

FOUR SELECTED
CHAPTERS OF
THE QUR'AN

A COMMENTARY ON CHAPTERS
29 AL-'ANKABUT, 55 AL-RAHMAN
56 AL-WAQI'AH AND 67 AL-MULK



KEYS TO THE QUR'AN
VOLUME FOUR
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BOOK DESCRIPTION

A commentary on four chapters of the Qur'an:

Chapter 29: The Spider (*Surat Al-`Ankabut*);

Chapter 55: The Beneficent (*Surat Al-Rahman*);

Chapter 56: The Great Event (*Surat Al-Waqi`ah*);

Chapter 67: The Kingdom (*Surat Al-Mulk*)

These four chapters from the Meccan period are thematically interconnected, covering the subjects of affliction, direct signs of the Creator, the Next Life and the nature of the One Supreme Deity. Through allegorical interpretation of Qur'anic language, the reader is shown the safe path of conduct in this world and the Hereafter. Its message of balance and mercy, and of Divine Unity, compels the reader to reflect on the interconnectedness of all facets of life.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Acknowledged as a master of self-knowledge and a spiritual philosopher, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri's role as a teacher grew naturally out of his own quest for self-fulfillment.

He travelled extensively on a spiritual quest which led to his eventual rediscovery of the pure and original Islamic heritage of his birth, and the discovery of the truth that reconciles the past with the present, the East with the West, the worldly with the spiritual – a link between the ancient wisdom teachings and our present time.

A descendant of five generations of well-known and revered spiritual leaders, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri has taught students throughout the world for over 30 years.

He is a gifted exponent of how the self relates to the soul, humankind's link with the Divine, and how consciousness can be groomed to reflect our higher nature.

The unifying scope of his perspective emphasizes practical, actionable knowledge that leads to self-transformation, and provides a natural bridge between seemingly different Eastern and Western approaches to spirituality, as well as offering a common ground of higher knowledge for various religions, sects and secular outlooks.

He is a prolific author of more than thirty books relating to the universal principles of Islam, the Qur'an, and its core purpose of enlightenment.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This series began in 1981 as part of the teachings of the Holy Qur'an in the United States and Europe. Numerous people had helped and worked to realize the original editions of these commentaries.

Considerable editing and modifications were carried out by Muna H. Bilgrami. Aliya Haeri's dedication and loyalty was invaluable in coordinating and supervising both the first series as well as the present series. Contributors to the present edition include Batool Ispahany, Kays Abdul Karim Mohammed, Dr. Salah al-Habib, Luqman Ali, Hasan Jobanputra, Christopher Flint and Syed Muyhi al-Khateeb. Special thanks are due to Dr. Yaqub Zaki for reading through the texts and for his helpful suggestions. Without the encouragement and enthusiasm of Dr. Omar Hamza's love of the Qur'an, this present edition would not have been possible.

FOREWORD

This volume is a commentary on four selected chapters of the Holy Qur'an, namely: Chapter 29, The Spider [*Al-`Ankabut*], Chapter 55, The Beneficent [*Al-Rahman*], Chapter 56, The Great Event [*Al-Waqi`ah*] and Chapter 67, The Kingdom [*Al-Mulk*]. These four Meccan chapters were chosen because of a strong interconnecting theme.

The Spider [*Al-`Ankabut*] is about the affliction and struggle of man in this life for the sake of his own growth and awakening to truth. The Beneficent [*Al-Rahman*] demonstrates the direct signs and marks of the Creator wherever one looks. The Great Event [*Al-Waqi`ah*] reminds one of the next life of the Hereafter so that the pursuit of knowledge and submission to the Creator in this life becomes vital and urgent. The Kingdom [*Al-Mulk*] shows that if there were such entities as other deities, they would be ultimately under the sovereignty of the One-and-Only God, in Whose hand rests total harmony and the control and destiny of creation.

The commentary lays open some of the great vistas of the inner meanings of the Qur'an. As the reader is guided to the bounties of the Qur'anic message through allegorical interpretation of the Qur'an, he or she is at once shown the path of safe conduct in this world and the Hereafter. The all-pervading message is one of balance and mercy. The key to attaining this is self-knowledge.

The commentary also explicates man's station in this life with reference to his Creator and reveals how the entire creation sings the song of *Tawhid* (Unity). It compels the reader to reflect this unity and interconnectedness of existence in all aspects of his life. These four chapters show the way to the knowledge of the One Creator and warn all humankind of the failure and injustice it inflicts on itself by not adhering to the path of faithful submission, correct action and transformation.

