A Cultural Reading of Paradise

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Translator's Foreword

Allāh does not create humans in vain. He bestows on them His bountiful grace and blesses them with countless faculties in order to test their belief in Him and fear of His anger. He also destines to them hardship and misery as a reminder that life is not an eternal abode or an ultimate goal, but rather a bridge they must cross to reach their ultimate destination.

In their diverse personalities, aspirations, talents and actions, humans are expected to seek Allāh's approval through worshipping Him, abiding by His orders, avoiding His prohibitions and, establishing a life shaped by Qur'ānic guidelines. If they do this, then they are entitled to an incredible reward whose form and content cannot be imagined. This reward is not only a life devoid of difficulties but also fulfillment of their material needs and it guarantees that their wishes come true. After all, who would not aspire to such a life?

Believers live forever in Paradise after spending their earthly life in quest of Allāh's approval. They will be satisfied graciously and their good deeds rewarded generously. None of life's inconveniences will be experienced and whatever the mind or heart desires will certainly be granted.

Books enumerating Paradise's *material* blessings are many. But books that link Paradise to cultural matters and abstract notions are rare. Thus, this book aims at uncovering this neglected aspect of Paradise. It shows that Paradise's material rewards are cultural reminders for humans to be creative, productive and spiritually inspired in this life. Among the material rewards mentioned are jewelry, clothes, utensils, houses, meadows, rivers, food and beds. Each of these is clearly connected to cultural and developmental aspects of our earthly life. Readers will certainly be inspired by the author's different thinking and perceptions of Paradise. His call to revisit the relevant Qur'ānic verses will guide readers to the hidden wonders of Heaven.

All praise is due to Almighty Allāh who has blessed me, once again, with the strength and will to translate a second book by Zakariya al- Muharrami. I would like

to extend my thanks to him for choosing me for this task. I ask Allāh to accept this task and future ones exclusively for His sake. He is All Hearing, All Seeing.

Khalsa H. al- Aghbari

Author's Introduction

Individuals' readings of Paradise are various. Some individuals see it as absolute enjoyment and endless fun which invokes in humans nothing but the desire to indulge in savoring such enjoyment. Others consider it as an anesthetic for minds and suppressant of energies. Paradise is also seen as opium which religions constantly market to kill the spirit of work. Muslims consider these views to be flawed. Paradise, as a matter of fact, is not limited to only awakening desires. It surpasses this to the establishment of the values required to do scientific research, build civilization and establish great social values. In the verses of the Holy Qur'ān which mention the blessings of Paradise, there are many incentives which push individuals to discover the secrets of earth and its laws. They also urge individuals to exploit the miracles of earth for the service of humans. Paradise which Allāh has promised His pious worshippers is unique in affecting the heart of a believer. It also provokes mental energies towards education, work and civilization.

It is unfortunate that the Islamic library is devoid of publications which establish a conceptualization for a cultural reading of Paradise. This, in turn, reflects weakness and crippled methodology from which the Islamic nation suffers. On the contrary, huge publications advertising a cursory reading of paradise are countless. In addition to that, many preachers think that invitation to Allāh is linked to mentioning the signs of the Hereafter and enumerating punishments of unbelievers. Paradise is rarely mentioned except when comparison to Hell is warranted.

This book is a pioneering one, as it is the only one written specially to focus on the cultural readings of Paradise. It elevates individuals' hearts and minds from the pictures of punishment and fun of Paradise enormously found elsewhere. It reflects the blessings of Paradise on our reality. It also stresses the fact that the Holy Qur'ān is rich with verses invoking energies and awakening emotions. This certainly refutes narrations which think that there are gaps in the Qur'ān which must be filled. Many books written on the description of Paradise and dependent on these legends and sayings led to restriction of Paradise to abstract enjoyment. They also strengthened the reaction that Paradise is no more than opium for nations. They preserve the legendary outlook on religion and this definitely drains religion of purity.

Zakariya al- Muharra

Admission to Paradise

Muslims live this life eagerly anticipating the Hereafter. They fight temptation in order to be with the best of companions (the Prophet (peace be upon him), his Companions and followers) in "a Garden whose width is that (of the whole) of the heavens and of the earth, prepared for the righteous" (3:133). In the Hereafter when unbelievers undergo regret and are admitted to Hell, believers find "Gardens of Eternity, whose doors will (ever) be open to them;" (38: 50). If Paradise, where believers are neither questioned nor punished, is entered through doors, how then do believers on earth dare to break into houses and invade others' property? Have they not heard Allāh's command "It is no virtue if you enter your houses from the back: It is virtue if you fear Allāh. Enter houses through the proper doors: And fear Allah. That you may prosper." (2:189)

This can be applied to all aspects of life. One reason for the progress of other nations over the Islamic *Ummah* (the Islamic Nation) is that they value individuals according to their qualifications and talents. Thus, they assign the right individual to the right position and task. However, the Islamic *Ummah* has been blinded by favoring individuals according to their social status and connections. As a result, individuals get jobs if they have connections. Such a practice exhausts energies and freezes progress and advancement. Paradise, being fair, is the ultimate in culture and advancement because admission is not based on connections or social rank. Only good individuals with their parents, wives and children are admitted. Allāh confirms this in the verse "Gardens of perpetual bliss: they shall enter there, as well as the righteous among their fathers, their spouses, and their offspring: and angels shall enter unto them from every gate (with the salutation):" (13: 23)

This enhances comfort in the hearts of believers especially after they are greeted with a warm welcome "The righteous (will be) amid gardens and fountains (of clear-flowing water). (Their greeting will be): "Enter you here in peace and security." (15: 45-46). This safe admission enhances in us the desire to reaffirm safety and stability in our societies so that we are not in chaos and continual fear and worry. Fearful individuals cannot be creative but inevitably regress to backward and traditional life.

