**The Twenty-third Word**

**Second chapter**

**(Five remarks on human happiness and misery)**

[Human beings have been created of the best stature as the perfect pattern of creation, and given a comprehensive potential. They have been sent to the world as miracles of power, the ultimate pinnacle of creation, and wonders of art. For them, this world is arena of trial, where the two ways are open before them, one leading to infinite ascent, the other to infinite descent. So, by following either of these ways, they either will rise to the highest of the high or descend to the lowest of the low. I will expound the mystery of humanity’s ascent and descent in five remarks.]

**FIRST REMARK:** We have some relationship with and are in need of most species. Our needs range into all parts of the universe, and our desires range as far as eternity. We desire a single flower as well as a whole spring, a garden as well as an eternal Paradise. We long to see our friend as well as the All-Beautiful, Gracious One of Majesty. As we have to knock on our beloved friend’s door for a visit, so too in order to be able to rejoin the ninety-nine percent of our friends, who have left for the Intermediate World, and be saved from eternal separation, we also need to seek refuge at the Court of the Absolutely Powerful One, Who will close this huge world’s door and open the door of the Hereafter, the world of wonders, and will replace this world with the next one.

Given this, our true object of worship can only be an All-Powerful One of Majesty, All-Compassionate One of Beauty and Grace, All-Wise One of Perfection, in Whose hand are the reins of all things, in Whose possession is the provision of every existence, Who sees everything and is omnipresent, unbounded by space, and free of any constraint, flaw, defect, and deficiency.

For only One with infinite power and all-encompassing knowledge can satisfy our unlimited need and therefore it is only He Who is worthy of worship.

So, O humanity! If you worship Him alone, you will attain a rank above all other creatures. If you do not, you will become a disgraced slave to impotent creation. If you rely upon your selfhood and power instead of prayer and trust in God, and claim an arrogant superiority, you will become lower than a bee or an ant and weaker than a fly or a spider with respect to positive acts and constructive invention. But your evil and destruction will weigh heavier than a mountain and be more harmful than a pestilence.

So, O humanity! You have two aspects of being. One is positive and active, and has to do with constructive invention, existence, and goodness. The other is negative and passive, and concerns destruction, nonexistence, and evil. As for the first aspect of your being, you cannot compete with a bee or a sparrow, are weaker than a fly or a spider, and cannot achieve what they can. As for the second aspect of your being, however, you can surpass mountains, the earth, and the heavens, for you can bear a burden that they cannot. Thus, your acts have a wider impact than theirs. When you do something good or build something, it reaches only as far as your hand and strength. But your evil and destructive acts are aggressive and expandable.

For example, unbelief is an evil, an act of destruction, an absence of affirmation. It may look like a single sin, but it implies an insult to creation, the debasement of all Divine Names, and the degradation of all humanity. For creation has a sublime rank and important task, for each part of it is a missive of the Lord, a mirror of His Glory, and a dutiful servant of His Divinity. Unbelief denies them this rank bestowed on them by virtue of these functions and reduces them to playthings of chance, and insignificant, useless, and worthless objects doomed to decay and decomposition.

Unbelief is also an insult to the Divine Names, Whose beautiful inscriptions and manifestations are seen in the mirrors of all created forms throughout the universe. Furthermore, it casts humanity down to a level more wretched and weak, helpless and destitute, than the lowliest animal. It reduces us to an ordinary, perishable sign-board without meaning, con- fused and swiftly decaying. And this when humanity, in reality, is a poetic work of Wisdom that manifests all Divine Names; a great miracle of Power that, like a seed, contains the Tree of Creation; and God-appointed ruler of the earth, who is superior to angels and higher than mountains, the earth, and heavens by virtue of the Supreme Trust we accepted.

In short: As regards evil and destruction, the carnal, evil-commanding soul may commit countless crimes and cause unlimited destruction, while its capacity to do good is very limited. It can destroy a house in a day but can- not rebuild it in a hundred days. But if it abandons self-reliance and vanity and relies upon Divine aid to do good and constructive things, if it abandons evil and destruction and seeks Divine forgiveness and so becomes a perfect servant of God, it becomes the referent of: *God will change their evil deeds into good deeds* (25:70). That is, our infinite capacity for evil is changed into an infinite ability for good. We attain the worth of “the perfect pattern of creation” and rise to the “highest of the high.”

Consider then, O heedless one, the All-Mighty’s Grace and Munificence. In reality, it is absolute justice to record one sin as a thousand sins, [due to its consequences and effects,] and a good act as only one. But God does the reverse: He records a sinful act as one and an act of goodness as ten, seventy, seven hundred, or, in some cases, seven thousand. From this we can understand that entering Hell is the result of one’s deeds and pure justice, while entering Paradise is the result of His absolute Grace.

