the works of the master architect Sinan transformed Istanbul into one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Poetry, music, and the arts reached their zenith.

This picture is not that of a one-winged civilisation but of an empire that still operated on two wings for that period. But it was during the reign of Suleiman that the moment at which this two-winged structure began to crack was also lived.

Sinan: Two-Wingedness Inscribed in Stone

One of the greatest two-winged believers of the Suleimanic period is undoubtedly Sinan the Architect (1489–1588). Sinan, who was of Christian devshirme origin, became a Muslim and served in the Ottoman army. But he found his true greatness in the fields of engineering and architecture.

It is on record that Sinan built 477 works throughout his life. Among these are 94 mosques, 57 madrasas, 52 mausoleums, and numerous bridges, caravanserais, and bathhouses. Each is a perfect union of technical engineering and aesthetic understanding.

It is narrated that he described the Shehzade Mosque as his ‘apprentice’ work, the Suleymaniye Mosque as his ‘journeyman’ work, and the Selimiye Mosque in Edirne as his ‘master’ work. The dome of the Selimiye was calculated to surpass the Hagia Sophia. And this calculation is correct: the diameter of the dome of the Selimiye exceeds that of the Hagia Sophia.

The engineering understanding of Sinan was not limited to aesthetics. Earthquake resistance, acoustics, use of light, air circulation — all of these were consciously addressed in his designs. This is one of the most advanced manifestations of modern engineering in the sixteenth century.

The existence of Sinan shows that the Suleimanic period was still able to preserve its two-wingedness. Technical knowledge and aesthetic depth, faith combined with production, worldly skill and spiritual rootedness — all were present together.

Ebu Suud Efendi and Suleiman: A Historical Point of Rupture

And now we come to the most critical truth of this part. One of the most determinative figures of the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent is the Sheikh al-Islam Ebu Suud Efendi (1490–1574). This name is not merely the name of a religious scholar. This name is the name of one of the architects of the process by which the two wings of Islamic civilisation were institutionally severed from each other.

Ebu Suud Efendi was an extraordinarily intelligent, extraordinarily prolific, and extraordinarily impressive

scholar. He wrote important works in Quranic commentary, jurisprudence, and kalam. He provided intellectual legitimacy to the legal reforms of Suleiman. His fatwas integrating customary law with sharia made important contributions to the Ottoman legal system.

But the deepest and most enduring influence of Ebu Suud Efendi is concealed in the arrangements he made to the madrasa curriculum.

During the reign of Suleiman, the madrasas were divided into two different categories. The first category: the madrasas of the religious sciences. Here Quranic commentary, hadith, jurisprudence, kalam, and religious instruction were taught. The second category: the madrasas of the rational sciences. Here logic, mathematics, astronomy, and philosophy were taught.

At the outset, this division appeared to be a division of labour in teaching. But over time this division of labour was transformed into two different worlds. The madrasas of the religious sciences came to be accepted by society as the domain of 'real knowledge.' The madrasas of the rational sciences, meanwhile, gradually assumed a secondary — even suspect — position.

How did this transformation occur? Partly through deliberate choice, partly through institutional inertia. Reinforcing the religious legitimacy of the state required the religious sciences to be brought to the fore. The rational sciences made no direct contribution to this legitimacy; on the contrary, they at times gave rise to questioning. And questioning was seen as a threat to a stable understanding of governance.

Ebu Suud Efendi in this process was both an active participant and a reflection of the spirit of his age. He reinforced the religious legitimacy of the state by integrating sharia with customary law. But this

reinforcement came at a price: the gradual confinement of reason, knowledge, and inquiry within an increasingly narrow domain.

And the consequences of this narrowing showed themselves within generations: when a child went to the madrasa, he encountered two separate worlds. In one world he learned the Quran, hadith, and jurisprudence. In the other, mathematics and logic. But these two worlds were not connected to each other. One had been categorised as ‘religious knowledge,’ the other as ‘worldly knowledge.’ And this categorisation whispered something into the child’s mind: choose either faith or the world. Either believe or investigate.

It is precisely this whisper that carried one of the seeds of the deepest wound of Islamic civilisation. Al-Khwarizmi had both performed the prayer and founded algebra. Ibn al-Haytham had both prayed and built the telescope. For them there was no choice between the two; the two spoke to each other. But from the Suleimanic period onward, the walls of the madrasa began increasingly to prevent this conversation.

VI. The Legacy of the Ottoman Rise: What Remained, What Broke

The Millet System: The Institutional Model of Pluralism

One of the most important institutional legacies of the Ottoman period of rise is the millet system. This system allowed communities of different religions and cultures to manage their own internal affairs. The Greek Orthodox, Armenian, Jewish, and Muslim communities each had

their own religious courts, educational institutions, and social organisations.

This system was not perfect. Non-Muslims were kept in a second-class status; they paid a special tax called the *jizya* and were deprived of certain rights. These shortcomings cannot be overlooked.

But the millet system was at the same time an extraordinarily advanced pluralism model for its era. While religious minorities in Europe were oppressed, exiled, and massacred, different communities in the Ottoman state could — within certain limits — continue to live. The settlement in Ottoman lands of the Jews expelled from Spain in 1492 is the most concrete example of the practical functioning of this system.

Women in the Ottoman Rise: Invisible but Determinative

In Ottoman historiography, women were for a long time rendered invisible. But in reality, particularly in court circles, women played extraordinarily determinative roles.

The most powerful woman of the Suleimanic period is Hurrem Sultan. Of Ukrainian origin and Muslim, Hurrem rose from concubine to wife of Suleiman and played an extremely active role in court politics. Her correspondence with Suleiman reflects both a deep intellectual relationship and a powerful political partnership.

Hurrem Sultan had charitable institutions built. Mosques, madrasas, soup kitchens — these bear her name. These institutions were not merely a display of wealth but the institutional expression of social responsibility.

Hurrem Sultan's influence over Suleiman is counted as the beginning of the period known in Ottoman history as the 'Sultanate of Women.' This period has been interpreted by some historians as a sign of decline. But this interpretation

carries the prejudice of viewing the empowerment of women as a negative development. The real issue is that court politics came increasingly to depend not on institutional mechanisms but on personal relationships.

The End of the Ottoman Rise: Where Did It Stop?

The Ottoman rise did not end with a single event. It halted through a slow, insidious, and internal process. And the roots of this halting had been planted precisely in the period this part has described.

The separation of the two worlds in the madrasas began to show its effect within a generation. Scientific production slowed. Asking questions became increasingly risky. The gate of *ijtihad* effectively narrowed. And the institutional mechanisms that would compensate for this narrowing were not put in place.

Outside, meanwhile, the world was changing rapidly. In Europe the Renaissance had taken root — largely thanks to the knowledge transmitted from Andalusia and the Islamic world. The Reformation movements had opened religious authority to questioning. The Scientific Revolution had begun. The Age of Discovery had changed the trade routes.

The Ottomans were seeing these changes. But their institutional structure was no longer as well suited to adapting rapidly to these changes. For the two wings had begun to be institutionally severed from each other. Faith and reason were living in separate spaces, in separate languages.

And this severance gave its most concrete result — as we will see in the next chapter — in the final period of the Ottoman Empire: the centuries in which memorisation was sanctified and the state found itself helpless before the West.

Splendour and Warning

This part has told of the Ottoman rise with both admiration and honesty — from the humble beginning of Osman Bey to the conquest of Constantinople by Fatih, from the eastern campaigns of Selim the Grim to the golden age of Suleiman the Magnificent. This rise was real. This splendour was real.

But within this splendour there was a crack difficult to see. The division of the madrasas into two separate worlds. The slow weakening of the bridge between knowledge and faith. The institutional structure's bringing to the fore transmission rather than questioning, memorisation rather than production.

This crack did not destroy the Ottomans immediately. Great structures can stand for a long time despite their cracks. But as the crack grows, the resistance of the structure diminishes. And at the first great external shock, that crack becomes a fault line.

In the next part we will examine how this fault line of the Ottomans deepened and how civilisation entered its period of stagnation. This is the subject of Chapter VIII: The Age of Stagnation. The centuries in which questions were silenced.

"At twenty-one, Fatih conquered a city. After conquering it, he took a handful of earth and placed it on his head. Victory had not made him proud. Humility

carried him. And this humility could not be fully transmitted to his descendants."

Bibliography and References

The Holy Quran — Al-Saff 61:4; Al-Hujurat 49:13; Al Imran 3:137

Ibn Khaldun — Muqaddimah [Prolegomena] (The sociological foundations of the Ottoman rise; asabiyyah and the cycle of civilisation)

Ebu Suud Efendi — Collected Fatwas; Tafsir-i Ebu Suud [The Commentary of Ebu Suud] (The foundational sources of the integration of knowledge and power)

Ashikpashazade — Tarikh-i Al-i Osman [History of the House of Osman] (A first source on the Ottoman founding period)

Neshri — Kitab-i Jihanuma [The Book of the World-Mirror] (A primary source on the history of the Ottoman founding)

Tursun Bey — Tarikh-i Ebu'l-Fath [The History of the Father of Conquest] (A detailed record of the Fatih period)

Sinan the Architect — Tezkiretül-Bünyan [The Record of Buildings] (His architectural understanding in his own words)

Halil Inalcik — Osmanlı İmparatorluğu: Klasik Çağ 1300-1600 [The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age] (The most

comprehensive Turkish academic source on Ottoman history)

Halil Inalcik — The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300-1600 (The English academic source on the Ottoman rise)

Colin Imber — The Ottoman Empire 1300-1650 (A comprehensive Ottoman history)

Caroline Finkel — Osman's Dream (A broad historical narrative of the Ottoman Empire)

Leslie Peirce — The Imperial Harem (Women and power in the Ottoman court)

Gülru Necipoğlu — The Age of Sinan (Sinan the Architect and the Ottoman architectural understanding)

Cornell Fleischer — Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire (The knowledge-power relationship in the Ottomans)

Elmalili Hamdi Yazir — Hak Dini Kuran Dili [The True Religion: The Language of the Quran] (Commentary on the relevant verses)

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi — Hutbe-i Shamiyye [The Damascus Sermon] (A contemporary analysis of the causes of Ottoman decline)

CHAPTER VII — From Andalusia to the Ottomans

Part IV — The Age of Stagnation: The Centuries When Questions Were Silenced

*"Indeed, God will not change the condition of
a people until they change what is in
themselves."*

(Al-Ra'd, 13:11)

A Bridge from the Previous Part: The Silent Crack Within the Splendour

In the previous part we told of the Ottoman rise with both admiration and honesty — the conquest of Constantinople by Fatih, the engineering miracles Sinan inscribed in stone, the legal reforms of the Suleimanic era. But in the same part we also laid bare a truth plainly: within that splendour, a crack difficult to see was forming.

The name of that crack is now becoming clear: the division of the madrasas into two separate worlds. The beginning of the rational sciences and the religious sciences living in two separate rooms of the same building, their windows facing away from each other.

This part tells the story of how that crack became a fault line. And this narrative is perhaps the most critical section of this book. For the intellectual, scholarly, and civilisational problems we live with today are rooted, to a

great degree, precisely here. The system that created today's one-winged believer was built in this part.

I. Ebu Suud Efendi: The Heavy Price of Good Intentions

Understanding Ebu Suud Efendi Correctly: Not a Tyrant, but a Well-Intentioned Architect

The very first thing that must be stated clearly at the outset of this part is this: Ebu Suud Efendi (1490–1574) was not a malicious person. On the contrary, he was one of the most intelligent, most prolific, and most profound scholars of his era. His Quranic commentary, his fatwas, and his legal reforms made genuine contributions to the tradition of Islamic scholarship.

And this truth does not prevent us from critiquing him. On the contrary, it makes the critique more important. For the most dangerous errors come not from the malicious but from those of good intention. Good intent does not eliminate responsibility for consequences. And the system that Ebu Suud Efendi built opened, in terms of its consequences, one of the deepest wounds in Islamic civilisation.