Believers' comfort and satisfaction is further enhanced when angels receive them "Peace be on you; enter you the Garden, because of (the good) which you did (in the world)." (16: 32). This demands an aware authority which provides comfort, care and necessities for its constituents to live a decent life. The authority has to interact with them in a spirit of love and peace and abjure threat and imprisonment. This speech urges citizens to contribute to building brotherhood and cooperation with one another. The core element for forming social bonds is meeting one another with the Islamic peace greeting, similar to which believers in Paradise use "Their greeting therein will be: "Peace!" (14: 23)

The Rivers and Springs of Paradise

Allāh created humans from water. He says, "It is He Who has created man from water" (25: 54). Therefore, human life is indispensably linked to water. Wherever there is water, human civilization is established. The best of these civilizations have been on the banks of rivers whether natural or human-made. Early humans were forced to dig canals and ditches and construct pipes through which water flows. This certainly ensures the continuity of life. In Paradise, where life is eternal, rivers flow with water to assuage thirst and inspire contemplators with the wonder and beauty of its endless flow "But give glad tidings to those who believe and work righteousness, that their portion is Gardens, beneath which rivers flow." (2: 25). This reward shows the importance of water and the obligation of preserving it. Therefore, believers have to preserve water and avoid abusing it like the ignorant who use water extravagantly and ignore the injunction "O Children of Adam! wear your beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer: eat and drink: But waste not by excess, for Allah loves not the wasters." (7: 31). Allāh also says, "and the Transgressors will be Companions of the Fire!" (40: 43). As for believers who keep this valuable wealth, they are entitled to "Gardens of Eternity which they will enter: beneath them flow (pleasant) rivers: they will have therein all that they wish: thus Allah does reward the righteous,-" (16: 31).

The rivers of Paradise are not limited to flowing water but contain various types of liquid, "in it are rivers of water incorruptible; rivers of milk of which the taste never changes; rivers of wine, a joy to those who drink; and rivers of honey pure and clear. In it there are for them all kinds of fruits; and Grace from their Lord. (Can those in such Bliss) be compared to such as shall dwell for ever in the Fire, and be given, to drink, boiling water, so that it cuts up their bowels (to pieces)?" (47: 15). How tantalizing this scenery is! It drives creative artists to become inspired. Allāh says, "The righteous (will be) amid gardens and fountains (of clear-flowing water)." (15: 45). Should we not look for springs and rivers which flow with water and oil instead of depending on others who have searched and investigated for us only to end up stealing our wealth? This began to happen mainly when we stopped reading the Holy Qur'ān carefully and did not pay attention to its encouraging calls which describe Paradise. We thought that Paradise was for fun not for creativity and development. Therefore, we should be pious and initiate a cultural reading of Paradise's blessings,

rivers and springs because the pious "(will be) in a position of Security. Among Gardens and Springs;" (44: 51-52).

The rivers of Paradise are not only beautiful in their description but also in their names. Allāh mentions, "A fountain there, called *Salsabīl*." (76: 18). This makes individuals aware that they have to choose lovely names for their children, places and institutions as this attracts customers.

Meadows and Shades of Paradise

Comfort and pleasure fill eyes and hearts when viewing gardens and greenery because these connect human minds with deep instinctual meanings linked to birth, death and rebirth from the earth " From the (earth) did We create you, and into it shall We return you, and from it shall We bring you out once again." (20: 55). Trees in their life cycle offer a vivid example of Human birth and death. Allāh states, " It is He Who brings out the living from the dead, and brings out the dead from the living, and Who gives life to the earth after it is dead: and thus shall you be brought out (from the dead). (30: 19). Trees provide sustenance as they are the first source of food for humans, and so animals which in turn become another food source for humans. In the humans' hearts, greenery is always associated with feelings of comfort and calmness. Therefore, one of the gifts of Paradise is the enjoyment of water and greenery. Allāh says, " Then those who have believed and worked righteous deeds, shall be made happy in a Mead of Delight." (30: 15). Mead here means a green garden where water flows non-stop " those who believe and work righteous deeds will be in the luxuriant meads of the Gardens: they shall have, before their Lord, all that they wish for./ That will indeed be the magnificent Bounty (of Allah)." (42: 22)

This scene of greenery has to inculcate in us a care for trees and plants in order to provide food for the Muslim *Ummah* instead of our dependence on others who have exploited our weakness and laziness. Knowing that we have turned away from the Qur'ān, they begin to supply our markets with genetically modified plants and use us as their laboratory guinea pigs.

We have to be aware of the importance of agriculture, greenery and meadows of Paradise which provide shades under which we can rest our bodies and hearts. Thus, these aspects have become amongst the blessings of Paradise. Allāh says, " But those who believe and do deeds of righteousness, We shall soon admit to Gardens, with rivers flowing beneath,- their eternal home: Therein shall they have companions pure and holy: We shall admit them to shades, cool and ever deepening." (4: 57). He also says, "But Allāh will deliver them from the evil of that Day, and will shed over them a Light of Beauty and (blissful) Joy. And because they were patient and constant, He will reward them with a Garden and (garments of) silk. Reclining in the (Garden) on

raised thrones, they will see there neither the sun's (excessive heat) nor (the moon's) excessive cold. And the shades of the (Garden) will come low over them, and the bunches (of fruit), there, will hang low in humility." (76: 11-14).

