

# Men and the Universe

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# MEN AND THE UNIVERSE

(Reflections of Ibn Al-Qayyem)

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## **Preface**

Praise be to Allah, the Compassionate, Who made known the Qur'an; Who created man, and taught him utterance; may peace and blessings be upon the noblest of prophets, Muhammad, who was sent to be a mercy for mankind.

The writings of Ibn Al-Qayyem, the celebrated scholar, may Allah give him mercy and admit him to His wide Garden, are indeed in no need of introduction. They are in fact a class apart. The present work is based on one of his books, "Miftah Dar Al-Sa'adah" (The Key to the House of Happiness.) I selected a section of the book from page 187 to 283 of volume one of the Arabic version, that discusses the following four topics:

1. Man
2. The Universe,
3. Animals,
4. Nature

To smooth Ibn Al-Qayyem's writing for the modern reader, I supplemented it with modern material that would appeal to present-day readers. I did so because this is a time characterized by lack of motivation for knowledge, and the material things have so pervaded the minds that knowledge has receded in the same degree. Such a situation takes place at times of lack of faith and dryness of the religious spirit.

In the present work I have given titles to sections, and divided some sections into two, ending up with more than a hundred. The purpose of this, of course, has been to smooth the way for the reader so that he or she will get to the core of the book in the easiest way. I have also referred to modern scientific encyclopedias and to handbooks on medicine and biology to draw from them a lot of interesting and valuable information that is presented in an agreeable and easy way. In addition, I have chosen fitting illustrations and sketches that work for comprehending the notions under discussion, and accelerate the achievement of the desired aim set for the book. It is well-known that a picture fixes an idea in the mind of the ardent reader, especially when he or she uses the verses of the Qur'an and traditions of the Prophet (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) as a starting point for his or her reflections. Ibn Al-Qayyem cites a large number of such verses and traditions, which he uses creatively and efficiently.

I choose this particular book of Ibn Al-Qayyem's, "Miftah Dar Al-Sa'adah" (The Key to the House of Happiness), because he presents in it the art and technique of thinking and reflection, and propounds the ways that should be followed to secure the desired outcome of reflecting on Allah's signs in nature and in the human sphere.

It may be in order here to list some of the techniques of thinking that Imam Ibn-al-Qayyem puts forth in his book:

1. Observing, with an open heart, Allah Almighty's creations in both the universe in general and in the human sphere in particular, with a view to better appreciating Allah's glory and comprehending His great power and wisdom.

2. Reflecting on Allah's verses revealed to the Prophet (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) and His shari'a, to develop an awareness of this religion's superiority and to realize the amazing correspondence between revelation, fitrah (human innate inclination to accept truth), and uncorrupted understanding.

3. Observing Allah's commandments and abiding by His system, which is conducive to preparing the heart to have the purity and clarity of vision concerning what is good for it. Abstaining from covetous looking, for instance, is of great benefit apart from being an act of obedience; since it protects the heart from corruption, makes it exult at the closeness to Allah, strengthens it; supplies it with a light that enables a believer to have perceptive vision, firmness and courage; protects him or her from the designs of Satan, so that a believer is dedicated to considering what is best for him or her. This is so because there is a close link between the heart and sight.

4. Guarding against the danger of sins and keeping away from them, since they distract the mind from proper functioning; it is a fact that the heart will be corrupted if burdened with many sins, and that leads in turn to the corruption of the other organs.

5. Guarding against blind imitation, since such a practice blurs thinking and dulls its activity. Instead, man is urged to focus on the teaching of the Scripture and the Prophet's traditions and to comply with their teachings as exemplified by the upright Caliphs (i.e. the first four Caliphs).

6. Protecting the body from abuse, preserving its comfort, and warding off all distracters.

The above techniques, if realized, will surely secure the attainment of the desired target. Some of the benefits of reflection are the following:

- a) It is the way to acquiring faith,
- b) It uncovers the truth about things and shows the distinction between right and wrong,
- c) It wards off delusions and fantasies,
- d) It protects one from sins,
- e) It is the basis for all acts of obedience (to Allah),
- f) It guides to acquainting oneself with Allah Almighty, His Oneness, His Attributes of Perfection; and directing all worship to Him alone, and
- g) It is the basis for purity of heart while reciting the Qur'an.