Did Ebu Suud Efendi do this knowingly? Our view: No. He tried, with the circumstances of his era, with the tools at his disposal, to resolve the problems he saw. He wished to legally reinforce the Ottoman state. He wished to reconcile sharia with customary law. He wished to regulate the madrasa system. Each of these goals was legitimate.

But a poorly designed system, built with good intentions, perpetuates its effects across dozens of generations. And this effect operates independently of the designer's intention. Just as a medication given at the wrong dose

with good intentions harms the patient instead of curing them.

To understand this truth is to read the matter of Ebu Suud Efendi both fairly and correctly.

The System of Ebu Suud: What Did He Build, and How?

Ebu Suud Efendi held the position of Sheikh al-Islam during the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent for approximately thirty years. This is long enough for any single person to leave a sufficiently deep mark on any institution.

His most fundamental institutional contribution was the systematisation of the Ottoman madrasa hierarchy. The madrasas were divided into defined levels. What knowledge was to be taught at each level was determined. And in the course of this determination, the balance between the rational sciences and the transmitted sciences — that is, between the natural sciences and philosophy on the one hand, and jurisprudence, Quranic commentary, and hadith on the other — was firmly established in favour of the transmitted sciences.

This preference was the institutional crowning of the tendency that had begun in the Seljuk period. Nizam al-Mulk had brought the religious sciences to the fore; but this preference had not yet been fully formalised in writing. During the era of Ebu Suud Efendi, however, this preference was inscribed into the written rules of the curriculum.

The concrete meaning of this was as follows: when a child entered an Ottoman madrasa, two different paths appeared before them. If they chose the path of the religious sciences, they would learn Quranic commentary, hadith, jurisprudence, kalam, and religious instruction. This path offered social status, the possibility of becoming

an imam or a mufti, and the opportunity to advance in state ranks. If they chose the path of the rational sciences, they would learn logic, mathematics, astronomy, and philosophy. But this path could not compete with the first in terms of social status.

And over time, the path of the rational sciences grew steadily narrower. For anything of low status is first looked down upon, then neglected, and finally abandoned. As generations passed, minds curious about the rational sciences found themselves unable to locate the institutional ground needed to nourish this curiosity.

II. Two Separate Worlds: The Division of the Madrasa

A Child Who Enters Through One Door and Encounters Two Different Worlds

Let us make this concrete. For every truth that remains abstract risks losing its reality.

In the second half of the sixteenth century, in an Ottoman city, two children begin the madrasa. Both are intelligent, both are curious, both want to learn. The first child studies the religious sciences. He rises in the morning and reads the Quran. In the afternoon he memorises hadith. In the evening he works through a text on jurisprudence. His teacher has been teaching the same text in the same way for ten years; his teacher's teacher did so in the same way. To ask questions can count as disrespect. When someone asks 'why does this verse say this?', the answer is more often than not 'the great scholars said so.'

The second child studies the rational sciences. He learns logic and mathematics. He works through the categories

of Aristotle. He makes astronomical calculations. But this child is aware of something: what he is studying is not counted as 'real knowledge.' His social status is low. He cannot become an imam in a mosque, a judge in a court. And furthermore, no one tells him how what he is learning is connected to his faith. Because the two madrasas are not connected to each other.

This picture, even on its own, is extraordinarily striking. But the real catastrophe lies in what happens over time. The first child grows up and reaches a respected place in society. The second child grows up and is either looked down upon, or begins to see his own knowledge as disconnected from life. And as generations pass, the path of the second child is very nearly closed.

Al-Khwarizmi had built algebra with the same mind that read the Quran. Ibn al-Haytham had discovered optics with the same intelligence that calculated prayer times. For them, religious knowledge and rational knowledge entered through the same door. After the system of Ebu Suud, that door was split in two.

'Religious Knowledge' and 'Worldly Knowledge': A Dangerous Division

The social psychological impact of this division was profoundly deep. Over time, the following construct became embedded in the Muslim mind: knowledge divides into two. 'Religious knowledge' leads to God. 'Worldly knowledge' serves the world. One earns the afterlife; the other serves this life.

Within this construct, an extraordinarily dangerous inference is concealed: if the two branches of knowledge are separate and rival, which will be chosen? And the answer, for the great majority of society, was religious knowledge. Because the afterlife was more valuable than this world.

But this inference is completely disconnected from the Quranic understanding. The Quran again and again commands the observation of the universe, the study of history, and the investigation of the human being. The command 'Read' was not given solely for reading the scripture. To read creation, to read society, to read the human being — all of these fall within the scope of that command.

But the walls of the madrasa fragmented this wholeness. And what was fragmented was not merely a curriculum. What was fragmented was the wholeness of the Muslim mind. Faith and reason continued to live within the same person — but they no longer spoke to each other.

*"Say: Are those who know equal to those
who do not know? Only those of
understanding will take heed."*

(Al-Zumar, 39:9)

This verse describes the chasm between 'knowing' and 'not knowing.' But from the sixteenth century onward, in the Muslim madrasas, a situation arose in which there were two different forms of 'knowing.' And these two no longer recognised each other.

III. Memorisation: The Death Certificate of a Culture

The History of Memorisation: How It Moved from Instrument to End

Memorisation was, at the outset, an extraordinarily valuable instrument. Memorising the Quran, learning hadiths by heart, committing the rules of jurisprudence to memory — these are legitimate and precious practices.

The great scholars would know thousands of hadiths by heart. This memory capacity made possible the transmission of knowledge from generation to generation.

But when memorisation ceases to be an instrument and becomes an end in itself, catastrophe begins. And this transformation gained increasing momentum in the Ottoman madrasas from the sixteenth century onward.

The transformation occurred as follows: the texts written by the great scholars came over time to be regarded as sacred. Not to understand but to memorise these texts became the essential task. To interpret the text — let alone to question it — began to be seen as dangerous. For interpretation could mean challenging authority. And authority was both a scholarly and a political power.

Ibn Khaldun noted this transformation in the *Muqaddimah*: ‘When knowledge comes to rest on transmission alone — when the student does nothing but convey what he has heard from his teacher — the intellect atrophies. For the intellect grows by confronting problems. Where there is no problem, the intellect sleeps.’

Ibn Khaldun wrote this observation in the fourteenth century. And his warning was not heeded. Two hundred years later, in the Ottoman madrasas, precisely the process he described was being lived: the intellect fell asleep.

What Memorisation Tells a Child

Let us concretely consider what a culture of memorisation tells a child.

A culture of memorisation says: ‘Give the correct answer to the question asked.’ The aim of learning is not to find the right answer, but to give the expected answer. This difference appears small. But its consequences are immense.

The child seeking the right answer must understand the question. To understand the question requires knowing the context. To know the context requires investigation. To investigate requires curiosity. And curiosity gives rise to questioning. This chain produces a thinking human being.

But the child who gives the expected answer learns something different: conformity. Conformity to the system, to authority, to the mould. When this child grows up, they do not question the system. Because they have never learned to question. What they have learned is to receive what is given and to pass it on.

And a society composed of such children ceases to be the producer of civilisation. It becomes a consumer. It takes what others have produced, uses it, and becomes dependent upon it. This dependence becomes, over time, political dependence. And political dependence is the deepest defeat of a civilisation.

The Chasm Between Taqlid and Tahqiq Deepens

In previous chapters we addressed the concepts of taqlid and tahqiq. Taqlid is following without understanding or questioning. Tahqiq is arriving through investigation and understanding.

In the Ottoman period of stagnation, the distance between these two concepts opened dramatically. Taqlid settled into the centre of the official education system. Tahqiq grew increasingly marginalised — and was at times met with suspicion.

There are concrete signs of this. From the sixteenth century onward, the great majority of the fatwas issued in Ottoman madrasas consist of the direct transmission of classical jurisprudence texts. On a question whose context had changed, the verbatim application of a centuries-old answer. A new problem does not require new thinking — only which old text one consults.

Over time, this approach divorced Islamic law from the realities of life. Trade changed, technology changed, social structure changed — but the answers did not. Because the minds producing the answers found change to be dangerous.

And this freezing affected not only law but theology, philosophy, and ultimately the understanding of science. Questions were asked less. Interpretation became risky. Producing something new could be interpreted as *bid'ah* — inventing something not in the religion.

IV. The Weapon of Bid'ah: The Most Powerful Enemy of Inquiry

The Correct Meaning of Bid'ah and Its Misuse

The word '*bid'ah*' means to invent something not found in the religious domain. The hadith of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) — '*Every bid'ah is misguidance*' — is one of the foundational references of Islam. And the purpose of this hadith is to prevent arbitrary changes, additions, and subtractions in the religious domain.

But the concept of *bid'ah* was expanded across history in an extraordinarily dangerous manner. Not only changes in acts of worship, but scientific investigations, philosophical questions, and social innovations also began to be labelled as '*bid'ah*.' This expansion distorted the original meaning of the concept.

Scholars who addressed *bid'ah* in two categories had identified this distortion long beforehand. Many great scholars, foremost among them Imam al-Shafi'i and Imam al-Nawawi, divided *bid'ah* into '*blameworthy bid'ah*' and

‘praiseworthy bid‘ah.’ Innovations that were not contrary to the essential nature of the religion but were beneficial to society were legitimate. Imam al-Shafi‘i said: ‘Bid‘ah is of two kinds: bid‘ah that is in conformity with the Book and the Sunnah is praiseworthy; that which is contrary to them is blameworthy.’

But this fine distinction was disregarded in practice during the period of stagnation. The label of ‘bid‘ah’ became the most effective weapon used to silence every kind of innovation, question, and investigation. And this weapon was most often drawn when it served the interests of those in power or of the established order.

The delayed arrival of the printing press in the Ottoman Empire is the most striking example of this dynamic.

The Printing Press: The Most Symbolic Example of Stagnation

Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press in the 1440s. This invention transformed Europe at its roots. In an era when books were multiplied only by hand, copying a single book took months and required great expense. With the printing press, hundreds or even thousands of copies could be produced in the same time. This was the democratisation of knowledge — the ability of everyone to access books. And this access made possible the chain stretching from the Reformation to the Scientific Revolution to the Enlightenment.

What did the Ottomans do? The printing press came to Istanbul approximately two hundred years after Gutenberg’s invention — in 1727. And the reason for this delay is most instructive.

The first to oppose the printing press came from both religious circles and the artisan guilds. Religious circles found it objectionable for sacred texts to be printed by machine. Calligraphers and copyists — those who

multiplied books by hand — feared losing their livelihoods. And the combined pressure of these two groups delayed the entry of the printing press into the Ottoman world by two hundred years.

Two hundred years. During this time, Europe printed, distributed, and read thousands of works thanks to the printing press. The Scientific Revolution took place. In anatomy, physics, astronomy, and chemistry, European scientists took giant strides. Newton founded physics. Harvey discovered the circulation of the blood. Galileo examined the heavens with the telescope.

And what was the Ottoman world doing in the same period? Continuing to produce books by hand. The same texts, in the same form, at the same speed. While the world was changing, what was taught in the Ottoman madrasas remained, to a great degree, static.

The printing press question must be read as a symbol. This is not merely a technological delay; it is the reflection of a mental closure in technology. A mentality that sees what is new as a threat also sees new technology as a threat. And this mentality gradually dulls the productive capacity of civilisation.

V. Missing the Industrial Revolution: A Historical Bill

Why Did Europe Pull Ahead?

The Industrial Revolution that began in England in the mid-eighteenth century is the greatest economic and social transformation in the history of humanity. The steam engine, the textile industry, iron and steel production, the railways — these are not merely technical

inventions. They are the products of accumulated knowledge, systematic investigation, and institutional investment.