The Jewelry of the Residents of Paradise

Human beings' earthly jewelry varies greatly. Rich and poor individuals are distinguishable by their clothes' quality, types and the quantity jewelry they wear. Such elements readily reflect the culture of a society and are ways of expressing its traditions. Intellectual colonists who are dubbed "donkeys" of cultural colonialism are ruled out from this. They imitate their masters in their behavior, manners, clothes and jewelry and have no distinct features of their own. As for Paradise, it shelters those believers whose personality is distinguished by unique and incomparable clothes and jewelry. Paradise has ornaments which attract attention. These encourage, by their luster and glitter, artists, couturiers and blacksmiths to design and produce gorgeous styles and designs. Allāh says, describing the jewelry of Paradise residents, "For them will be Gardens of Eternity; beneath them rivers will flow; they will be adorned therein with bracelets of gold, and they will wear green garments of fine silk and heavy brocade: They will recline therein on raised thrones. How good the recompense! How beautiful a couch to recline on!" (18: 31). Some bangles are made of gold and others of silver. Allāh says, describing them, "And when you look, it is there you will see a Bliss and a Realm Magnificent. Upon them will be green Garments of fine silk and heavy brocade, and they will be adorned with Bracelets of silver; and their Lord will give to them to drink of a Wine Pure and Holy." (76: 20-21)

Despite the fact that gold and silver represent the most precious forms of jewelry, the Qur'ānic verse goes beyond them and lists beads which are characterized by softness, glitter and stillness. Allāh says, "Allāh will admit those who believe and work righteous deeds, to Gardens beneath which rivers flow: they shall be adorned therein with bracelets of gold and pearls; and their garments there will be of silk." (22: 23). He also says, " Gardens of Eternity will they enter: therein will they be adorned with bracelets of gold and pearls; and their garments there will be of silk." (35: 33). Silk clothes with their softness, smoothness, and beauty are worn by Paradise residents, "Gardens of Eternity will they enter: therein will they be adorned with bracelets of gold and pearls; and their garments there will be of silk." (35: 33). Allāh promises "will deliver them from the evil of that Day, and will shed over them a Light of Beauty and (blissful) Joy. And because they were patient and constant, He will reward them with a Garden and (garments of) silk." (76: 11-12).

Silk is the material from which Paradise residents' clothes are made. However, the design and look of these clothes, along with their decorations and accessories, are not mentioned in the Qur'ān. So, creative individuals such as blacksmiths, designers and artists are free to create imaginatively the finest designs which suit believers and their culturally distinct originality instead of importing designs and fashions contradicting the Islamic values from abroad. The Qur'ān mentions two types of material: *Sundus* (silk) and *istabraq* (brocade): "As to the Righteous (they will be) in a position of Security, Among Gardens and Springs; Dressed in fine silk and in rich brocade, they will face each other;" (44: 51-54). *Sundus* is the lightest of cloth which corresponds to softness and transparency. As for *istabraq*, it represents the heaviest form of cloth. This indicates the variations available in Paradise for appearance and design. Each individual has his/ her own taste and Paradise meets all these options, "there will be there all that the souls could desire, all that their eyes could delight in:" (43: 71). This, in turn, ensures the respect and esteem for varying views and ideas. Moreover, it reflects the importance of establishing civilizations based on diverse resources, products and sources of income so that individuals feel financially secure. This is so in the earthly life, but in Paradise, Muslims are invited to enter paradise "We are your protectors in this life and in the Hereafter: therein you shall have all that your souls shall desire; therein shall you have all that you ask for!-" (41: 31).

The Houses of the Residents of Paradise

Allāh creates humans who are in a weak form and lack what should cover their needs and hide their weaknesses. Allāh says, “Allāh wishes to lighten your (difficulties): For man was created Weak (in flesh)" (4: 28). He also makes marriage like a house in which hearts feel comfortable and needs and desires are fulfilled as He says, "And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts): verily in that are Signs for those who reflect." (30: 21). Similarly, He makes houses for the comfort of souls and bodies as reflected in the verse: " It is Allāh Who made your habitations homes of rest and quiet for you; and made for you, out of the skins of animals, (tents for) dwellings, which you find so light (and handy) when you travel and when you stop (in your travels); and out of their wool, and their soft fibers (between wool and hair), and their hair, rich stuff and articles of convenience (to serve you) for a time." (16: 80). This is clearly seen when Pharaoh’s wife asked to substitute the first house with the second one in Paradise. Allāh says, "And Allāh sets forth, as an example to those who believe the wife of Pharaoh: Behold she said: "O my Lord! Build for me, in nearness to you, a mansion in the Garden, and save me from Pharaoh and his doings, and save me from those that do wrong";" (66:11).

So what do the houses of Paradise look like?