**SECOND REMARK:** Human beings have two faces. The first face looks to this worldly life because of our selfhood. Here our capital consists of a free will as feeble as a hair, a power restricted to a most limited talent with respect to positive, constructive acts, a life or lifespan as short as a flash of light, and a material existence bound to decompose swiftly. In this state, we are no more than a feeble member of one species among countless others spread throughout the universe.

The second face looks to the eternal life because of our nature as God’s servants charged with and in need of worshipping Him. Our perception of helplessness and insufficiency as God’s servants needy of Him make us extremely important and inclusive beings. For the All-Wise Originator has implanted an infinite impotence and poverty in our nature so that each of us may be a comprehensive mirror reflecting the boundless manifestations of an All-Compassionate One of infinite Power, an All-Munificent One of infinite Richness.

We resemble seeds. A seed is endowed with great potential by Divine Power and a subtle program by Divine Destiny, so that it may germinate underground, emerge from that narrow world and enter the spacious world of air. Asking its Creator in the tongue of its capacity to become a tree, it may attain a perfection particular to it. If, due to its malignant disposition, the seed abuses its potential to attract harmful substances, it will soon rot away in its narrow place. If it uses its potential properly, however, and in compliance with the creational commands of *The Splitter of grain and fruit stone* (6:95), it will emerge from its narrow place and grow into an awesome, fruitful tree. In addition, its tiny and particular nature will come to represent a great and universal truth.

In just the same way, our essence is equipped by Power with great potential and is inscribed by Destiny with important programs. If we use our potential and faculties in this narrow world under the soil of worldly life to satisfy the fancies of our carnal, evil-commanding soul, we will, like a rotten seed, decay and decompose for an insignificant pleasure in a short life amidst hardships and troubles. Thus, we will depart from this world with a heavy spiritual burden on our unfortunate souls.

But if we germinate the seed of our potential under the “soil of worship” with the “water of Islam” and the “light of belief” according to the Qur’an’s decrees, and use our faculties for their true purposes, we will grow into eternal, majestic trees whose branches extend into the Intermediate World and the World of Representations or Immaterial Forms, and which will be favored with countless bounties and yield innumerable fruits of perfection in the next world and Paradise. We will, in fact, become the blessed, luminous fruit of the tree of creation.

True progress is possible only when we turn our faculties (e.g., intellect, heart, spirit, and even imagination) to the eternal life and make them occupied with its own kind of worship. What the misguided consider progress—being immersed in the life of this world and subjecting all our faculties to the carnal, evil-commanding selfhood to taste all worldly pleasures down to the basest—is nothing but decline and degradation. I once observed this truth in a vision, which is as follows:

I reached a huge city full of large palaces. Outside some of them, I noticed ongoing spectacles and shows to amuse and entertain. As I drew near to one of them, I saw that its owner was playing with a dog at the door. Women were chatting with young strangers, and young girls were organizing children’s games. The doorman was behaving as if he were their master. I realized that the palace was empty, with all important tasks left unattended, for its corrupted inhabitants were pursuing useless affairs.

I then came across another palace. A faithful dog was lying at the door, and beside it was a doorman with a stern, serious, and sober expression. The palace seemed so quiet that I entered in wonder and amazement. Inside was a scene of great activity,: one flour above another, the inhabitants were engaged in different, important tasks. The people on the first floor were managing the palace. On the second floor, girls and boys were studying. The women on the third floor were producing beautiful works of art and delicate embroidery. On the top floor, the owner was in constant communication with the king to secure his household’s well-being and so that he could perform noble duties for his own progress and perfection. As they did not see me, I walked about unhindered.

Then I came out and looked around. I saw that the city was full of similar palaces. I asked and was told that the palaces like the first one belonged to the foremost unbelievers and misguided, while those of the second type belonged to upright Muslim notables. In one corner, I came across a palace on which my name was written: “Said.” As I looked at it closely, I felt as if I saw my image on it. Crying in bewilderment, I came to my senses and awoke.

The city is our social life and the terrain of human civilization. Each palace is a human being, and the inhabitants are human senses and faculties (e.g., eyes, ears, intellect, heart and spirit, and powers of anger and lust). Each sense and faculty has a particular duty of worship, as well as particular pleasures and pains. The carnal soul and fancies, as well as the powers of anger and lust, correspond to the dog and the doorman. Thus, subjugating the sublime senses and faculties to carnal desires and fancies so that they forget their essential duties is decline and corruption. It certainly is not progress. You may interpret the other details for yourself.

**THIRD REMARK:** With respect to our constructive actions and bodily endeavors, we are like weak animals and helpless creatures. The realm at our disposal is so limited that our fingers can touch its circumference. Our weakness, impotence, and indolence are so great that even domesticated animals are influenced by them. If a domesticated animal is compared with its undomesticated counterpart, great differences can be seen.