Why did the Industrial Revolution begin in England? This question has more than one answer: colonial revenue, geographical position, legal infrastructure, a culture of trade. But one of the most foundational reasons is an intellectual infrastructure. The Royal Society had been founded in England in 1660. Figures such as Newton, Boyle, and Hooke were the pioneers of systematic experimental investigation. And the time it took for these investigations to prepare the ground for practical applications was not very long.

And what did the Ottoman world have in the same period? Serious work was being done in mathematics, astronomy, and the natural sciences — it would be unjust to deny it. But this work lacked institutional support and a systematic research culture. Every investigator worked on his own and more often than not despite his institutional status.

In the end, the Industrial Revolution took place before the eyes of the Ottomans — and was missed. This missing came not from stupidity or laziness but from the accumulation of a systematic mental closure.

The Price of the Missed Revolution: The Beginning of Dependence

The price of missing the Industrial Revolution was not only economic. This was the beginning of civilisation becoming externally dependent.

Consider: a society that cannot produce the technology it needs must obtain it from others. Obtaining technology requires money. Obtaining money requires selling resources. And selling resources always strengthens not the resource-holder but the resource-buyer.

This cycle is the economic reality of the last two centuries of the Ottomans. Weapons, cloth, machinery, and financing were being obtained from Europe. In return, raw materials, territorial concessions, and increasing debt were left behind. And with each new agreement, the Ottoman space of independence contracted a little more.

This dependence had a cultural dimension as well: learning from Europe became obligatory. But this learning was not a two-winged learning. It was the taking of the language, institutions, and ways of thinking of the strong, while acknowledging that the strong are strong. This acknowledgement, over time, also eroded confidence in one's own culture.

And it is precisely here that the deepest and most painful consequence of the system of Ebu Suud makes itself visible: when a civilisation loses confidence in its own mind, it becomes dependent on the mind of another. And this dependence is the name of a defeat far more permanent than the defeat of the sword.

VI. The Shaking of Islamic Faith: The Religious Damage of the System

The Heaviest Consequence: Faith Is Weakening

Now we come to the heaviest observation in this book. And this observation must be made with both honesty and a great sense of responsibility.

The system built by Ebu Suud Efendi — the severing of the rational sciences from the religious sciences, the institutionalisation of memorisation culture, the narrowing of inquiry — did not only weaken the civilisation's capacity for scientific production. It also

shook the Islamic faith itself. And this consequence was the last thing the designer intended.

How? Let us think about it as follows.

A child memorised the Quran in the madrasa. He impressed the texts of hadith upon his memory. He learned the rules of jurisprudence. But he never asked the following question — or was not permitted to ask it: ‘Why do I believe this?’ Because this question was dangerous. The question ‘why?’ was suggestive of doubt.

And that child grew up. He encountered life. Science was advancing, technology was changing, the world was transforming. And that child did not know how to position his own faith within this changing world. Because his faith had not been received through thought but through memorisation. And faith received through memorisation is defenceless when shaken. Because what keeps it standing is not understanding — it is habit.

Bediuzzaman Said Nursi identified this truth with extraordinary clarity at the beginning of the twentieth century. He said: ‘In former times there was strong faith, but this faith did not rest on *tahqiq* — genuine investigation. It came from *taqlid* — imitation. And faith resting on imitation is not resistant to doubt.’

Taqlid-based faith — that is, belief accepted without understanding — when faced with the first serious external shock, either collapses completely or hardens into a defensive rigidity. Neither is healthy.

Two Dangerous Outcomes: Collapse or Rigidity

The first dangerous outcome: the collapse of faith. When Enlightenment thought strengthened in Europe and reached the Islamic world, many Muslim minds could not cope with it. Because the tool they had in their hands was

memorised answers. And memorised answers were not sufficient for the questions of the Enlightenment.

This insufficiency, for some, led to a complete break. 'Reason cannot accept this; so let me abandon religion.' This break was not only individual but social. The anti-religious intellectual movement that occurred in many Muslim countries during the modernisation process took root to a great degree on this ground. People felt compelled to choose between their religion and their reason. And this compulsion shows that the system of Ebu Suud did not produce a legitimate Islamic understanding — it only institutionalised a choice.

The second dangerous outcome: defensive rigidity. Some Muslims, by contrast, reacted in the precisely opposite way. They saw every incoming novelty as a threat. They counted questioning as faithlessness. They regarded investigation as a sign of unbelief. And this rigidity became, over time, one of civilisation's greatest vulnerabilities: closing itself off to external criticism.

This second group were, for the most part, sincere Muslims. They wanted to protect their faith. But they chose the wrong way of protection: building walls. Yet faith is not protected by walls. Faith is strengthened by understanding. And understanding cannot grow without questioning.

The Chasm Between the Intention of Ebu Suud and the Outcome of His System

At this point it is necessary to return to the beginning. Ebu Suud Efendi did not wish to weaken Islam. On the contrary, he wished to protect it. He wished to strengthen the Ottoman state. He wished to solidify religious legitimacy.

And it is precisely for this reason that the consequences produced by the system he built are so painful. Because

good intent does not pay the bill of a wrong system. If a doctor gives a patient the wrong medication intending to cure them, the patient is harmed. The doctor's intention does not reduce the patient's suffering.

Ebu Suud Efendi, in wishing to protect Islam, institutionally weakened Islam's greatest power — the working of reason together with faith. This is the precise definition of tragedy: good intention, with the wrong instrument, causing lasting damage.

And this damage accumulated in layers across the centuries. Every generation grew up within the system built by the previous one. Every generation learned less questioning and more memorisation. And every generation moved the two wings of civilisation a little further apart.

Until today. Today, some Muslim communities believe they can do one without the other: either faith without reason, or reason without faith. And both — as this book's central truth has shown — demonstrate: on a single wing, one cannot fly.

VII. The Shadow Extending to the Final Period of the Ottomans

The Tanzimat: A Late Awakening

In the nineteenth century the Ottomans recognised the situation they were in. And reform movements began. The Tanzimat Edict of 1839 is counted as the beginning of modern legal and administrative reforms in the Ottoman world.

But the Tanzimat is an extraordinarily contradictory process. On one side, institutions, understandings of law, and educational models taken from the West. On the other, a society unable to digest these changes, caught between two separate worlds.

For the fundamental problem of the Tanzimat was this: institutions were changing, but minds were not. The human beings needed to fill each newly imported institution from the outside had not been raised. Because the education system that was to raise those human beings had been divided centuries before.

The intellectuals of the Tanzimat divided into two separate camps. One camp argued that everything from the West must be taken. The other, that nothing should change. And the balance between the two wings, already weakened, grew still further weakened in this conflict.

The Madrasa and the School: The Ottoman Mental Divide

In the nineteenth century, two separate education systems began operating side by side in the Ottoman world: the madrasa and the mektep — the school. The madrasas provided traditional religious education. The schools provided Western-style modern education.

These two systems produced two different types of human being — but these two types could not understand each other. The madrasa-educated saw in the school-educated a ‘godless admirer of the West.’ The school-educated saw in the madrasa-educated a ‘representative of ignorant reaction.’ And these two groups remained strangers to each other within the same society.

This division was the inevitable consequence of the system of Ebu Suud. A madrasa system that was not two-winged produced, over time, another division imposed from outside: religious education versus secular education. And

this second division would produce conflicts far deeper than the first.

Indeed, the religion-secularism tension experienced in many Muslim countries in the twentieth century is, at its core, the modern manifestation of this historical rupture. When Ebu Suud divided the madrasa curriculum in two, he could not foresee that within a few centuries this division would divide society in two as well. But the system produced unforeseen consequences. And these consequences are still being lived today.

Part Closing

The Damage Is Real, the Repair Is Possible

This part described a heavy picture. The sanctification of memorisation. The narrowing of inquiry. The two-hundred-year delay of the printing press. The missing of the Industrial Revolution. The beginning of external dependence. Faith nourished by imitation and growing distant from genuine investigation. And ultimately, society splitting into two separate camps in both religion and science.

This picture is not an invitation to despair. It is a window opened to see the truth. And to see the truth is the first step of repair.

For if the damage has accumulated across centuries, the repair may also require centuries. But every great journey begins with a single step. And that step is to learn again to question. To accept that memorisation is not enough. To recognise that faith is strengthened by understanding. And to see that reason is not the adversary of faith but its complement — as both the Quran and history have shown.

Al-Khwarizmi had both performed the prayer and founded algebra. This unity is not a dream of the past. It is a reality that is possible anew in every generation. But for it to be possible, the walls that divided that unity must be seen. And this part was written to show those walls.

"Good intention does not legitimise a wrong system. But it makes it harder to understand. Ebu Suud wished to protect Islam. But the system he built silenced Islam's greatest power."

Bibliography and References

The Holy Quran — Al-Ra'd 13:11; Al-Zumar 39:9; Al-Baqarah 2:170; Al-Mujadilah 58:11

Ebu Suud Efendi — Fetava-yi Ebu Suud Efendi [The Collected Fatwas of Ebu Suud Efendi] (The foundational source of the Ottoman religious law system)

Ebu Suud Efendi — Irshad al-Aql al-Salim ila Mazaya al-Kitab al-Karim (His Quranic commentary; understanding of Islamic knowledge)

Ibn Khaldun — Muqaddimah [Prolegomena] (How memorisation dulls the intellect; the cycle of knowledge and society)

Imam al-Ghazali — Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din [The Revival of the Religious Sciences] (The most comprehensive analysis of the distinction between taqlid and tahqiq)

Imam al-Shafi'i — Al-Umm (The legitimate and illegitimate forms of bid'ah)

Imam al-Nawawi — Al-Majmu' (Categories of bid'ah)

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi — Munazarat [Discussions] (The weakness of taqlid-based faith)

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi — Hutbe-i Shamiyye [The Damascus Sermon] (The fundamental causes of Ottoman decline)

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi — Isharat al-I'jaz [Signs of Miraculousness] (The Quranic understanding of the unity of reason and faith)

Halil Inalcik — The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age (The structure of the Ottoman madrasa system)

Cornell Fleischer — Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire (The knowledge-power relationship)

Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu — Ottoman Scientific History (Scientific work in the Ottomans and its constraints)

Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar — 19. Asir Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi [The History of Nineteenth-Century Turkish Literature] (The mental division of the Tanzimat period)

Bernard Lewis — The Muslim Discovery of Europe (The Ottoman process of discovering Europe)

Niyazi Berkes — The Development of Secularism in Turkey (The contradictions of the Tanzimat and the madrasa-school division)

Francis Bacon — Novum Organum (The philosophical foundation of the Scientific Revolution; the paradigm the Ottomans missed)

Joel Mokyr — The Gifts of Athena (The intellectual origins of the Industrial Revolution)

Elmalili Hamdi Yazir — Hak Dini Kuran Dili [The True Religion: The Language of the Quran] (Commentary on the relevant verses)

CHAPTER VIII

On the Threshold of the Modern World

Part I — 1800–1900: The Return of the Jahiliyya and the Internal Decay

*"Have they not travelled through the land
and observed how was the end of those
before them?"
(Yusuf, 12:109)*

A Bridge from the Previous Chapter: After the Walls Were Built

In the previous chapter we saw the walls built by the system of Ebu Suud. The rational sciences and the religious sciences were confined to two separate rooms. Memorisation took the place of inquiry. The printing press was made to wait two hundred years. The Industrial Revolution was missed. And the price of this missed revolution was external dependence.

Now we are looking at the concrete face of that dependence in the nineteenth century. But this time we will not look only outward. To understand the pressure coming from outside, it is equally necessary to see the decay coming from within. For what weakened the Ottomans in the nineteenth century was not only the power of Europe. It was also the ignorance within, the illiteracy, the failure to educate girls, the superstition spreading in the name of religion, and the machinations of traitors within the palace.

This part tells that story — from both within and without. Both painful and true.