CHAPTER 29: SURAT AL-`ANKABUT (THE SPIDER)

Introduction

Whoever professes, confesses, or witnesses that there is One Creator of creation in all its diversity will also experience duality and the process of interplay between opposites. As with spiritual seekers of any age, some of the early Muslims in Mecca could not withstand the pressure exerted upon them to return to the convenience of their old habits and customs of pre-Islamic times. This chapter (*surah*) of the Qur'an, The Spider, refers to the flimsy, insecure structures upon which we tend to depend, comparable to a spider's web. The only structure which is everlasting and indestructible is based on the non-structural knowledge of God and His laws that govern physical existence.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

1. *Alif Lam Mim.*

2. Do men reckon that they will be left alone upon saying, We believe, and not be tested with affliction?

3. Certainly, We tried those before them, so indeed Allah will know those who are true, and those who reject.

There is a purpose in creation, a subtle and deep purpose which is to discover the meaning and essence of existence. However, man must trust in what is behind existence before he can fully commit himself to the quest. No matter how hard man may try to calculate and discern the purpose of this existence, he will never succeed without this trust (*iman*), the roots of which lie in the very essence of his being. Failure to commit oneself fully to this trust in the ultimate source can only result in discord and affliction (*fitnah*).

'We tried those before them' refers to a superficial kind of trial or affliction – a plot, an artifice – which can easily be uncovered. No matter how man reckons or calculates, he will be afflicted in a superficial way so that his trust or faith (*iman*) becomes increasingly more real and certain of the absolute Reality.

Trust or faith begins with a more outward and existential orientation, but it must eventually lead to the inward recognition that there is no separation between the deep inner reality and the outer realities, because they form a single continuum. Reality has neither beginning nor end; it is only for the sake of illustration that we talk about the outer and the inner.

Hasan, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, his family and his righteous Companions,¹ defined 'trial' (*fitnah*) as that which proves man's reality, his divine origin, by what appears to be affliction, turmoil and trouble. Divine mercy puts man through processes that appear to be undesirable and troublesome on purpose to show him that he has no power over anything. Man has, in fact, no claim except the continual witnessing and recognition of the One-and-Only Reality: 'There is no god but Allah' (*La ilaha illa Allah*).

4. Or do those who perpetrate evil think that they will escape Us?

5. Whoever hopes to meet Allah, surely the appointed time of Allah has come; He is the Hearing, the Knowing.

6. And whoever strives hard, strives only for himself. Most surely Allah is self-sufficient, above [need of] [His] creatures.

7. Those who believe and perform good actions will certainly be forgiven by Us for their wrong actions, and We shall reward them for the best of what they did.

¹ It is customary, whenever the name of the Prophet Muhammad is mentioned, to invoke the peace and blessings of Allah upon him, his family and his righteous companions.

Man in his arrogance and cleverness thinks that he can escape from the laws which govern existence; he thinks that he can cheat Reality, imagining himself as a separate entity. However, a person who has complete and utter trust and knowledge does not see himself as an entity separate from Reality. He sees only one higher self; he sees the self and outer actions as a manifestation of Oneness. He has security, certainty, serenity and independence through dependence on Allah. The opposite of this state of unity (*tawhid*), is man's imagining that he exists alongside Allah or that his is the sole reality.

Love of Reality guides and draws man towards unity. If one claims to love Reality, that claim will be put to the test. It is Allah's mercy by which He helps man to recognize the degree of his honesty and sincerity. The trust (*iman*) of the early followers of the Prophet Muhammad was tested. Pressure was exerted on them by the prevailing system, because his revolutionary message posed a threat to its survival. Many families urged their relatives who followed him to return to the traditional and customary tribal ways. Some experienced one or both of their parents threatening to take their lives and the lives of their offspring.

Those who maintain their faith are promised the knowledge of Allah and the truth of the Resurrection. The more they exert themselves in this life, the closer they will come to this state of knowledge. 'Whoever strives hard, he strives only for himself.'

The believers (*mu'minun*) are given a clear code of conduct, and by sincerely doing their utmost, they will be amply rewarded.

8. We have enjoined upon man goodness to his parents. If they contend with you that you should associate [others] with Me of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them. To Me is your return, and I will inform you of what you did.

9. And those who believe and do good, We shall surely make them enter among the righteous.

The first thing a child beholds is his parents. Should he not show loyalty towards them, he cannot show loyalty in a subtler way towards Allah. A child's rebellion against his parents is a

rebellion against all those who have physical power over him and sustain him. If a child is rebellious towards his parents, he is likely to rebel against all. Regardless of whether one's parents are good or bad, every being still has access to the mercy of the Creator. Thus, from a spiritual point of view, though one's parents may be misguided, one can only be qualified to reflect upon that when one's own self-guidance begins to emerge.

Under all circumstances a person is advised to be respectful to his parents. It does not mean that he is to remain under their domination, but he should ask forgiveness for them. After all, parents are the existential means by which a person comes about. Allah is the invisible origin from which man has come forth through the physical vehicle of his parents.