But as recipient beings conscious of our need to pray and petition, we are honored, worthy travelers allowed to stay for a while in the guest-house of this world. We are guests of such a Munificent One that He has put His infinite treasuries of Mercy at our disposal and subjugated His unique works of creative Power and special servants to us. Also, He has prepared for our use, pleasure and recreation such a vast arena that its radius is as far as sight or even imagination can reach.

If we rely on our physical and innate abilities, taking the worldly life as our goal and focusing on its pleasures in pursuit of our livelihood, we will suffocate within a very narrow circle. Moreover, our bodily parts, senses, and faculties will bring suit and witness against us in the Hereafter. But if we know that we are guests and so spend our lives within the limits established and approved by our All-Munificent Host, we will lead a happy and peaceful life in a broad sphere and gain a long, eternal life. We can rise to the highest of the high, and all of our bodily members and faculties will testify in our favor in the Hereafter.

Our wonderful faculties are not meant for this trivial worldly life; rather, they are for our eternal life of great significance. For when compared with animals, we see that we are far richer than animals in respect of faculties and senses, while in regard to worldly pleasures and animal life we fall a hundred times lower. This is because every worldly pleasure we taste bears many traces of pain. Pains of the past, fears of the future and the pains at the cessation of every pleasure spoil our enjoyment. However, animals experience pleasure without pain, enjoyment without anxiety, and are neither wounded by the pains of the past nor distressed by the fears of the future. They enjoy comfortable lives and praise their Creator.

This means that if humanity, created of the best stature as the perfect pattern of creation, concentrates on this worldly life, we are far lower than a sparrow, although we have far more developed faculties than any animal. In order to explain this reality, I will repeat a parable which I wrote in another treatise.

A man gives his servant ten gold coins and tells him to have a suit made out of a particular cloth. He gives another servant a thousand gold coins and sends him to the market with a shopping list. The former buys an excellent suit of the finest cloth. The latter acts foolishly, for he neither notices how much money he was given nor reads the shopping list. Thinking that he should imitate his friend, he goes to a shop and asks for a suit. The dishonest shopkeeper gives him a suit of the very worst-quality cloth. The unfortunate servant returns to his master and receives a severe reprimand and a terrible punishment. Anyone can see that the thousand gold coins were not given for a suit, but for a very important transaction.

In the same way, our spiritual faculties, feelings, and senses are much more developed than those of animals. For example, we can see all degrees of beauty, distinguish all the varieties of the particular tastes of foods, penetrate the many details of realities, yearn for all ranks of perfection, and so on. But animals, with the exception of a particular faculty that reaches a high state of development according to its particular duty, can realize only slight development, if any.

We are rich in faculties because our senses and feelings have developed a great deal owing to our mind and intellect. Our many needs have caused us to evolve different types of emotions and to become very sensitive to many things. Also, due to our comprehensive nature we have been given desires turned to several aims and objectives. Our senses and faculties have greatly expanded due to the diversity of our essential duties. Furthermore, since we are inclined and able to worship, we have the potential to realize all kinds of perfection.

Such rich faculties and abundant potentialities cannot have been given to us for an insignificant, temporary, worldly life. In reality, they were given to us because our essential duty is to perceive our obligations, which are directed toward endless aims; to affirm our impotence, poverty, and insufficiency in the form of worship; to study creation’s glorifications of God with our far-reaching sight and penetrating understanding, and to bear witness to them; to discern and be grateful for the All-Merciful One’s aid sent in the form of bounties; and to gaze, reflect upon, and draw warnings from the miracles of His Power as manifested in creation.

O world-adoring one charmed by the worldly life and ignorant of the meaning of your nature as the perfect pattern of creation! Once I saw the true nature of this worldly life in a vision, as follows:

I found myself a traveler going on a long journey. My lord who set me making this journey gradually gave me some of the sixty gold coins He had allotted to me. This went on for some time, and after a while I arrived at an inn that provided some entertainment. In one night I spent ten gold coins on gambling and entertainment, and in pursuit of fame. The next morning, I had no money left. Nor could I do trade and buy provisions I would need at my destination. All I had left was pain, sorrow, and regret left by sins and illicit pleasures. While I was in this wretched state, a man appeared and said to me: “You have lost all you had and deserve to be punished. Moreover, you will go on to your destination with no money. But if you use your mind, the door of repentance is not closed. When you gradually receive the remaining fifteen gold coins, keep half in reserve and use it to buy what you will need at your destination.”