I. The Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Empire: The Bill Has Come

The Sick Man: A Medical Diagnosis of an Empire

In the nineteenth century, an expression became widespread in European diplomacy to describe the Ottomans: ‘the Sick Man.’ Tsar Nicholas I of Russia was one of the first statesmen to use this phrase in 1853. And it became so entrenched that the Ottoman Empire’s final century came to be known by this name.

But the expression ‘Sick Man’ was not merely a label applied from outside. It reflected a reality. And that reality was most painful: an empire that had once ruled three continents was in the nineteenth century not only losing territory but borrowing money, being forced into treaties, and coming under the control of others on its own soil.

The diagnosis of this illness was easy; the cure was hard. Because the illness came not from outside but from within.

And an illness coming from within cannot be cured by attributing it to the outside.

Literacy Rate: The Most Fundamental Measure of Civilisation

In the mid-nineteenth century, the literacy rate in the Ottoman Empire was extraordinarily low. Though estimates vary by region and period, the general picture is this: approximately fifteen to twenty-five percent of the male population could read and write. In the female population this rate was much lower — in some regions below five percent.

To put these figures in perspective: at the same period, the literacy rate in England was around seventy percent. In Prussia (today's Germany) it was over eighty percent. In Sweden it approached almost one hundred percent. While Europe was raising the literate workforce that the Industrial Revolution required, the Ottomans were sending the great majority of their population into life without the ability to read or write.

This gap is not merely an educational problem. It is the direct measure of a civilisation's productive capacity. A society unable to read and write can neither produce nor transmit knowledge. Each generation cannot benefit from the knowledge of the previous one. Every individual is compelled to begin from zero.

And it is precisely for this reason that the nineteenth-century Ottoman story is both painful and instructive: education — the most fundamental investment of civilisation — had been neglected for centuries. And the bill for this neglect was being presented to the whole of society.

Girls: The Greatest Victims of the System

Behind the literacy rate being this low, there are many reasons. But the greatest reason, the most visible and the most painful, is this: girls — particularly in rural areas — were raised within an understanding that found educating them unnecessary and even dangerous.

The roots of this understanding lie not in Islam but in the Jahiliyya. As we addressed in earlier chapters, Islam came in opposition to a Jahiliyya that buried girls alive. Aisha (may God be pleased with her) was the greatest hadith scholar of her age. Fatima (may God be pleased with her) was the piece of the Prophet's heart. The women of the Ansar would ask the Prophet questions directly and receive fatwas from him.

But approximately twelve centuries after that time, the following understanding prevailed in many parts of the Ottoman world: 'What need does a girl have for education? She will marry and raise children in any case.' This understanding was not Islamic; it was the product of cultural atrophy. And this atrophy removed half of the population from the production of knowledge.

A civilisation that bars its women from education means more than halving that civilisation's potential. For a woman is not only an individual producer but the first teacher of a generation. A mother who cannot read and write carries a serious disadvantage in fostering a love of reading in her child. The women of an uneducated society raise an uneducated generation. This cycle feeds and reinforces itself.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the reformist Ottoman intellectuals began to see this truth. Namik Kemal, Shinasi, Ziya Pasha — all of them advocated the education of girls. But this advocacy met with deep resistance. And a large part of this resistance was presented under the guise of religion. 'This is contrary to Islam' was said. Yet the opposite was true. What Islam

commanded was to make learning obligatory for every Muslim — male or female.

II. The Memorised Religion: Faith Not Understood

What Was Being Taught in the Mosques?

In the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire, religious education flowed through two channels: the madrasas and the mosques. But both channels were products of the system addressed in the previous chapter — one that did not question, that transmitted rather than understood, that memorised rather than thought.

The Friday sermons delivered in the mosques consisted, for the most part, of the recitation of classical Arabic texts that the congregation could not understand. The people listened without knowing what was being said. The content had been the same for decades — because changing it was dangerous. To change the sermon might constitute bid‘ah.

This picture is most striking: the Quran is Islam’s primary source, and the Quran was revealed to be understood. The question ‘Do they not reflect upon the Quran?’ comes from the Quran itself. Yet in the nineteenth-century Ottoman world, millions of people went to mosques for years and listened to texts they did not understand. They did not ask in order to understand. Because asking might be counted as impudence.

In the madrasas the picture was no different. The works of Khalid al-Baghdadi, Imam Rabbani, and other great scholars were memorised without their contents being debated. The student would accept what the great scholar

said. How accurate, how current, how applicable that great scholar was — these were not questioned.

And so religion was transformed into a social habit. There was worship; but why worship was performed, what it meant — these were not asked. There was faith; but the foundation of this faith was not understanding but habit. And faith resting on habit, at the slightest shock, either breaks or hardens.

Superstition and Religion: Two Things Standing in for Each Other

One of the inevitable consequences of a religious environment devoid of understanding is the infiltration of superstition into religion. This infiltration is not sudden but slow and insidious. And in the final period of the Ottomans, this infiltration had become extremely deep.

Supplicating at graves, seeking the intercession of saints, wearing amulets against the evil eye, counting certain days as inauspicious, believing that illnesses could be cured by sorcery — some of these are debated, others are clearly outside Islam. But in the nineteenth-century Ottoman world, the great majority of them had become mixed into the people's understanding of religion.

The reason for this mixing is clear: the people could not understand religion. Because they could not understand it, they were compelled to accept what was presented to them. And what was presented was often a mixed whole: genuine Islam alongside cultural traditions, rulings based on revelation alongside centuries-old superstitious beliefs, standing side by side. The people could not distinguish between them. Because distinguishing required both literacy and the ability to question. Neither was present.

This picture recalls one dimension of the Jahiliyya era. In the Jahiliyya too, people performed without questioning what they had seen from their forebears. They worshipped

idols with the justification of ‘we saw it thus.’ In the nineteenth-century Ottoman world, people maintained both genuine acts of worship and superstitious practices side by side, with the justification of ‘we saw it thus.’ And the understanding needed to distinguish one from the other had been systematically dulled.

III. Technology Is the Work of Unbelievers: Civilisation’s Most Costly Delusion

Religious Resistance Toward Innovation

The pattern we saw in the matter of the printing press continued in the nineteenth century. Every new technology was first met with suspicion. It was at times openly labelled ‘the work of unbelievers.’

The telegraph entered the Ottomans in 1855. The needs of the Crimean War made this entry obligatory. But in the process of introducing the telegraph to the public, serious resistance was encountered. Some said the devil’s voices passed through the telegraph wires. Others maintained this device was the work of jinn. This resistance had no organised structure; but it was a social reflection.

Railways went through a similar process. In Europe, railways were the backbone of the Industrial Revolution. Raw materials were transported to factories, goods to markets, people to cities. In the Ottomans, the construction of railways was left largely to foreign capital. Not only was there a lack of technical capacity; social adoption was also slow.

A similar picture existed with vaccination. Smallpox had killed millions of people on Ottoman territory. The vaccine

developed by Edward Jenner began to spread in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century. Its entry into the Ottoman world was delayed. And when it arrived, it met with serious resistance: ‘The human being cannot intervene in an illness that comes by the decree of God.’

The theological message behind this objection is incorrect. Islam explicitly encourages medical treatment. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said ‘For every ailment there is a cure’ and counselled seeking treatment. But in a religious environment devoid of understanding, this encouragement had been forgotten; in its place a distorted interpretation of the concept of divine decree had taken root.

This distorted interpretation was extraordinarily dangerous. For the concept of ‘God’s decree’ was turned into a cover for escaping responsibility. Not seeking treatment was presented as tawakkul — trust in God. Not investigating was interpreted as acceptance of fate. And this interpretation was building a wall in front of civilisation.

The Boundary Between Tawakkul and Laziness

Tawakkul is an extraordinarily valuable concept in Islam. But the correct understanding of tawakkul is an inseparable part of the two-winged believer understanding at the spine of this book.

Tawakkul means leaving the outcome to God after doing everything in one’s power. Tawakkul is not saying ‘God will sort it out’ without doing what is in one’s power. This distinction is critical.

The hadith of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) on this matter is most clear. A man who had not tied his camel said ‘I have placed my trust in God.’ The Prophet said: ‘Tie your camel, then trust in God.’

*"Prepare against them whatever you are
able of power and of steeds of war."*

(Al-Anfal, 8:60)

This verse summarises Islam's foundational approach that unites tawakkul with action. Preparation is the human being's responsibility. The outcome is God's decree. To confuse the two — to assign even preparation to God — is both theologically wrong and civilisationally destructive.

But in the nineteenth-century Ottoman world this wrong understanding had become widespread. And it was preparing the ground for people to flee both worldly and religious responsibility.

IV. Thieves Within the Palace: The Internal Decay of the Ottomans

The Game That Began After the Conquest of Istanbul: The Legacy of Byzantium

When Istanbul was conquered in 1453, Mehmed the Conqueror entered the city and began to build a civilisation. But with the conquest, something else also occurred: the institutional legacy of Byzantium seeped into the Ottoman court structure.

This seepage was not open but concealed. It carried not weapons but intrigue. Byzantium had been an empire in which court intrigue, poison, assassination, and secret alliances had gained legitimacy across approximately a thousand years. And this culture was partially transferred to the Ottoman court.

The devshirme system — the raising of children taken from Christian families in Muslim and Ottoman manner

— initially functioned as a remarkably successful model of human resources. Many great Ottoman viziers and commanders emerged from this system. But the same system also generated, over time, a different dynamic: the accumulation of power in the court ranks by those who remained attached to their own origins, cultures, and networks.

This dynamic reached its culmination in what Ottoman historians call ‘harem politics’ or the ‘Sultanate of Women.’ From the seventeenth century onward, it was often the mothers of sultans or powerful women of the harem who determined the inner balances of the court. These women were at times highly capable and made genuine contributions to state governance. But the same process also moved the court to the very centre of power games.

The Court Circle and Bribery: The System Eating Itself from Within

By the nineteenth century, the Ottoman court and the upper bureaucratic strata were wrestling with a serious problem of corruption. This corruption had gone beyond individual moral failings to acquire a systemic dimension.

The sale of positions — the distribution of offices in exchange for money — had become a widespread practice. This practice produced extraordinarily destructive consequences: the person who had bought their position robbed the citizenry in order to recover the money they had paid. This cycle accelerated both the financial and the moral collapse of the state.

The reforms of the Tanzimat period tried to address these problems. But rather than changing the system, the reforms more often added new bureaucratic layers. And new layers meant new interest groups.

Those who observed this internal decay from outside acted with great deliberateness. The great powers of Europe — Britain, France, Russia, Austria — knew this vulnerability of the Ottomans extremely well. And they used this knowledge in service of their own interests.

V. The Games Outside: The Anatomy of Colonialism

The Rise of the West: How and Why?

The rise of the West in the nineteenth century cannot be attributed to a single cause. The Industrial Revolution, the culture of scientific inquiry, the resources brought by the Age of Discovery, the intellectual opening created by the Reformation, the strengthening of the rule of law — all of these are factors that fed one another.

But among these factors there is a critical element that particularly concerns the Muslim world: colonialism. The rise of Europe was built to a great degree on the plundering of the resources of others. Without seeing this truth, it is not possible to understand why the West grew strong so rapidly.

When Spain seized America in the fifteenth century, it transferred the continent's vast gold and silver reserves to Europe. This flow of wealth accelerated the capital accumulation of Europe. When Britain colonised India, it seized not only raw materials but also the market for finished goods. The Indian textile industry was liquidated before British factories. When France occupied North Africa, it exploited the region's lands, resources, and people alike.

This plunder was presented under the name of the 'civilising mission.' Europeans claimed to be 'civilising' the societies they exploited. This claim is a great historical lie.

But it was widely accepted by the European public opinion of the era. And this acceptance made the continuation of colonialism easier.

The Treaties That Divided the Ottomans: Defeats on Paper

Throughout the nineteenth century the Ottomans were compelled to sign a series of humiliating treaties. These treaties meant not only the loss of territory but the loss of sovereignty.