Allāh describes these as homes. They are not, however, like any home in which one might or might not feel comfortable. They are especially built to provide comfort and ease for bodies, hearts and souls: "Allāh has promised to Believers, men and women, gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein, and beautiful mansions in gardens of everlasting bliss. But the greatest bliss is the good pleasure of Allah. That is the supreme felicity." (9: 72). Allāh says, " He will forgive you your sins, and admit you to Gardens beneath which Rivers flow, and to beautiful mansions in Gardens of Eternity: that is indeed the Supreme Achievement."(61:12). As already mentioned, homes might either be abstract houses representing marriage or material houses that shelter bodies and souls. We are aware of the wonder of the Qur’ānic description of the houses of Paradise as they are “beautiful mansions”. We will leave marriage now for a different time in order to enjoy looking at the houses of Paradise.

Allāh says, "Blessed is He who, if that were His will, could give you better (things) than those,- Gardens beneath which rivers flow; and He could give you palaces (secure to dwell in)." (25: 10). The word *qas□r* (palace) in Arabic means destination reflecting that the homes of Paradise are of ultimate perfection in every aspect. They are huge, beautiful and wonderful. This careful description of them inspires designers and architects to produce the finest architectural plans which elevate the culture and art and architecture of our *Ummah*. The Qur'ānic description keeps adding to the wonder and beauty of these houses. It makes us dive deep into the Glorious Creation of Allāh. He says, " Those are the ones who will be rewarded with the highest place in heaven, because of their patient constancy: therein shall they be met with salutations and peace," (25: 10). He also says, " But those who believe and work deeds of righteousness - to them shall We give a Home in Heaven,- lofty mansions beneath which flow rivers,- to dwell therein forever;- an excellent reward for those who do (good)!-" (29:58). How wonderful this picture is! The rivers of Paradise do not just flow outside but also underneath the rooms of these homes. The Holy Qur'ān continues to draw other pictures of these rooms, this time to show their vertical extension resembling lofty towers and high skyscrapers. Allāh says, "But it is for those who fear their Lord. That lofty mansions, one above another, have been built: beneath them flow rivers (of delight): (such is) the Promise of Allah. Never does Allah fail in (His) promise." (39: 20). Believers are not afraid of falling or suffocating in these houses because in paradise only goodness and security are available. Allāh says, "It is not your wealth nor your sons, that will bring you nearer to Us in degree: but only those who believe and work righteousness - these are the ones for whom there is a multiplied Reward for their deeds, while secure they (reside) in the dwellings on high!" (34: 37). The Holy Qur'ān concludes its description by adding another aspect of these rooms. No one can adequately compass this picture except those who can appreciate architectural design. Allāh says, "Companions restrained (as to their glances), in (goodly) pavilions;-" (55: 72). We might think that these tents are different from the palaces. Some imaginative individuals might combine the two views creating a divine picture that is hard to describe.

The Beds of Paradise

One of the eternal blessings of Paradise is its beds. For the believers “will be Gardens of Eternity; beneath them rivers will flow; they will be adorned therein with bracelets of gold, and they will wear green garments of fine silk and heavy brocade: They will recline therein on raised thrones." (18: 31). It is the believers’ right to rest and relax when their earthly life is filled with work and diligence and offers no rest or relaxation since it is not eternal. Civilizations are established on the shoulders of faithful workers. As for the lazy and sluggish, there is no place in the history of construction. They do not have the luck of the blessings of the pious who are in paradise: "Therein will they recline (at ease): Therein can they call (at pleasure) for fruit in abundance, and (delicious) drink; And beside them will be chaste women restraining their glances, (companions) of equal age." (38: 51-52) and also me "And those Foremost (in Faith) will be Foremost (in the Hereafter). These will be those Nearest to Allāh. In Gardens of Bliss: A number of people from those of old, And a few from those of later times. (they will be) on Thrones encrusted (with gold and precious stones), Reclining on them, facing each other." (56: 10-16).

The beds of Paradise give creative individuals views of pure Islamic designs characterized by originality and Islamic, international and national expertise.

The Holy Qur’ān presents innumerable pictures of Paradise beds. Allāh says, "They will recline on Carpets, whose inner linings will be of rich brocade: the Fruit of the Gardens will be near (and easy of reach)." (56: 55). The Holy Qur’ān declares that the blankets are made of (the heaviest of cloth). This makes humans imagine the kinds, types, and texture of the external material of these beds. Mere imagination cannot establish a civilization if it is not followed by translation of that view and idea into reality. An idea, no matter how great, has no value if it does not become a reality lived by people. Muslims are required to be artistically and industrially creative to win over their competitors in the battle of cultures.

One of the pictures which helps a creative observer to make a masterpiece of these beds in Paradise appears when Allāh speaks of believers "Reclining on green Cushions *Rafraf* and rich Carpets of beauty *'abqariy*." (56: 76). *Rafraf* is a type of

cloth and *'abqariy* is a type of mat. The Holy Qur'ān leaves it open for creative individuals to ponder the mix of all these colors and types of beds and blankets. Here could emerge gorgeous examples of products and structures in the Islamic *Ummah* that could compete others in cultural advancement.

The Food of the Residents of Paradise

It is common sense that food and drink (after air, of course) are necessary for humans to survive in this life. But humans never think of food and drink as also forms of luxury and grace. Therefore, we find them present in Paradise. Allāh says, " To them will be passed round, dishes and goblets of gold: there will be there all that the souls could desire, all that their eyes could delight in: and you shall abide therein (forever)." (43: 71). Despite the paucity of words in this verse, it carries rich meanings indicative of eternal grace, comfort, and happiness which inspire minds and energies to imagine the eternal bless of Paradise. We will not part from the Qur'ānic verse which opens the windows wide for us to see that wonderful image. Most important of all is eternity. Allāh says, "But give glad tidings to those who believe and work righteousness, that their portion is Gardens, beneath which rivers flow./ Every time they are fed with fruits therefrom, they say: "Why, this is what we were fed with before," for they are given things in similitude; and they have therein companions pure (and holy); and they abide therein (forever)." (2:25).