One may add in support of the above, a tradition of Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him) which says:

«تَفَكَّرُوا فِي خَلْقِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تَفَكَّرُوا فِي اللَّهِ» .

*"Think of Allah's creation, not of Allah." (As reported by Aboo Nu'aym in his: (Al-Hiliah, on the authority of Ibn Abbas.)*

I pray to Allah that the following chapters are worth the reader's effort, that I have succeeded, in some degree, in clarifying the link between the 'ilm' (knowledge, vision) of the classical scholars, and knowledge, or empirical science of the present age, which refers to facts, experiment and concrete evidence.

At the same time, I pray to Allah Almighty that He guides us to what is true and upright, that He protects us from transgression, as He is Able to do anything. Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds. Peace and blessing be upon Muhammad, upon his family and companions.

**Anas Al-Qoz, Captain**

20 Safar, 1418 A.H.; 25 June, 1997

## **Al-Imam Ibn Al-Qayyem**

His full name was Muhammad s/o Aboo Bakr s/o Ayyoub, Al-Zar'ee Al-Dimashqee, Shamsud-Deen Ibn Qayyem Al- Jawziyyah. He was born in Hawran, southeast of Damascus, in 691 A.H. (1219 CE) He was a courageous, widely-read scholar; he had an extensive knowledge of the various legal schools, and the schools of early Muslim scholars. He had such a strong passion for his teacher, Al- Imam Ibn Taymiyyah, that he rarely contradicted any of his views; he championed all his ideas, edited his books and publicized his scholarship.

When Al-Imam Ibn Taymiyyah was detained at Al- Qal'ah prison in Damascus, Ibn Al-Qayyem was detained with him. This detention occurred as a result of the conspiracies of Suffis and unorthodox groups. Later, he was subjected to further hardship in connection with Ibn Taymiyyah's legal opinions.

Al-Imam Adh-Dhahabee reports that Ibn Al-Qayyem was once imprisoned because he criticised making a journey with the purpose of visiting Prophet Ibraheem's tomb in Palestine.

Ibn Katheer, a great disciple of Ibn Al-Qayyem's, says of him: "He was constant in teaching and writing day and night; he prayed long and recited the Qur'an long; he was well-bred, courteous, not covetous or malicious. His prayer was very long, and his bowing and prostration in prayer were quite long."

After praying Al-Fajr prayer, he used to stay in his place remembering Allah until well after sunrise; he commented on this: "This is the start of my day. If I fail to sit, I lose my strength."

He used to say: "With patience and conviction one attains precedence in religion."

And he used to say: "A traveller (i.e. towards Allah) cannot do without perseverance to help him go ahead and upwards, and without knowledge to light his way and guide him."

He was fond of collecting books and reading them. His collection was incalculable; his library one of the biggest. After his death, his children sold his books for quite a long time, though keeping for themselves what they liked.

### **Some of his writings:**

'Al-Huda' (Guidance), 'Al'lam Al-Muaqqi'een' (Major Spokesmen), 'Bada'iu Al-Fawa'id' (Remarkable Fruits), 'Tareeq Al-Sa'adatayn'(The Way to Double Happiness), 'Sharh Manazil Al-Sa'ireen'(Exposition of the Stages of Traveller), 'Al-Qadaa wa Al-Qadar'( Destiny), 'Jala' Al- Afham' (Comprehension Made Simple), 'Masa'id AlShaitan'(The Snares of Satan), 'Miftah Dar Al Sa'adah'(The Key to the House of Happiness), 'Al- Rooh'(The Spirit), 'Hadee Al-Arwah'(The Guide of Spirits), 'Raf'u Al-Yadayn'(The Raising of Hands), 'Al-Sawa'iq Al- Mursalah 'Ala Al-Jahmiyah wa Al-Mu'attilah' (Thunderbolts Against Jahmites and Mu'tazilites). He also composed a poem of six thousand couplets, which he entitled 'Al-Kafiyah fi Al-Intisar Lil-Firqatin Najiyah'.