There are various degrees of trust or belief. A true believer (*mu'min*) regards everything that happens to him as his just destiny; nothing occurs from a whim, but from reality. A believer derives knowledge from all he experiences, whether it appears to be good or bad. If he has not identified himself with a specific, fixed viewpoint, he will derive knowledge and benefit from all affliction and change.

10. Among men are those who say: We believe in Allah; but when they are persecuted in [the way of] Allah, they deem the persecution of men to be the punishment of Allah. And if help came from your Lord, they would most certainly say: Surely we were with you. Does Allah not know best what is in the hearts of men?

11. Most certainly Allah knows those who believe and those who are hypocrites.

The concept most difficult for the lower self (*nafs*) to perceive is hypocrisy. Many actions may be justified in a hypocritical way. A person may say he is working in the way of Allah (*fi sabilillah*), but may actually want to gain an elevated reputation or become the leader of a community or country. If his actions are truly for Allah's sake, the afflictions of people will drive him more towards the innermost source, into dependence upon the ultimate Reality.

12. Those who disbelieve say to those who believe: Follow our path and we will bear your wrongs. Never shall they bear any of their wrongs. Surely they are liars.

13. They will most certainly carry their own burdens and other burdens, and they shall be questioned on the Day of Resurrection as to what they fabricated.

When the faith of early Muslims weakened in the face of human mischief and trouble, some wanted to give up their belief in the Prophet Muhammad. They claimed that Allah was sending them signs in the form of afflictions indicating that they should adopt a path of lesser resistance. However, it was the path of expediency that they wished to follow, and it would therefore become the more difficult path in time. Afflictions are the test of Allah upon man incorporated in nature. Those who turned away from the right path lacked discrimination and deep trust. They read into the signs only the most obvious outward meanings without considering the goal to which they were being led.

What occurred at the dawn of Islam is repeated at all times. Man is distressed by afflictions. Allah says, 'My mercy encompasses everything', so we must try to see this in all that comes to us. The laws which govern any creational event are prescribed. It is up to man to penetrate the subtleties of how those laws operate at all times, under all circumstances and for everyone. Allah's mercy is instantaneous. One realizes this according to the degree of one's trust (*iman*).

14. Certainly we sent Noah to his people, and he remained among them nine hundred and fifty years. The deluge overtook them while they were unjust.

15. So we delivered him and the companions of the ark, and We made the event a sign to the world.

When one seeks to imitate the conduct of the Prophet and his family and righteous Companions, one carries the passport that allows safe conveyance from one port to another. One will pass easily from the port of mortality to the port of immortality; otherwise, one will flounder in the sea of confusion and drown. Unfortunately, this is the state of the majority of people, whether they call themselves Muslims or not. They do not hold fast to the rope of Allah. The Qur'an explains very clearly that those who want to follow Allah and know Him must follow the Prophet and his way, as well as follow in the footsteps of the righteous who came after him.

A prophetic tradition says, 'Men of knowledge are the heirs of the prophets.' What is there to inherit from a prophet but his knowledge and the method of its application in one's life?

Everything we witness in existence is based on duality, such as life and death, guidance and misguidance, leading and being led. We experience opposites simultaneously. We love and hate simultaneously. If a man loves truth, justice, compassion and generosity, then he must hate injustice, tyranny and meanness. Understanding and genuinely experiencing this concept can help guide one's actions toward the higher opposites that reflect the Attributes of Reality. Traveling a great distance from the lower tendencies toward the higher tendencies, a person leaves fear and insecurity behind for tranquility and certainty, and thereby improves the quality of life around himself.

16. And [We sent] Abraham, when he said to his people: Serve Allah and keep your duty to Him. That is better for you, if you did but know.

17. You only worship idols besides Allah and you forge a lie. Surely, those whom you worship besides Allah do not control for you any sustenance, therefore, seek sustenance from Allah, worship Him, and be grateful to Him. To Him you shall return.

18. And if you reject [the truth], nations before you rejected, and nothing is incumbent upon the messenger but a clear delivery [of the message].

Follow those who have reflected the clear message, those who have knowledge of Allah. The knowledge of Allah is the recognition of truth; this is the result of abandonment and submission to the One-and-Only Reality. The command of Allah is that His highest creation, the human being, should come to know His will as it manifests itself within the parameters of His existential laws. This is the clear prophetic message. The result of its denial has been historically observed as the decay, corruption and destruction of people and nations.

In life, man stumbles on, attempting to apprehend the laws of successful action. Affliction and turmoil are the natural teachers that inform a person about the boundaries so that he does not transgress them. By this knowledge man is able to become aware of the points at which he

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