The fruits of Paradise do not diminish in quantity and they are not changed by time. In other words, they do not wither. They stay fresh and tasty. The fruits of Paradise are of all types and kinds. Allāh says, describing these fruits, "As to the Righteous (they will be) in a position of Security, Among Gardens and Springs; Dressed in fine silk and in rich brocade, they will face each other; So; and We shall join them to Companions with beautiful, big, and lustrous eyes. There they can call for every kind of fruit in peace and security; Nor will they there taste Death, except the first death; and He will preserve them from the Penalty of the Blazing Fire,-" (44: 51-56). Such will be the Garden of which ye are made heirs for your (good) deeds (in life). You shall have therein abundance of fruit, from which you shall have satisfaction." (43: 72-73)

The abundance of the fruit of Paradise indicates its variety in look, size and shape. It is always available irrespective of season. This might inspire research into seasonless fruits: "The Companions of the Right Hand,- what will be the Companions of the Right Hand? (They will be) among Lote-trees without thorns, Among Talh trees with flowers (or fruits) piled one above another,- In shade long-extended, By

water flowing constantly, And fruit in abundance./ Whose season is not limited, nor (supply) forbidden," (56: 27-33).

There is, as a matter of fact, a call for research in the Holy Qurān and that is because there is a single type of fruit but different in taste, look, smell according to desires and tastes: " In them will be Fruits of every kind, two and two. In them will be Fruits of every kind, two and two." (55: 52) . It also lists for us the types of fruits in paradise: "In them will be Fruits, and dates and pomegranates: Then which of the favours of your Lord will you deny?" (55: 68)

Because dates and pomegranate are the fruits of Paradise, we should look for their unique nutritional values. It is worth mentioning that People in Paradise have the right to choose from the meats and fruits available. If this verse only mentions bird meat, there is a comprehensive verse which mentions all types of meats that cannot be imagined "Round about them will (serve) youths of perpetual (freshness), With goblets, (shining) beakers, and cups (filled) out of clear-flowing fountains: No after-ache will they receive therefrom, nor will they suffer intoxication: And with fruits, any that they may select: And the flesh of fowls, any that they may desire." (56: 17-21). "And those who believe and whose families follow them in Faith,- to them shall We join their families: Nor shall We deprive them (of the fruit) of aught of their works: (Yet) is each individual in pledge for his deeds. And We shall bestow on them, of fruit and meat, anything they shall desire. They shall there exchange, one with another, a (loving) cup free of frivolity, free of all taint of ill." (52: 21-23)

Talking about foods leads us to shed light on drinks as they are essential to human survival. Allāh says, "Gardens of Eternity, whose doors will (ever) be open to them; Therein will they recline (at ease): Therein can they call (at pleasure) for fruit in abundance, and (delicious) drink;" (38: 51-52)

Yes, it is Paradise drinks which are pure. What we have mentioned about the variety of foods also applies to drinks. One of the colors of drinks in Paradise is white which represents purity and blessedness. Allāh says, "Upon them will be green Garments of fine silk and heavy brocade, and they will be adorned with Bracelets of silver; and their Lord will give to them to drink of a Wine Pure and Holy." (76: 21). But it will be no more than the retribution of (the Evil) that you have wrought;- But

the sincere (and devoted) Servants of Allah,- For them is a Sustenance determined, Fruits (Delights); and they (shall enjoy) honour and dignity, In Gardens of Felicity, Facing each other on Thrones (of Dignity): Round will be passed to them a Cup from a clear-flowing fountain, Crystal-white, of a taste delicious to those who drink (thereof), Free from headiness; nor will they suffer intoxication therefrom." (37: 39-47). "In it are rivers of water incorruptible; rivers of milk of which the taste never changes; rivers of wine, a joy to those who drink; and rivers of honey pure and clear. In it there are for them all kinds of fruits; and Grace from their Lord. (47: 15)

Moreover, other types of drinks are enumerated in the following verse. The Qur'ān is not content to make us be like mere watchers. It also pushes us to create beautiful pictures relevant to the drinks' look, taste and content "Reclining in the (Garden) on raised thrones, they will see there neither the sun's (excessive heat) nor (the moon's) excessive cold. And the shades of the (Garden) will come low over them, and the bunches (of fruit), there, will hang low in humility. And amongst them will be passed round vessels of silver and goblets of crystal,- Crystal-clear, made of silver: they will determine the measure thereof (according to their wishes). And they will be given to drink there of a Cup (of Wine) mixed with *Zanjabil*,-" (76: 13-17)

The previous image which reveals the drink combined with ginger gives us a free recipe for drinks and foods by urging us to mix the tasty components together. It also leads us to know the benefits of ginger and its nutritional value. We could finally ask Allāh to have us amongst those who are told in Paradise "(To them will be said:) "Eat and drink you, with profit and health, because of your (good) deeds." (52:19).