He died in Damascus in 751 A.H. (1350 AD) His funeral was attended by a great many people. May Allah give him peace and grant him his favour, Amen.

## Chapter One: Man

﴿أَوَلَمْ يَرِ الْإِنْسَنُ أَنَّا خَلَقْنَاهُ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ فَإِذَا هُوَ خَصِيمٌ مُبِينٌ﴾ [يس: ٧٧]

*"Is man, then not aware that it is We who create him out of a mere drop of sperm- whereupon, lo! he showed him- self endowed with the power to think and to argue." Al-Qur'an(36:77)*

### Ibn Al-Qayyem's Propositions Concerning Man

1. That he was first created from clay, and that his seed was made from a draught of despised fluid.
2. That he was created from a handful that Allah collected from all parts of the earth, so that it contains the good and the evil, the easy-going and the intolerant, the liberal and the miserly. It was Jibreel (Gabriel) who took this handful, then it was fermented until it turned to mud, then Allah fashioned man as He deemed fit. Then He breathed into him of His spirit, so that he was a human of flesh and blood, talking and reasoning...Later on Allah had His angels prostrate themselves before man, and taught him the names of everything.
3. That he was blessed with intellect, knowledge, understanding, eloquence and speech.
4. That he was privileged with the quality of modesty.
5. That he was privileged with two means of expression, the oral and the written.
6. That he was endowed by Allah with the power of acquiring knowledge by several means.
7. That he was distinguished with certain motives and impulses that serve to accomplish what is good for man.
8. That man was distinguished with strength, desire and will.
9. That Allah's commandments are to be permanently observed until the day man meets His Lord.
10. That man was not created without purpose.
11. That man is distinguished from the other creatures in appearance and shape.
12. That man is an indivisible whole: composite of soul, mind and body.

## Stages of the Creation of Man

Ibn AI-Qayyem writes the following:

By considering the verses in the Qur'an in which Almighty Allah has urged His servants to reflect upon Him, one will indeed be led to learn about Allah, about His Oneness and attributes of perfection; to learn about aspects of His might as attested by the absoluteness of His power, the infinite nature of His wisdom; by His mercy, generosity, clemency, kindness, justice, grace, anger, reward and punishment - it is through reflection on these facts that He willed His servants to know Him, and it is for this reason that He exhorted them to reflect upon His signs.

It is with this in mind that I here mention a number of signs as referred to in the Qur'an, so that they may be a reminder of further signs. One set of such signs are related to the creation of man. It will be noticed that in numerous places in the Qur'an we have been exhorted to reflect on the creation of man, as for example in the following verses:

﴿ فَلْيَنْظُرِ الْإِنْسَانُ مِمَّ خُلِقَ ﴾ [الطارق : ٥]

*"Let man, then, observe from what he has been created." (86:5)*

﴿ وَفِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَفَلَا تُبْصِرُونَ ﴾ [الذاريات : ٢١]

*"Just as there are signs within your own selves: can you not, then, see?" (51:21)*

﴿ يَتَأَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِن كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِّنَ الْبَعْثِ فَإِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِّن تُّرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِمِّن نُّطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ مِمِّنْ عَلَقَةٍ ثُمَّ مِمِّنْ مُّضْغَةٍ مُّخَلَّقَةٍ وَغَيْرِ مُّخَلَّقَةٍ لِّنُبَيِّنَ لَكُمْ وَنُقَرُّ فِي الْأَرْحَامِ مَا نَشَاءُ

إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى ثُمَّ نُخْرِجُكُمْ طِفْلًا ثُمَّ لِتَبْلُغُوا أَشَدَّكُمْ وَمِنْكُمْ مَّن يُّنَوِّفُ  
وَمِنْكُمْ مَّن يُّرَدُّ إِلَىٰ أَرْدَلِ الْعُمُرِ لِكَيْلَا يَعْلَمَ مِن بَعْدِ عِلْمٍ شَيْئًا ﴾ [الحج : ٥]