The Anglo-Ottoman Commercial Convention of Balta Limani, signed with Britain in 1838, granted British goods more advantageous conditions in the Ottoman domestic market than local goods. The practical consequence was most destructive: the still-developing Ottoman industry could not compete with cheap British goods and was liquidated. The Ottomans became consumers of foreign goods on their own territory.

The Capitulations were arrangements granting the citizens of foreign states special rights outside Ottoman law. Initially presented as commercial conveniences, in the nineteenth century they became a full instrument of legal exploitation. When a European merchant committed a crime on Ottoman territory, they could not be tried in Ottoman courts. This was the effective limitation of sovereignty.

The Public Debt Administration — Duyun-u Umumiye — established in 1881 symbolises the heaviest loss of Ottoman sovereignty. When the Ottomans became unable to pay their foreign debts, European creditors obtained the right to collect Ottoman tax revenues directly. Permitting others to collect taxes on one's own territory — this is sovereignty on paper, dependence in practice.

Russia's Desire to Move South: The Plan to Partition the Ottomans

In the nineteenth century, the greatest external threat to the Ottomans came from Russia. Russia's strategic goal was clear: to reach warm waters — the Mediterranean. For this, controlling the Straits and Istanbul was necessary. And the shortest road to this goal was to weaken or partition the Ottomans.

Russia used both military and ideological instruments to reach this goal. Militarily, it fought the Ottomans on numerous occasions. The Ottoman-Russian War of 1877–78 — known to Turks as the '93 War' — ended in a most grievous defeat. The Ottomans lost the greater part of their territory in the Balkans. Hundreds of thousands of Muslims were compelled to migrate from the Balkans to Anatolia.

Ideologically, Russia used the discourses of 'Pan-Slavism' and 'protecting Orthodox Christianity' to incite the Slavs and Christian minorities of the Balkans. These discourses facilitated the conversion of different identities within the Ottomans into separatist movements.

Britain's Duplicitous Policy: Both Friend and Foe

Britain's Ottoman policy constitutes one of the most complex and most insidious political games of the nineteenth century. On one side, Britain acted as the Ottoman's 'friend,' supporting the Ottomans against Russia. It took the Ottoman side in the Crimean War (1853–1856). The visible reason for this was to prevent Russia's advance southward.

But the same Britain was, on the other side, gnawing at the economic sovereignty of the Ottomans. With the Balta Limanı Convention it seized the Ottoman markets. It brought Egypt under its effective control — in 1882 British

soldiers entered Egypt and did not leave for fifty years. It formed alliances with local powers to limit Ottoman influence on the axis from India to the Gulf.

This duplicitous policy was an extraordinarily effective strategy: prevent the Ottomans from collapsing by protecting them from Russia, but at the same time prevent the Ottomans from standing on their own feet. A weak but standing Ottoman Empire was the picture most suited to British interests.

This picture shows the external dimension of Ibn Khaldun's theory of *asabiyyah*: a powerful external force can shape the internal balances of a weakened civilisation to its own advantage. There is no need to do this through open conquest; economic dependence and diplomatic pressure more often than not produce more effective results.

VI. The Traitors Within: The Ottoman Self-Destruction

The Dönme and Hidden Structures: The Anatomy of Infiltration

In the Ottoman collapse process of the nineteenth century, it was not only external pressures but also internal hidden structures that played a determinative role. To say this is not to produce a conspiracy theory. It is a truth documented in the historical sources.

The Dönme — particularly the Sabbatean community centred in Salonica — emerged in the seventeenth century under the leadership of the Jewish-origin false prophet Sabbatai Zevi. This community outwardly accepted Islam but in reality continued its own beliefs and practices in

secret. They remained invisible within the Ottoman millet system. And over time, they accumulated power in both commercial and bureaucratic ranks.

The influence of these communities on the Committee of Union and Progress — CUP — is, while debated among historians, too well documented to be ignored. Salonica was both the centre of the Dönme community and the city where the CUP was born. And some important figures of the CUP were connected to this community.

The CUP was a structure founded with the aim of modernising the Ottomans. And it did genuinely carry out some reforms. But the same structure was also the architect of the most destructive decisions of the Ottoman final period: the decision to enter the First World War, the policies toward minorities, and ultimately the steps that prepared the ground for the collapse of the empire.

It is not correct to read the entirety of this history within a conspiracy theory framework. The primary causes of the Ottoman collapse are the structural internal problems; the external pressures and internal hidden structures accelerated this process. It is not external factors that rot the tree. It is the fungus within that rots it.

Ottoman Intellectuals Educated in Europe: Between Two Worlds

As part of the Ottoman modernisation effort in the nineteenth century, young Ottomans were sent to Europe for education. This was a positive step. But its consequences were most complex.

Young Ottomans who went to Europe returned in two different ways. The first group returned having taken the science and technology of Europe while preserving their own identity and values. This group was genuinely two-winged. The second group lost confidence in their own culture when they went to Europe. Seeing that Europe was

powerful, they thought this power derived from its culture. And when they returned, they set about replacing their own culture with Europe's.

This attitude of the second group is understandable but mistaken. Europe is powerful; but the source of this power does not lie in its culture but in its institutions. It lies in its culture of scientific inquiry, its understanding of the rule of law, its investment in education. All of these can be adopted — and it is necessary to do so. But to adopt them it is not necessary to abandon one's own identity.

But those who could not see this distinction were drawn into a tragedy: when they abandoned Islamic culture they could not become European either. Because however much they dressed, spoke, and lived like Europeans, Europeans did not count them as European. These intellectuals suspended between two worlds belonged fully to neither the old identity nor the new.

VII. The Return of the Jahiliyya: A Historical Analogy

The Jahiliyya as Defined by the Quran and the Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Empire

The picture addressed in this part — illiterate masses, a religion memorised and not understood, girls deprived of education, superstition and religious understanding intertwined, worship of power and dependence — this picture in its entirety recalls the concept of Jahiliyya addressed at the beginning of this book.

Jahiliyya is not only the name of pre-prophetic Mecca. Jahiliyya is the name for every society that has grown distant from the guidance of revelation. And in the

nineteenth-century Ottoman world the symptoms of this distancing were most clear.

In the Jahiliyya, girls were buried alive. In the nineteenth-century Ottoman world, girls were not sent to school. The form had changed; the essence had not: women were being kept outside society.

In the Jahiliyya, idols were worshipped. In the nineteenth-century Ottoman world, people were supplicating at graves and seeking the intercession of saints. The form had changed; placing intermediaries between God and His servant carries the same danger in every era.

In the Jahiliyya, knowledge was in the hands of the powerful alone. In the nineteenth-century Ottoman world, knowledge was the monopoly only of those who could access madrasa education. And the madrasa education produced not those who questioned but those who transmitted.

In the Jahiliyya, society was open to the manipulation of external powers. In the nineteenth-century Ottoman world, society was open to the games of both internal and external powers. Because a society that does not read, does not think, and does not question cannot see what is being done to it.

*"Do they seek the judgement of the
Jahiliyya? But who is better than God in
judgement for a people who are certain in
faith?"*

(Al-Ma'idah, 5:50)

This verse is a valid measure not only for a historical era but for every era. And viewed through this measure, a significant part of the nineteenth-century Ottoman world falls within the Jahiliyya category. This is said not to demean the people of that era but for the honest reading of history.

A Century-Long Bill Cannot Be Paid with a Single Cause

Throughout this part we addressed the pressures coming from both within and without the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire. The appallingly low literacy rate. Girls deprived of education. Religion memorised and not understood. Superstition and Islam intertwined. Needless religious resistance to technology. Corruption and intrigue within the palace. Economic and military pressure from outside. And the games of hidden structures within.

None of this picture has a single cause. All of these problems feed one another, deepen one another, and legitimise one another. The pressure from outside legitimises the decay within. The decay within facilitates the pressure from without. This cycle feeds itself.

And to break this cycle, correcting only one element is not sufficient. Blaming the external enemy without seeing the internal problem does not solve the problem; it postpones it. Focusing only inward without seeing the external pressure means missing the whole.

The two-winged believer is the one who reads this cycle from both directions. Who sees both the illness within and the game without. Who both shoulders their own responsibility and stands against the assault from outside.

In the next part, we will look at the civilisational bill of this era: the rise of the West, the retreat of the East, and the establishment of the new world order. We are approaching the final pages of Volume I. And on these final pages, a single question will resonate in the reader's

mind: how did a civilisation that once gave direction to the world come to follow the ideas produced by others?

"The enemy coming from outside uses only the door within. And it is always the one inside who opens that door. And that door had been left ajar, centuries before, by a madrasa curriculum."

Bibliography and References

The Holy Quran — Yusuf 12:109; Al-Ra'd 13:11; Al-Anfal 8:60; Al-Ma'idah 5:50; Al-Baqarah 2:170

Al-Bukhari — Sahih al-Bukhari, Book of Medicine (Hadiths on the necessity of seeking treatment)

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi — Hutbe-i Shamiyye [The Damascus Sermon] (The diseases of the nineteenth-century Muslim world)

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi — Munazarat [Discussions] (The education of girls; address to the eastern provinces)

Namik Kemal — Articles (The intellectual perspective of Ottoman modernisation)

Ziya Pasha — Poetry and Prose; Zafername (Literary witnesses of the Ottoman period of decline)

Ibn Khaldun — Muqaddimah [Prolegomena] (The cycle of external pressure and internal decay)

Halil Inalcik — The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age (The nineteenth-century Ottoman structure)

Bernard Lewis — The Emergence of Modern Turkey (The collapse of the Ottomans and modernisation)

Bernard Lewis — What Went Wrong? (An analysis of the retreat of the Islamic world)

Niyazi Berkes — The Development of Secularism in Turkey (The Tanzimat and the contradictions of modernisation)

Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar — 19. Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi [The History of Nineteenth-Century Turkish Literature] (The mental panorama of the era)

Feroz Ahmad — The Young Turks (The Committee of Union and Progress and the final Ottoman period)

Donald Quataert — The Ottoman Empire 1700–1922 (The last two centuries of the Ottomans)

John Darwin — After Tamerlane: The Rise and Fall of Global Empires (An analysis of the colonial age)

Yaakov Barnai — The Jews in Palestine in the Eighteenth Century (Ottoman social structure and minorities)

Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır — Hak Dini Kur'an Dili [The True Religion: The Language of the Quran] (Commentary on the relevant verses)

Halide Edib Adivar — The Turkish Ordeal (The social picture of the era as conveyed through a woman's eyes)

CHAPTER VIII — On the Threshold of the Modern World

Part II — The Rise of the West: Truth, Debt, and Blood

*"Travel through the land and observe how
was the end of those who came before."*

(Al Imran, 3:137)

A Bridge from the Previous Part: The Internal Picture Has Been Seen; Now We Look Outward

In the previous part we saw the internal picture of the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire. The low literacy rate, girls deprived of education, memorised religion, superstition, needless resistance to technology, and the decay within the palace. This picture is the ground that facilitated the pressure coming from outside.

Now we are looking outward. At the rise of the West. At the anatomy of colonialism. And at how the new world order was built.

In writing this part, an extremely careful balance must be observed. This book will be read in Europe as well. And a book to be read in Europe must state the truth as it is — neither exaggerating nor softening it. To caricature the West conceals the truth. To exonerate it is a betrayal of history.

Accordingly, this part will not do the following: it will not portray the West as wholly evil and the Islamic world as wholly good. This part will do the following: it will look at history's own records and convey what those records say. For truth is always more powerful than propaganda.

I. Medieval Europe: An Unromanticised Reading

The Dark Ages: A Reading Without Romanticisation

The term 'Dark Ages' is debated among historians. Some academics argue that this term unjustly disparages Europe's medieval period. This objection has a valid dimension: the claim that nothing was produced in

medieval Europe is incorrect. Monasteries preserved knowledge. Gothic architecture emerged. A certain order functioned within the feudal system.