The Utensils of the Residents of Paradise

There remain many breathtaking blessings of Paradise included in the Holy Qur'ān. In this section, I present another view of Paradise which includes many wonderful pictures and cultural lessons for the *Ummah*. Utensils of Paradise are always filled with delicious food and drink. Allāh says, "To them will be passed round, dishes and goblets of gold: there will be there all that the souls could desire, all that their eyes could delight in: and ye shall abide therein (for eye)." (43: 71). This open text amazes contemplators who are able to imagine wonderful pictures of golden plates of various sizes, types and decoration. How is this amazing harmony in the designs of these golden plates and cups presented?

The Utensils of Paradise are not only made of gold but also of silver, glass and maybe other metals only known to Allāh: "And amongst them will be passed round vessels of silver and goblets of crystal,- Crystal-clear, made of silver: they will determine the measure thereof (according to their wishes)." (76: 15-16). This verse, linguistically wonderful, creates magnificent uncommon pictures. The first is the cups which are made into *qawarīr* (bottles). The second is the fact that they are made of silver. The beauty of this picture is due to the fact that people thought previously that *quarīr* were only made of glass. This unusual production breaks the common cultural aspect and offers readers a free ticket to the worlds of creativity and discovery through their widest doors.

The previous verses have taken us to the worlds of creativity and beauty in the design and appearance of these utensils. There is another verse which urges us to consider and contemplate other creative aspects of the blessings of Paradise which are neatness and organization. Allāh says, "Therein will be Thrones (of dignity), raised on high, Goblets placed (ready)," (88: 13-14). All is organized and neat in Paradise, even the cups which are set out in a breathtaking manner: "Round about them will (serve) youths of perpetual (freshness), "(56: 17-18) With goblets, (shining) beakers, and cups (filled) out of clear-flowing fountains:" Muslims should make use of this by organizing their daily lives, work priorities and time.

Paradise does not only have cups and *qawarīr* but also other objects: “When they are told, "Fear you that which is before you and that which will be after you, in order that you may receive Mercy," (they turn back). “(36: 45-46). “As to the Righteous, they shall drink of a Cup (of Wine) mixed with *Kafur*,- Not a Sign comes to them from among the Signs of their Lord, but they turn away “ (76: 5). “And they will be given to drink there of a Cup (of Wine) mixed with *Zanjabil*,” (76: 17). The cups have no necks but the *Abarīq* have long necks which pour eternal liquid bounty into the glasses and cups of Paradise’s residents.

The Qur’ānic verses also bring forth some of these drinks. Allāh says, "When they are told, "Fear you that which is before you and that which will be after you, in order that you may receive Mercy," (they turn back). Not a Sign comes to them from among the Signs of their Lord, but they turn away therefrom." (36: 45-46). He also says "As to the Righteous, they shall drink of a Cup (of Wine) mixed with *Kafur*,- " (76: 5) and "And they will be given to drink there of a Cup (of Wine) mixed with *Zanjabil*,- " (76: 17). Heavenly glass only serves the best of drinks mixed with ginger ale and camphor. This tells Muslims not to use their cups for forbidden drinks. Allāh tells Muslims to purify their cups from the forbidden: “And We shall bestow on them, of fruit and meat, anything they shall desire. They shall there exchange, one with another, a (loving) cup free of frivolity, free of all taint of ill.” (52: 22-23). Smokers and drinkers should be careful not to let evil contaminate their clothes, utensils, brains and bodies. In the concluding scene, we immerse ourselves in this wonderful picture of heavenly utensils. Allāh says, "Verily for the Righteous there will be a fulfillment of (the heart's) desires; Gardens enclosed, and grapevines; Companions of equal age; And a cup full (to the brim). No vanity shall they hear therein, nor Untruth:- (78: 31-35)

The Women of Paradise

Ladies comprise the most wonderful scenes of Paradise. The Holy Qur'ān has excelled in describing them profusely. Such a description makes people look forward to seeing them and enjoying their beauty. These ladies are pure and purified wives about whom Allāh remarks: "But give glad tidings to those who believe and work righteousness, that their portion is Gardens, beneath which rivers flow. Every time they are fed with fruits therefrom, they say: "Why, this is what we were fed with before," for they are given things in similitude; and they have therein companions pure (and holy); and they abide therein (for ever)." (2: 25). Allāh, the Almighty, also says "Say: Shall I give you glad tidings of things Far better than those? For the righteous are Gardens in nearness to their Lord, with rivers flowing beneath; therein is their eternal home; with companions pure (and holy); and the good pleasure of Allah. For in Allāh's sight are (all) His servants,-" (3: 15). He says "But those who believe and do deeds of righteousness, We shall soon admit to Gardens, with rivers flowing beneath,- their eternal home: Therein shall they have companions pure and holy: We shall admit them to shades, cool and ever deepening." (4: 57).

A Muslim woman has to be chastise in order to be in the list of the heavenly women who are of breathtaking beauty. Allāh comments: "Gardens of perpetual bliss: they shall enter there, as well as the righteous among their fathers, their spouses, and their offspring: and angels shall enter unto them from every gate (with the salutation):" (13: 23). He says, "Verily the Companions of the Garden shall that Day have joy in all that they do; They and their associates will be in groves of (cool) shade, reclining on Thrones (of dignity); (Every) fruit (enjoyment) will be there for them; they shall have whatever they call for; "Peace!" - a word (of salutation) from a Lord Most Merciful!" (36: 55-58)

How pretty the women of paradise are! Because eyes are the sign of women's beauty, the women of paradise have lustrous eyes: "As to the Righteous (they will be) in a position of Security, Among Gardens and Springs; Dressed in fine silk and in rich brocade, they will face each other; So; and We shall join them to Companions with beautiful, big, and lustrous eyes." (44: 51-54). It is really the happiest moment in the believers' life. "They will recline (with ease) on Thrones (of dignity) arranged in

ranks; and We shall join them to Companions, with beautiful big and lustrous eyes." (52: 20). It is the meeting time and satisfying ones' eagerness "Companions restrained (as to their glances), in (goodly) pavilions;-" (55: 72).