*"O men! If you are in doubt as to the truth of resurrection, remember that, verily, We have created every one of you out of dust, then out of a drop of sperm, then out of a germ-cell, then out of an embryonic lump complete in itself and yet incomplete, so that We might make your origin clear unto you.*

*"And whatever We will to be born We cause to rest in the mothers' wombs for a term set by Us, and then We bring you forth as infants and allow you to live so that some of you might attain to maturity: for among you are such as are caused to die in childhood, just as many a one of you is reduced in old age to a most abject state, ceasing to know anything of what he once knew so well." (21: 5)*

﴿ اَيْحَسِبُ الْاِنْسَانُ اَنْ يَتْرَكَ سُدًى ۝ اَلَمْ يَكْ نُطْفَئْ مِنْ مَنِيٍّ يُمْنًى ۝ ثُمَّ كَانَ عَلَقَةً فَخَلَقَ فَسَوًى ۝ جَعَلَ مِنْهُ الزَّوْجَيْنِ الذَّكَرَ وَالْاُنثَى ۝ اَلَيْسَ ذَٰلِكَ بِقَدْرِ عَلًى اَنْ يُحْيِيَ الْمَوْتًى ﴾ [القيامة : ٣٦-٤٠]

"Does man, then, think that he is to be left to himself, to go about at will? Was he not once a mere drop of sperm that had been spilt, and thereafter became a germ-cell - whereupon He created and formed it in accordance with what it was meant to be, and fashioned out of it the two sexes, the male and the female? Is not He, then, able to bring the dead back to life?" (75: 36-40).

﴿ اَلَمْ نَخْلُقْكُمْ مِنْ مَّاءٍ مَّهِينٍ ۝ فَجَعَلْنَاهُ فِي قَرَارٍ مَّكِينٍ ۝ اِلَىٰ قَدَرٍ مَّعْلُومٍ ۝ فَقَدَرْنَا فَنِعْمَ الْقَدِرُونَ ﴾ [المرسلات : ٢٠-٢٣]

"Did We not create you out of a humble fluid, which We then allowed to remain in the womb's firm keeping for a term pre-ordained? Thus have We determined the nature of man's creation: and excellent indeed is Our power to determine what is to be!" (77: 20-23)

﴿ اَوَلَمْ يَرِ الْاِنْسَانُ اَنَّا خَلَقْنَاهُ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ فَاِذَا هُوَ خَصِيْمٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴾ [يس : ٧٧]

"Is man, then, not aware that it is We who create him out of a mere drop of sperm - whereupon, lo! he shows himself endowed with the power to think and to argue?" (36: 77)

﴿ وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْاِنْسَانَ مِنْ سُلَالَةٍ مِنْ طِينٍ ۝ ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَاهُ نُطْفَةً فِي قَرَارٍ مَّكِينٍ ۝ ثُمَّ خَلَقْنَا النُّطْفَةَ عَلَقَةً فَخَلَقْنَا الْعَلَقَةَ مُضْغَةً فَخَلَقْنَا الْمُضْغَةَ عِظَامًا فَكَسَوْنَا الْعِظَامَ لَحْمًا ثُمَّ اَنْشَأْنَاهُ خَلْقًا آخَرَ فَتَبَارَكَ اللهُ اَحْسَنُ الْخَالِقِينَ ﴾ [المؤمنون : ١٢-١٤]

"Now, indeed, We create man out of the essence of clay, and then We cause him to remain as a drop of sperm in the womb's firm keeping, and then We create out of the drop of sperm a germ-cell, and then We create out of the germ-cell an embryonic lump, and then We create within the embryonic lump bones, and then We clothe the bones with flesh - and then We bring all this into being as a new creation: hallowed, therefore, is Allah, the best of artisans!" (23: 12-14)

In many places in the Qur'an a human is urged to reflect and ponder over the starting of his creation, the growth and the end.

**Male reproductive cells swimming in the Spermatic Fluid**