But this objection does not reflect the whole truth. When we compare Europe and the Islamic world between the seventh and twelfth centuries, the picture is most clear.

In the tenth century, Cordoba was a city of nearly half a million people, with night illumination, a sewage system, and seventy libraries. At the same period, London's population was approximately ten thousand. Paris had no sewage system; refuse and waste were thrown into the streets. The filth thrown from palace windows onto the streets contaminated the roads. This is not legend — it is history transmitted from the documents of the era.

The picture is equally striking in terms of hygiene. The Quranic obligations of ablution and the full ritual bath had made regular washing both a religious and a cultural necessity for Muslims. While Andalusia had 900 bathhouses in service, bathing and the bath were counted a luxury in Europe. Period documents record that some European nobles washed only a few times a year.

Perfume was born of this need. In medieval Europe there were no hygiene products to eliminate odour; instead, substances giving off powerful scent were used to mask bodily smell. The spread of perfume in Europe derives in part from contact with the Islamic world established through the Crusades.

To state these facts is not to claim that Europeans were devoid of human value. These facts are the objective record of history. And this record establishes beyond dispute the superiority of Islamic civilisation in that era.

The Heritage Transmitted from the Islamic World to Europe

As addressed in earlier chapters, a large portion of the sources of the intellectual awakening Europe experienced through the Renaissance was transmitted from the Islamic world. But the dimensions of this transmission need to be made concrete.

In medicine: Ibn Sina's *Al-Qanun fi al-Tibb* was translated into Latin in the twelfth century and used as the foundational textbook in European medical faculties until the seventeenth century. For five hundred years, the teacher of European doctors was a Muslim scholar.

In mathematics: the concept of zero and the decimal number system reached Europe through Islamic mathematicians. The Arabic numerals we use today — in reality a system that Islamic mathematicians developed from the Indian system and disseminated — made it possible for Europe to calculate and develop the sciences. Advanced mathematics cannot be done with Roman numerals.

In chemistry: 'alcohol,' 'alkali,' 'elixir,' 'alembic' — all of these are words of Arabic origin. The terminology of modern chemistry carries the legacy of Islamic chemists. The word 'chemistry' itself comes from the Arabic 'kimiya.'

In philosophy: the theological system of Thomas Aquinas is in direct dialogue with the Aristotelian commentaries of Ibn Rushd. Aquinas refers explicitly to Ibn Rushd. The greatest figure of Western Scholasticism was standing on the shoulders of a Muslim philosopher.

This knowledge transfer is not accidental. It is the historical proof that Islamic civilisation offered knowledge to humanity as a universal heritage. And this proof shows that in a certain sense Western civilisation today is built upon the accumulated heritage that Islamic civilisation bequeathed.

II. The Anatomy of Colonialism: Facts and Figures

What Is Colonialism? Defining the Concept Correctly

Colonialism is the use by a powerful society of the lands, resources, and people of another society without that society's consent, and the transformation of this use into a permanent system. This definition is both simple and sufficient.

An important distinction must be made to understand colonialism: conquest and colonialism are not the same thing. In history, many societies conquered other lands. Muslims did so; so did the Chinese, so did the Romans. But what distinguishes colonialism from other conquests is the aim of systematic resource transfer and the creation of permanent dependence.

The difference between Spain's conquest of America and Rome's conquest of Gaul is this: Rome eventually made those it conquered Roman citizens. Spain, by contrast, exploited those it conquered for five centuries, evaluated them not as citizens but as resources, and in this process caused the deaths of millions of people.

The Wealth from America: Europe's Capital

The exploitation of the American continent by Spain and Portugal from the fifteenth century onward provided Europe with an immense transfer of wealth. The dimensions of this transfer constitute one of history's greatest resource plunderings.

The amount of silver extracted from the Potosí mines — in present-day Bolivia — throughout the sixteenth and

seventeenth centuries is most striking. According to the calculations of historian Carlos Sempat Assadourian, the silver extracted from Potosí in the sixteenth century alone corresponded to approximately eighty percent of world silver production at that time. The great majority of this silver flowed directly through Spain into Europe.

But this wealth had a price: millions of indigenous Americans were worked in conditions of death as mine labourers. Bartolomé de las Casas — Spanish clergyman and defender of human rights — wrote in his work 'A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies,' compiled during this period: 'In the mine shafts there were such conditions that people died within a few months. Their places were taken by fresh people. These also died. And so it continued.'

This shows how a Christian clergyman of the sixteenth century placed on record what his own society was doing. Voices criticising colonialism also rose from within the West. This fact shows that the critique does not derive solely from the anger of the East.

India: How a Rich Country Was Impoverished

India is the most comprehensive and most thoroughly documented example of British colonialism. This example sets out the economic mechanism of colonialism with extraordinary clarity.

When the British arrived in India, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, India's share of the world economy was approximately twenty-four percent — one of the largest economies of the era. India's textile industry — particularly Dhaka muslin and Calico cloth — was in demand worldwide.

The British East India Company was founded at the beginning of the 1600s for commercial purposes. But by the eighteenth century this company was no longer a

trading company; it was a military and administrative power. With the Battle of Plassey in 1757, control of Bengal passed into British hands. And thereafter a systematic resource transfer began.

Economist Utsa Patnaik's research published in 2018 calculated how much wealth the British extracted from India between 1765 and 1938. The result: approximately 45 trillion dollars. This figure is undoubtedly debated, but the calculation method is regarded with respect in academic circles.

How was India's textile industry liquidated? While cheap machine-woven cloth from British factories entered the Indian domestic market at low tariffs, high tariffs were applied to Indian textile entering Britain. This was not free trade but a systematic policy of de-industrialisation. And as a consequence of this policy, millions of Indian weavers were left unemployed.

The Bengal famine of 1943 symbolises one of the most savage consequences of this colonial policy. During the Second World War, Bengal's rice stocks were seized by Britain for military purposes. In the famine that followed, estimates suggest two to three million people lost their lives. Winston Churchill is known for a cold remark about this famine: he advocated using India's resources for the war effort.

North Africa and the Middle East: Those Who Entered the Void Left Behind by the Ottomans

As the Ottomans began to retreat, North Africa and the Middle East became Europe's new target region. This process took place through both military occupation and diplomatic manipulation.

France occupied Algeria in 1830. This occupation lasted one hundred and thirty-two years. And the violence to which the Algerian people were subjected during this

period was most severe. In operations conducted in the mid-nineteenth century, under the command of French General Saint-Arnaud, Algerians were driven into caves and the entrances sealed, leaving them to perish. These events are on record in French documents of the era. Alexis de Tocqueville — the theorist of liberal democracy — wrote articles criticising French oppression in Algeria. That is to say, these criticisms came not from outside but from French intellectuals.

Britain effectively occupied Egypt in 1882. Ottoman theoretical sovereignty continued; but real power was in British hands. Control of the Suez Canal makes the economic motivation of this occupation abundantly clear: the trade route to India.

The Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916) is a secret agreement by which Britain and France, even before the collapse of the Ottomans was complete, determined how they would divide the Middle East between themselves. The borders drawn by this agreement form the basis of the current borders of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. And these borders were drawn not according to the ethnic, religious, and cultural realities of the region but according to the strategic interests of two European powers.

Without knowing this truth it is not possible to understand why the Middle East is so unstable today. Artificial borders forcibly brought different communities under the same roof or divided the same communities across more than one state. Given no time or conditions to build a common identity, they were included within the same state by the drawing of a line. And this forced coexistence became the permanent source of internal conflict across decades.

III. The Cultural Dimension of Colonialism: More Dangerous Than Physical Occupation

From Physical Occupation to Mental Occupation

The most enduring effect of colonialism is not the occupation of territory but the occupation of the mind. Territorial occupation ends; but mental occupation transcends generations. And this truth is seen with extraordinary clarity in the experience of the former colonies that gained independence in the twentieth century.

Mental occupation means this: the colonised society begins to see its own culture, language, and values as secondary, and the culture, language, and values of the coloniser as superior. This perception occurs not through the coloniser's direct imposition but through the systematic reshaping of institutions, the education system, and cultural production.

Thomas Macaulay, in his famous Minute on Indian education presented to the British Parliament in 1835, wrote: 'We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.' This sentence summarises the cultural programme of colonialism in a single statement. Let the body remain in the colony; let the mind belong to the coloniser.

This programme achieved success in many former colonies. Even after independence was gained, the ruling classes continued to think in the language of the coloniser, to govern with the institutions of the coloniser, and to maintain a distance from their own culture. This is an effect that extends far beyond the end of physical colonialism.

Orientalism: The West's Invention of the East

Edward Said's work 'Orientalism,' published in 1978, analyses how the West defined the Islamic world and how this definition was intertwined with colonialism. This work has been most controversial both academically and politically; but its central thesis today commands wide academic acceptance.

Said's argument is this: Western academics defined the East — particularly the Islamic world — not as it actually was but in the manner suited to Western needs. When this definition portrayed the East as 'static,' 'irrational,' 'prone to violence,' and 'a place requiring the export of civilisation,' it both legitimised and facilitated colonialism.

This framing had concrete consequences: a British soldier occupying India did not feel bad. Because what he had been taught was: 'We are bringing civilisation to them.' This belief comforted both the colonising soldier and European public opinion.

To accept Said's analysis is not to say that all Western academics were malicious. Many European Orientalists genuinely studied the societies they were curious about and produced valuable works. But the framework of these studies was more often than not shaped within a colonial perspective. To be aware of this framing is indispensable for reading history more correctly.

IV. Europe's Debt to the Islamic World: The Forgotten Truth

The Islamic Roots of the European Enlightenment

One of the most important claims of this chapter is that the Enlightenment period, accepted as Europe's 'golden age,' owes a great debt to the accumulated heritage of Islamic civilisation. This claim is accepted within Western academia itself.

George Saliba's work 'Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance' sets out this connection with academic precision. Saliba shows that Copernicus's revolutionary heliocentric model was directly influenced by the earlier work of the Islamic astronomer Ibn al-Shatir. The similarity between Copernicus's geometric diagrams and those of Ibn al-Shatir exceeds the bounds of what coincidence can explain.

W. Montgomery Watt, in his work 'The Influence of Islam on Medieval Europe,' writes: 'Europe bases its value solely on its Greek and Christian heritage. This is historically incorrect and indefensible. Throughout the medieval period, Europe could not have reached its current position without the enriching influence of Islamic culture.'

To state this truth is not to deny Europe's own production. Europe did not merely preserve the heritage it received; it built upon it, developed it, and transformed it. This productivity is worthy of admiration. But the source from which this productivity was nourished is not only Greece and Rome but Islamic civilisation as well.

Guilds, Crafts, and Transmitted Techniques

Alongside the great intellectual transmission, everyday life practices also flowed from the Islamic world to Europe. This transmission is more often than not overlooked; because it carries practical rather than academic content. But the true relationship between civilisations is shaped not only by what philosophers carry but also by what merchants, craftsmen, and travellers carry.

Coffee came to Europe from Yemen via the Ottomans. The first coffeehouses opened in Istanbul in 1554. Europe's first coffeehouse opened in London in 1652. And these coffeehouses became the debating spaces of the European Enlightenment. In an intellectual revolution, a beverage from the Islamic world had a spatial role.

Sugar, agricultural practices, and irrigation techniques were transmitted to Europe through Andalusia. The technical knowledge of sugarcane cultivation that Spain and Portugal later spread worldwide had been learned largely from the Muslims.

Surgical instruments: the work 'al-Tasrif' by the Islamic surgeon al-Zahrawi — known in the West as Albucasis — contained the designs of various surgical instruments. Many of these instruments, through their Latin translation, became standard tools of European surgery.

The totality of these transmissions allows us to see the historical relationship between the two civilisations within a framework of mutual debt and gain. There is no one-directional transmission; but the direction of transmission changes depending on which period one looks at. And in the critical period between the seventh and thirteenth centuries, the predominant direction of transmission was from the Islamic world toward Europe.