In the houses of Paradise "will be (Maidens), chaste, restraining their glances, whom no man or Jinn before them has touched;- " (55: 56) . How then can one not enjoy life in paradise? This wonderful description calls Muslim women to lower their gaze and protect themselves. Moreover, married Muslim women should only devote themselves to their husbands and never let their imagination venture towards other men. Allāh also says, describing the women of Paradise, "We have created (their Companions) of special creation. And made them virgin - pure (and undefiled), - Beloved (by nature), equal in age,-" (56: 35-37), which means that they are active in fulfilling the needs of their husbands.

Thus, Muslim women should be characterized by these virtues to gain their husbands' approval and protect their families through recalling the elegance and beauty of heavenly women: "And (there will be) Companions with beautiful, big, and lustrous eyes,- Like unto Pearls well-guarded." (56: 22-23). Allāh also adds, "Like unto Rubies and coral." (55: 58)

They are not pieces of jewelry to be displayed on store shelves like these women of morally collapsed nations who display their bodies in stores, papers, magazines, casinos and satellite channels. Muslim women should emulate the women of Paradise and never go after the wood of Hellfire. Another picture we can conclude with is the beauty and magnificence of these women in the verse: "Companions of equal age;" (78: 33). Their breasts rise when breathing indicating the beautiful attributes of the female.

The Satisfaction of the Residents of Paradise

Humans are made up of soul and body. Thus, their happiness is based on satisfying the needs of both. Paradise is eternal and offers incomparable happiness. It is no wonder, then, that the Holy Qurān, besides including examples of wonderful heavenly material blessings, mentions cultural signs linking spiritual blessings to psychological happiness. Allāh declares, "Say: Shall I give you glad tidings of things far better than those? For the righteous are Gardens in nearness to their Lord, with rivers flowing beneath; therein is their eternal home; with companions pure (and holy); and the good pleasure of Allah. For in Allah's sight are (all) His servants,-" (3: 15). Allāh's approval of humans makes them feel secure and certain about the continuity of the blessings of Paradise. As long as Allāh is satisfied with them, their worries are over, misery is wiped out and fear vanishes. They are confident that Allāh's blessings are eternal. How can they end when Allāh is satisfied with humans? Allāh announces, "Their Lord does give them glad tidings of a Mercy from Himself, of His good pleasure, and of gardens for them, wherein are delights that endure: They will dwell therein for ever" (9:21-22).

We are not exaggerating when we say that Allāh's approval is the ultimate goal in the hearts of believers; it is much more important than material rewards. This is proved in the verse: "Allāh hath promised to Believers, men and women, gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein, and beautiful mansions in gardens of everlasting bliss. But the greatest bliss is the good pleasure of Allah. That is the supreme felicity." (9: 72). Allāh's approval is the biggest blessing and the most important gift which cannot be compared to purifying faces, admission to Paradise, or savoring goodness. This satisfaction which produces happiness in believers' hearts reassures them about what they have be granted. Allāh says, "Allah will say: "This is a day on which the truthful will profit from their truth: theirs are gardens, with rivers flowing beneath,- their eternal Home: Allah well-pleased with them, and they with Allah. That is the great salvation, (the fulfillment of all desires)." (5:119).

The most obvious cultural lesson for the *Ummah* indicating the significance of Allāh's approval is that cultural advancement and satisfaction of material needs will not be enough for believers if they are not accompanied by prosper in spiritual

satisfaction. Western culture is a vivid example of the failure humanity has experienced in trying to create happiness because it separates material development from protective religion which guards against loss.

Generations have become lost, crimes and immorality have spread, families have disintegrated and societies have become too worldly. Different philosophies have emerged to resurrect the spiritually dead and psychologically lost Western society. Thus, the Islamic *Ummah,* in its endeavor to catch up with the intellect and culture of the West, must avoid the fatal mistakes which the West has made by separating religion from life. Islam is the religion which establishes life. Thus, any Muslim who lives his religion without life is doomed and that who wants to live life without religion is also doomed because Islam is a balanced religion and way of life. It connects good deeds and establishing life for Allāh's sake with succeeding in this life and the Hereafter. How great Islam is and how magnificent Allāh's approval of believers is!

True Brotherhood in Paradise

People fail to progress socially and culturally because their hearts are filled with hatred, grudges and envy. This is noticeable when envious individuals constantly try to put obstacles in the path of successful individuals in order to harm them. For instance, an envious man whose heart is darkened by hatred and anger will spare no effort to harm successful people. He will often resort to cheating, lying, betraying, backbiting, and slandering. He may harm others physically by stealing, raping and killing. Islam comes to call humans to worship Allāh and build up the earth. These cannot be accomplished unless Muslim society is cleansed from the causes of destruction and backwardness. One way of cleansing a society is by removing hatred, envy and grudges from individuals' hearts.

Allāh warns us of envy; He says, "And from the mischief of the envious one as he practices envy." (113:5). Moreover, He has also warns us about deeds that might lead to fighting and disputes. He declares, "And obey Allāh and His Messenger. and fall into no disputes, lest you lose heart and your power depart;" (8: 46). He has shown that the establishment of a culture and elevation to the highest levels of paradise cannot be achieved unless hatred is removed from human's hearts. He says, "The righteous (will be) amid gardens and fountains (of clear-flowing water). (Their greeting will be): "Enter ye here in peace and security." And We shall remove from their hearts any lurking sense of injury: (they will be) brothers (joyfully) facing each other on thrones (of dignity)." (15:45-48). Muslims who are aware of themselves and their end should start by cleansing their hearts of envy and hatred in order to live happily. They should be satisfied with Allāh's gifts to them. They must seek Allāh's approval. When individuals are contented and hearts are cleansed of envy and hatred, Muslims are privileged to enjoy eternal Paradise.

Allāh says "As to the Righteous, they will be in Gardens, and in Happiness,- Enjoying the (Bliss) which their Lord has bestowed on them, and their Lord shall deliver them from the Penalty of the Fire." (52: 17-18).

The Knowledge of the Residents of Paradise

Angels bowed to the prophet Ādam (pbuh) after they realized that he was superior to them due to his knowledge. The complete story of Ādam is narrated in the Holy Qur'ān urging Muslims to contemplate its cultural meanings. The Chapters of the story begin by distinguishing Ādam with the ability to know matters, their names and facts. On the contrary, angels were not provided with this ability. When revealed to them that Ādam owned mental ability to knowledge of matters, they knew that he had a privilege of appreciation and closeness to Allāh. They were ordered to bow to him not because of his worshipping but his knowledge. People should submit to knowledge and the knowledgeable. As for individuals who lack knowledge, they should follow scholars despite their color or low social rank. Allāh says "And He taught Ādam the names of all things, then He placed them before the angels, and said: "Tell Me the names of these if you are right. They said: "Glory to Thee: of knowledge we have none, save what you have taught us: in truth it is You Who are perfect in knowledge and wisdom. He said: "O Ādam! Tell them their names." When he had told them their names, Allāh said: "Did I not tell you that I know the secrets of heaven and earth, and I know what you reveal and you conceal?". And behold, We said to the angels: "Bow down to Ādam:" and they bowed down: not so *Iblīs:* he refused and was haughty: he was of those who reject Faith." (2: 31-34).

The story of the bow of angels to Ādam stresses the fact that humans are superior to objects of earth. Their superiority is based on their advancing knowledge which is granted by reading, discovery and knowledge. Thus, the verses of Holy Qur'ān urge humanity to read "Proclaim! (or read!) in the name of your Lord and Cherisher, Who created-. Created man, out of leech- like clot: Proclaim! And your Lord is Most Bountiful. He Who taught (the use of) the Pen. Taught man that which he knew not." (96: 1-5). They also urge humanity to discover "D they not look at the camels, how they are made?- And the Sky, how it is raised high?- And at the Mountains, how they are fixed firm?- And the Earth, how it is spread out?" (88: 17-20). And finally, there is a call for the advancement of knowledge "Say: "Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know?" (39:9).

The Muslim nation deteriorates when it turns down its creative individuals and readers and substitutes them with memorizers and conservatives. The progress of

other nations happens when these nations consider reading to be a sacred obligation. Other nations won over Muslims who shunned reading.

Some Muslims thought that this life is destined for the prosperity of non believers and Muslims are devoid of luck. This is certainly a wrong idea that needs to be corrected. Life is the cultivation of the Hereafter. The Holy Qur'ān orders Muslims to care for life. Allāh says "But seek, with the (wealth) which Allāh has bestowed on you, the Home of the Hereafter, nor forget your portion in this world." (28: 77). Muslims should realize that discovery, knowledge and education are amongst the characteristics of the residents of Paradise. Allāh says showing their passion for knowledge "One of them will say: "I had an intimate companion (on the earth), "Who used to say, do you really believe? When we die and become dust and bones, shall we indeed receive rewards and punishments" "He said: "Would you like to look down?" He looked down and saw him in the midst of the Fire. He said " By Allāh! You were not little short of bringing me to perdition! "Had it not been for the Grace of my Lord, I would certainly have been among those brought (here) (37: 50-57).)

Knowledge is a treasure whose key is asking questions. The residents of Paradise constantly ask questions and search for knowledge. Allāh says "They will say: "Aforetime, we were not without fear for the sake of our people. "But Allāh has been good to us, and has delivered us from the Chastisement of the Scorching Wind. "Truly, we did call unto Him from the old: truly it is He, the Beneficent, the Merciful!" (52: 25-28). Thus, asking questions is the first step for acquiring knowledge. He also says "Every soul will be (held) in pledge for its deeds. Except the Companions of the Right Hand, (They will be) in Gardens (of Delight): they will question each other, and (ask) of the Sinners: "What led you into Hell Fire?" They will say: "We were not of those who prayed. Nor were we of those who fed the indigent; But we used to talk vanities with vain talkers; And we used to deny the Day of Judgment; Until there came to us (the Hour) that is certain" (74: 38-47).

The Muslim nation is required to emulate the residents of Paradise in their constant quest for knowledge so that it can compete other nations in cultural advancement.