V. The Legacy of Colonialism: Damage Still Being Lived Today

Artificial Borders and Permanent Instability

The problems created by the artificial borders drawn by the Sykes-Picot Agreement are still being lived today. Iraq, Syria, Libya — at the root of the ongoing conflicts in these

countries lies, among other causes, the artificial borders drawn in the colonial period.

Iraq's borders brought Kurdish, Sunni Arab, and Shia Arab communities under a single state roof. Between these communities there were at times deep historical tensions. Without being given the time and conditions to build a common identity, they were incorporated into the same state by the drawing of a line. And this forced coexistence became the source of internal conflict across decades.

The situation in Libya is similar. Regions that under the Ottoman administration were in different administrative units — Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan — were made into a single state in the course of Italian colonialism and the subsequent independence process. Without a common national identity being sufficiently built, this artificial unity broke apart after 2011.

To assign this situation to the account of colonialism does not mean that the relevant societies are exempt from their own responsibility. To resolve their own internal problems is the primary responsibility of every society. But without seeing the historical ground of these problems, producing solutions is also not possible.

The Continuation of Economic Dependence: Colonialism Did Not End, It Changed Form

Formal colonialism came largely to an end in the mid-twentieth century. Former colonies gained their independence. But this independence did not fundamentally change economic relations.

The concept of 'neocolonialism' describes the relationships of economic dependence maintained after the end of formal colonialism. Former colonies continued to export raw materials and import processed goods. Debt relations allowed the old metropolises to maintain their influence over old colonies. The structural adjustment

programmes of the IMF and the World Bank determined the economic policies of many African and Asian countries from outside.

To state this truth is not to portray the West as wholly evil or the East as wholly victimised. It is an objective reading of economic power relations. And without this reading, it is not possible to understand today's world order.

VI. The New World Order: The Legacy of the Nineteenth Century

What Did the World Look Like at the Turn of the Twentieth Century?

At the end of the nineteenth century, the world map presented a most striking picture. European powers — Britain, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, and Italy — dominated approximately eighty percent of the world's land surface, or had established powerful influence over regions.

Britain alone possessed an empire on which the sun never set. India, Australia, Canada, South Africa, Egypt, Sudan, Burma, Malaya, Hong Kong, and many other regions were under British sovereignty. In these territories lived approximately 400 million people.

The Ottomans, meanwhile, figured in this picture as the 'Sick Man': historically great, but now contracted. A significant part of their territory had been lost. Their economy was under debt. Their sovereignty was restricted by various treaties. And within, there was a social fabric in the process of unravelling.

This picture raises the question of whether a lesson is being given. The reason the Islamic world came to this point is not Islam itself but the distancing from Islam's two-winged understanding. And the reason for the West's rise is not solely the superiority of Western societies but their development of the heritage received from Islamic civilisation — in parallel with the Islamic world's abandonment of this heritage.

Critiquing Colonialism Is Not Rejecting the West

What is told in this part was written not to reject Western civilisation wholesale but to read history as it is. This distinction must be made clearly.

Western civilisation, beyond colonialism, has pioneered many important developments. The rule of law, the defence of individual rights, democratic governance practices, the culture of scientific inquiry, freedom of the press — all of these are values the Islamic world today needs. And the fact that these values developed in the West does not make them less valuable.

On the contrary: to say that these values developed in the West partly nourished by Islamic civilisation, that the West then carried these values further, and that the Islamic world today needs to rediscover these values — this is the most coherent historical reading.

To critique colonialism is to say this: when power is obtained by plundering the resources of others, this power is devoid of legitimacy. And power devoid of legitimacy harms, in the long term, both itself and its counterpart. This critique also rises from powerful voices within the West. Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, Bertrand Russell — all of these directed serious criticisms at colonialism.

This internal critique stood against the legitimisation of colonialism. And the existence of this internal critique points to one of the most valuable characteristics of

Western civilisation: the capacity for self-criticism. Learning this capacity is also obligatory for the Islamic world.

Part Closing

The Two Faces of Retreat

Throughout this part we addressed the rise of the West with both its own dynamics and its historical debts — the heritage it received from Islamic civilisation, the realities of colonialism, and how the new world order was built.

The picture that this narrative puts forward is this: the retreat of the Islamic world in the nineteenth century is a two-faced phenomenon. One face is internal: the memorised religion, women deprived of education, unquestioned traditions, and the decay within the system. The other face is external: the resource plunder of colonialism, artificial borders, and economic dependence.

Both faces must be seen. To see only the outside is to flee from one's own responsibility. To see only the inside is to overlook historical oppression. The two-winged believer is the one who can carry both of these truths.

And it is the person who, carrying both of these truths, asks: what is to be done? This question must be asked at both the individual and the societal level. And the answer to this question will be given at the close of Volume I and the opening of Volume II.

We are coming to the final chapter of Volume I. In that chapter, we will stand face to face with the great question produced by all of this narrative: how did a civilisation

that once gave direction to the world come to follow the ideas produced by others?

"History is indebted not to the victor but to the righteous. And for the righteous to be victorious, what is needed first is not power but mind."

Bibliography and References

The Holy Quran — Al Imran 3:137; Al-Ra'd 13:11; Al-Hujurat 49:13

Edward Said — Orientalism (The concept of Orientalism and its relationship to colonialism)

George Saliba — Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance (The Islam-Renaissance connection)

W. Montgomery Watt — The Influence of Islam on Medieval Europe (The influence of Islam on Europe)

Utsa Patnaik — Revisiting the Drain, or Transfers from India to Britain (The transfer of wealth from India to Britain)

Adam Smith — The Wealth of Nations (The economic critique of colonialism)

John Stuart Mill — Considerations on Representative Government (The critique of colonial governance)

Bartolomé de las Casas — A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies (The oppression of indigenous American peoples)

Carlos Sempat Assadourian — El sistema de la economía colonial (The Potosí mines and the silver transfer)

Walter Rodney — How Europe Underdeveloped Africa (The economic devastation of colonialism in Africa)

Frantz Fanon — The Wretched of the Earth (The psychological and cultural effects of colonialism)

Aimé Césaire — Discourse on Colonialism (The cultural critique of colonialism)

Roger Owen — The Middle East in the World Economy 1800–1914 (The integration of the Middle East into the colonial economy)

James Gelvin — The Modern Middle East: A History (Sykes-Picot and the analysis of artificial borders)

David Landes — The Wealth and Poverty of Nations (A comparative analysis of the rise of the West)

Ibn Khaldun — Muqaddimah [Prolegomena] (The cycle of rise and decline of civilisations; the universal framework)

Elmalili Hamdi Yazir — Hak Dini Kuran Dili [The True Religion: The Language of the Quran] (Commentary on the relevant verses)

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi — Hutbe-i Shamiyye [The Damascus Sermon] (The diseases of the Islamic world and proposed solutions)

VOLUME I — FINALE

The Century of the Broken Wing

*The End of the Journey from Adam to the 1900s and the Birth
of the Great Question*

"And We have certainly created for Hell many of the jinn and mankind. They have hearts with which they do not understand, they have eyes with which they do not see, and they have ears with which they do not hear. Those are like livestock; rather, they are more astray. It is they who are the heedless."

(Al-A'raf, 7:179)

The End of a Journey: To Stop Here and Look

This book began at the beginning of humanity. With Adam. From the first breath breathed into clay, from that first name, from that first command to prostrate. And it has come here. To the threshold of the 1900s. Approximately two hundred pages and thousands of years.

Throughout this journey we saw many things. The greatest minds of humanity: al-Khwarizmi, al-Biruni, Ibn Sina, Ibn al-Haytham, al-Farabi, al-Jazari, Ibn Khaldun. Each of these names was the most powerful living proof of the two-winged believer's understanding. They both prostrated in prayer and built the telescope. They both recited the Quran and founded algebra. And for them, these two things never contradicted each other.

We saw that this duality was not accidental. It was the spirit of the Constitution of Medina: to be both just and wise. It was the spirit of Bayt al-Hikmah: to be both believing and investigating. It was the spirit of Andalusia: to produce together with difference.

And we saw that this spirit was slowly lost. First questions narrowed. Then memorisation expanded. Then the two wings were institutionally severed from each other. Then technology arrived and was rejected with the label of 'the

work of unbelievers.’ Then girls were not educated. Then the printing press waited two hundred years. Then the Industrial Revolution was missed. Then came the debt, then the dependence, then the occupation.

And by 1900: a civilisation that had once been the most brilliant in the world was now trying to imitate the ideas, technologies, and institutions produced by others.

Now, stopping here, we must ask that great question.



I. The Great Question

How did it happen?

***This civilisation that once gave direction to
the world —***

***how did it come to follow the ideas produced
by others?***

This question is not a lament. Nor is it an accusation. This question is the most honest and most necessary question of history. And to ask this question is the first step toward seeking its answer.

This book did not give a single answer to this question. Because there is no single answer. But this book showed the components of that question. And now, bringing all those components together, let us look at the complete picture.

II. An Accounting of What Was Lost

The First Thing Lost: The Legitimacy of Inquiry

The first command of Islam was 'Read.' The Quran asks repeatedly: 'Will you not then reflect?' 'Will you not then reason?' 'Do you not see?' The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) was a leader who loved the questions of his Companions, who could say 'I do not know,' and who made consultation a foundational principle.

This spirit was, over time, lost. Asking questions came to be counted as disrespect. The child who asked 'Why?' was labelled 'insolent.' The gate of *ijtihad* narrowed. The words of the great scholars became unquestionable. And in the place where inquiry lost its legitimacy, the growth of thought also stopped.

A society that does not ask cannot produce. A society that cannot produce becomes dependent on others. And a society that is dependent becomes, over time, subservient. The first link of this chain: to forbid the question.

The Second Thing Lost: The Half That Is Woman

Aisha (may God be pleased with her) was one of the greatest hadith scholars of Islam. Khadijah (may God be pleased with her) was the first Muslim in history and supported Islam with her commerce. Zaynab (may God be pleased with her), in the palace of Yazid, proclaimed the truth despite everything she had lost. In Andalusia, women academics served as scribes in the caliph's court.

And in the nineteenth century, in many parts of the Ottoman Empire, girls were not being sent to school.

When a civilisation deprives its women of knowledge, it reduces that civilisation's potential by at least half. For woman is both a producer and the first teacher of the

generation. Mothers who cannot read raise generations unable to love reading. This loss grew in compound measure across the centuries.

The Third Thing Lost: The Unity of Knowledge and Faith

For al-Khwarizmi, prayer and algebra were two faces of the same truth. For Ibn al-Haytham, supplication and experiment were two roads of approach to the same God. For those generations, the religious sciences and the natural sciences entered through the same door.

With the system of Ebu Suud Efendi — with good intention but with a wrong system — this door was split in two. The religious sciences were drawn into one room, the rational sciences into another. The two rooms had windows facing away from each other. And children were compelled to choose one of these two rooms.

This choice is the most costly institutional error in human history. Because what was being chosen was this: either protect your faith or use your mind. Both together were, institutionally, no longer possible.

And the bill for this separation was paid across the centuries. Both faith and reason weakened, separately. Reason without faith drifted toward meaninglessness. Faith without reason fell into the embrace of superstition.

The Fourth Thing Lost: The Foundation of Justice

The greatest power of the Medina Model was its justice. Everyone was equal before the law. The daughter of the Prophet and the freed slave alike. The Muslim and the Jew alike. This justice is the most solid foundation of civilisation. Because it builds trust. And trust makes production possible.

Over time this foundation of justice dissolved. The sale of positions spread. Corruption became institutionalised. The right of the powerful preceded the right of the weak. And when the foundation of justice dissolved, the whole of society suffered. Because people do not produce for institutions they do not trust.

The Fifth Thing Lost: Universality

In Bayt al-Hikmah, Muslims, Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians worked together. In Andalusia, three faiths produced together in the same city. The greatest periods of Islamic civilisation are the periods in which universality was most powerfully lived.

Over time this universality contracted. ‘We’ and ‘them’ sharpened. School of law, nationality, and ethnicity moved to the fore of our common humanity. And the civilisation that lost its universality closed itself only inward. It refused to learn from outside; it ceased to contribute to the outside.

Yet the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: ‘Wisdom is the lost property of the believer; wherever they find it, they take it.’ This word is the most beautiful Islamic expression of universality. And this word, for centuries, was not reflected in practice.

III. Before Leaving Volume I to the Reader: Two Questions

The First Question: Whose History Is This?

The reader reading this book — where do they position themselves within this history?

There are those who read this history as ‘their history’ — events belonging to the distant past, foreign to us, no

longer relevant. For these readers, this book offers only a historical panorama.

But for those who read this history as ‘our history,’ the situation is very different. And this book was written for this second group. Because this history has directly shaped today. The division of the madrasa by Ebu Suud is the root of today’s religion-science tension. The failure to educate girls is one of the historical grounds of today’s social inequality. The two-hundred-year delay of the printing press is the distant ancestor of today’s technological dependence.

Those who read this history as ‘ours’ read with an unavoidable sense of responsibility the following question: then, today, on how many wings am I?

The Second Question: One Wing or Two?

The foundational question of this book is: is it possible to be a two-winged believer today?

The answer: yes. History has proven it. Al-Khwarizmi was possible. Ibn Sina was possible. Al-Biruni was possible. These people did not live in dreams or in legend; they lived in real life, produced real works, left real marks.

But this possibility does not realise itself on its own. To realise this possibility, the following are needed: To ask. To investigate. To nourish both faith and reason. To aim not at memorisation but at understanding. To open the same door to girls and to boys. Not to be ashamed of learning from others. Not to flee from seeing one’s own errors.

All of these are individual choices. And when individual choices accumulate, a social transformation begins.

IV. Where Are We in 1900: The Final Photograph of the Picture

The Map of Civilisation: 1900

In the year 1900 the world looked like this:

Europe, propelled by the momentum of the Industrial Revolution, was exporting technology, weapons, and capital to every corner of the world. Scientific production was advancing at an immense pace in European universities. Maxwell had built electromagnetism upon Newton's physics. Darwin had explained the theory of evolution. Mendel had discovered the laws of genetics. Pasteur had laid the foundations of microbiology.

The Ottomans, meanwhile, were trying to survive. Territories in the Balkans had been lost. The debt swamp had deepened. They were compelled to accept an order in which others collected taxes on their own territory. And within, traditionalists and modernisers were in conflict, unable to produce a coherent vision.

Egypt was under British occupation. Algeria had been governed as a French colony for seventy years. India was a crown possession of Britain. Indonesia was controlled by the Dutch; the Philippines, after Spain, by the United States.

Within this picture, the Muslim world, with approximately 400 million people, formed the world's largest religious community. But this size could not be converted into political and economic power.

There was number, but no power. There was faith, but reason was weak. There was the past, but the future was uncertain.

And It Is at That Moment That the Great Question Was Born

A Muslim intellectual living at the threshold of the 1900s, looking back at their history, what did they see?

Left behind: the light of Bayt al-Hikmah. The medicine of Ibn Sina. The libraries of Andalusia. The victory of Manzikert. The conquest of Istanbul. The dome of the Selimiye.

Before them: borders surrounded by Western weapons. Debts taken from Western banks. Children sent to study at Western universities. News written about themselves in Western newspapers.

And felt within: both a deep pride and a deep shame. Both the feeling of ‘we once were’ and the question of ‘where are we now.’

This moment is the closing moment of this book.

And at this moment, for the first time in history this sharply, the following question arose:

***"This civilisation that once gave direction to the world —
how did it come to follow the ideas produced by others?"***

V. A Bridge to Volume II: The Door That Opens

From 1900 to 2026: We Know What Happened

This question was asked in 1900. And the century that followed showed how deep this question was.

Two world wars came. Millions of people died. The Ottomans collapsed. Colonial peoples fought for independence. The nuclear bomb detonated. The Cold War began. Television arrived, then the internet, then social media. Artificial intelligence emerged. Experiments in implanting chips in the human brain began.

And within all these changes, the Islamic world was still asking that question. Still seeking the answer. Still trying to be two-winged, still failing.

But this time there was a difference: the system outside was no longer merely a military or economic power. This system had become a much deeper structure targeting the human mind, perception, and even the body. Media became a weapon. Perception management became the name of the new war. And behind all of this lay the modern manifestation of that ancient conflict this book has told from its beginning: the war between Iblis and the human being. The war between the nafs and the spirit.

And the modern architects of this war had taken the field with an organisation of a kind rarely seen in history: to control the human being by rendering them meaningless. To reduce them to a being that consumes but does not think, that eats but does not give thanks, that connects but does not love.

The name of this great plan will be opened in Volume II.

The Map of Volume II: The Dajjal System and the Reunion of the Two Wings

Volume II will address the one hundred and twenty-six years from 1900 to today. But this time it will not be only a historical narrative; it will be a real-time analysis.

The ideological and economic conflicts behind the world wars. The transformation of media into an instrument of power. How perception operations work. How global capital shapes civilisations. Where the digital age is taking the human being. The dangers and possibilities of artificial intelligence. And the moment when, with Neuralink, human identity comes under threat.

And within all this picture: the Dajjal system. This concept is not merely a religious imagery. It is an ancient concept that defines every system that disconnects the human being from reality, lulls them into a false comfort, and ultimately distances them from God. And today this system operates with an effectiveness never seen before in history.

But Volume II will not draw only a pessimistic picture. Because history does not consist only of collapses. After every great darkness, a light has come. From within every great decay, a resistance has risen.

And this time the light will be made concrete with the coming of the Mahdi and Jesus son of Mary (peace be upon him). What this coming means, under what conditions it will occur, and why the great majority of humanity will still be in loss even at that moment of arrival — these we will address in the final sections of Volume II.

*"Indeed, it is We who sent down the
Remembrance — the Quran — and indeed,
We will be its guardian."*

(Al-Hijr, 15:9)

This verse is the final word. God will protect His own speech. However much the human being tries to distort, falsify, or disregard it, the essence of that speech is preserved. And in every generation, there arise those who understand and live that essence.

These are the two-winged believers.

These are the figures at the spine of this book.

And these continue to exist today.

VI. A Final Word: A Call

This book will not end as a lament. It will end as a call.

Because every person reading this book stands somewhere in history. We are neither in al-Khwarizmi's time nor in Andalusia's golden age. We are neither in the Ottoman period of rise nor at its full collapse. We are somewhere in between. And this 'in between' place is both the most dangerous and the most valuable.

It is dangerous; because being caught between the weight of the past and the uncertainty of the future can paralyse a person. It is valuable; because not everything has yet ended. History has not closed.

And it is precisely for this reason that the following call is made:

Read. Because that was the first command.

Ask. Because the question is the beginning of the search.

*Investigate. Because the universe is a book written by
God.*

Have faith. Because reason alone cannot find direction.

*Think. Because not thinking is the state the Quran
censures.*

Be just. Because justice is the foundation of civilisation.

Produce. Because consuming is not enough.

*Teach. Because when knowledge is not transmitted, it
dies.*

And most importantly:

Use both your wings at once.

Because on a single wing, however much you beat it, you cannot fly. And a civilisation that cannot fly is eventually dashed to the ground. And a civilisation dashed to the ground does not write history — it is written into history.

The history of this civilisation up to now, as told in this book, has shown us this: the greatest ascent was on two wings. The deepest fall was from one wing.

Now the question is yours:

"On how many wings are you?"



VOLUME I — END

From Adam to the 1900s

VOLUME II

*From 1900 to Today: The Dajjal System and the Reunion of the Two
Wings*

[forthcoming]

A Book Ends, A Word Begins

Years ago I asked myself a question. It was not a simple question. It was a heavy question — heavy enough to weigh a person down if they stood upon it. But I could not pass without asking it:

***"This civilisation that once gave direction to the world —
how did it come to follow the ideas produced by others?"***

That question gave birth to this book. And this book is not only one answer to that question; it is the map of dozens of different doors, dozens of different rooms, and a journey of centuries.

I learned in writing it that to write history is to speak with the past. Reading Ibn Sina, I felt the nights he rose from medicine to perform the prayer. Seeing the Basmala in the pages of al-Khwarizmi, I understood what knowledge truly means. The voice of Zaynab in the palace of Sham rang in my ears. And when I noticed the crack in the system that Ebu Suud Efendi built with good intention, I was silent for a long time.

Because the deepest wounds open not from malice but from good intention misdirected.

This book was not written only to tell history. This book was written to hold up a mirror. Both to us and to those watching us. Both to the past and to the future.

Eight chapters, dozens of parts, hundreds of years. We began with Adam. We came to the 1900s. And we stopped right here. Because at this point the reader needed to be

left alone with that great question. Had I given the answer, the book would have been closed. When the question is left with the reader, the book continues even after it is closed.

When a book ends, the author carries a strange feeling. Neither full joy nor full sorrow. Something between the two; that shore-feeling that reaches toward the void and senses that something is there.

As though you have returned from a long journey and arrived before the door of your home. But before going inside, you stop for a moment. You look back. You remember where you have been, how far you have walked, what you have carried.

I too am standing at that threshold now. What lies behind: prophets, scholars, sultans, wars, madrasas, books, cities destroyed, libraries burned — and within all of them — within all of them — the matter of the two wings. Faith. Reason. The truth that without one, the other cannot fly.

From 1900 to today. From world wars to the digital age. From perception operations to artificial intelligence. And to the modern form of that great question: the Dajjal system. And beyond: to what the coming of the Mahdi and Jesus son of Mary (peace be upon him) means. To why the great majority of humanity will be in loss even at that moment.

But now these lines end here. And they end saying this:

Read.

Ask.

Investigate.

Believe.

Think.

*Produce.
And use both your wings at once.*

*Because on a single wing, one cannot fly. And to fly is the
common matter of us all.*

Ömer Akin

*Founder & Strategic Intelligence Director
Quantum Intelligence Hub Ltd — UK / NL
Leeuwarden, Netherlands — 2026*

Bibliography and References

The Holy Quran — Al-A'raf 7:179; Al-Hijr 15:9; Al-Ra'd 13:11; Al-Mujadilah 58:11; Al-Zumar 39:9

Al-Bukhari — Sahih al-Bukhari, Book of Knowledge (The hadith: wherever the believer finds wisdom, let them take it)

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi — Hutbe-i Shamiyye [The Damascus Sermon] (The single-volume summary: the ailment of the Islamic world and its remedy)

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi — The Words; Isharat al-I'jaz; Mektubat [The Letters] (The unity of faith and reason)

Ibn Khaldun — Muqaddimah [Prolegomena] (The cycle of rise and decline of civilisations; asabiyyah)

Imam al-Ghazali — Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din [The Revival of the Religious Sciences] (The revival of the religious sciences)

Elmalili Hamdi Yazir — Hak Dini Kuran Dili [The True Religion: The Language of the Quran] (Commentary on Al-A'raf 179 and Al-Hijr 9)

Sayyid Qutb — Fi Zilal al-Quran [In the Shade of the Quran] (The concept of modern Jahiliyya)

Marshall Hodgson — The Venture of Islam, Vols. I–III (A comprehensive history of Islamic civilisation)

Bernard Lewis — What Went Wrong? (An analysis of the retreat of the Islamic world)

Tariq Ramadan — In the Footsteps of the Prophet (Carrying the legacy of the Prophet into today)

Ibrahim Kalin — Self, Other and Beyond (A contemporary perspective on Islamic civilisation)

Mustafa Islamoglu — The Productive Muslim (The practical dimension of the two-winged believer understanding)