My soul did not agree, so the man said: “Save a third of them then.” Still my soul balked. The man insisted: “Then a quarter.” I saw that my soul could not abandon its addictions, so the man turned away indignantly and disappeared. At once, I found myself on a high-speed train travelling through a tunnel. I was alarmed, but there was no escape. To my surprise, I saw very attractive flowers and tasty-looking fruits alongside the track, hanging out from the sides of the tunnel. I foolishly tried to pick some of them. But all around them were thorns that, due to the train’s speed, tore at my hands and made them bleed. They cost me very much. Suddenly an attendant came and said: “Give me five cents and I’ll give you as many flowers and fruits as you want. With your hands all cut up, you are losing a hundred instead of five cents. Besides, there is a punishment for picking them without permission.”

Depressed by this condition, I looked out the window to see when the tunnel would end. But there was no end in sight. The tunnel’s walls had many openings into which passengers were being thrown. Suddenly I caught sight of an opening just opposite me with a gravestone on either side. When I peered out, I made out my name, “Said,” written in capital letters on a gravestone. I gave a cry of bewilderment and repentance. Unexpectedly, I heard the voice of the man who had advised me at the inn, asking: “Have you come to your senses?” I replied: “Yes, but I’ve been left powerless, and there is nothing I can do.” He told me to repent and trust in God, to which I replied that I would. Then I woke up and I found myself transformed into the New Said; the Old Said had gone away.

I will now interpret some aspects of this vision: The journey is our life, a journey from the Worlds of Spirits to all eternity, passing through the stages of the mother’s womb, youth, old age, the grave, the Intermediate World, Resurrection, and the Bridge. The sixty gold coins are the sixty years of an average lifetime. I was forty-five when I had this vision. Only God knows when I will die. A sincere student of the Qur’an showed me the true path so that I might spend half of the remaining fifteen years for the Hereafter. The inn, I came to understand, was Istanbul for me. The train was time, and each wagon was a year. The tunnel was this worldly life. The thorny flowers and fruits were illicit pleasures and forbidden amusements that make the heart bleed with the idea of separation at the very moment you reach for them. Disappearance of pleasures increases sorrow, and besides, being unlawful, cause one to suffer punishment. The attendant had said: “Give me five cents, and I’ll give you as many flowers and fruits as you want.” This means that the permissible tastes and pleasures, obtained in lawful ways, are enough to satisfy us and so there is no need to pursue illicit ways.

**FOURTH REMARK:** Humanity, among the creatures, is much like a tender child. Our strength is in our weakness, and our power in our impotence. This lack of strength and power has caused creation to be subjugated to us. So, if we perceive our weakness and become humble servants of God through verbal and active prayer, and if we recognize our impotence and seek God’s help, we will have shown our gratitude to Him for this subjugation of nature to us. Moreover, God will enable us to reach our goal and achieve our aims in a way far beyond our own capability. Sometimes we wrongly attribute a wish’s attainment to our own power and ability, when in reality it has been obtained for us through the prayer offered by the tongue of our disposition. Consider how great a source of power is a chick’s weakness, for it causes the mother hen to attack even a lion. A lion cub’s weakness subjugates a great lioness, which will suffer hunger to feed its baby. How remarkable is the powerful appeal inherent in weakness, and what a spectacular manifestation of Compassion for importunate beings.

Tender, beloved children obtain their goals by weeping, wishing, or making sad faces, all of which can cause mighty people to serve them. If children rely on their own strength, in practical terms they can achieve nothing. Their weakness and powerlessness, as well as feelings of affection and protection, are so in their favor that a single gesture may allow them to subjugate powerful persons to themselves. Should such children arrogantly deny the care and affection shown to them and claim to do all of this on their own, they would receive a sour face and resentment. Similarly, if like Korah who said: *I have been given it (my possessions) on account of my knowledge* (28:78), we attribute our achievements to our own power and ability in a way that demonstrates ingratitude and denies our Creator’s Mercy and accuses His Wisdom, we will certainly deserve punishment.

This shows that our observed dominion in nature, and our advancement and progress in civilization and technology, are mainly due to our essential weakness and helplessness, which attract Divine aid. Our poverty is the source of Divine provision, our ignorance is compensated for by Divine inspiration, and our need draws Divine favors. Divine Mercy, Affection, and Wisdom, not our own power and knowledge, have empowered us with dominion over creation and have put things at our disposal. It is Divine Authority and Mercy Which, due to our weakness, enable us, beings so weak that we can be defeated by a blind scorpion and a footless snake, to dress in silk produced by a worm and to eat the honey produced by a stinging insect.

Since this is the reality, O humanity, renounce arrogance and self- trust. Rather, declare and affirm your impotence and weakness in God’s Court by asking for His help, and by praying and entreating Him. Show that you are His true servant. Then say: *God is sufficient for us. How excellent a Guardian He is!* (3:173) and ascend to the higher ranks.

Do not say: “I am nothing. Why should the absolutely All-Wise One put creation at my disposal and demand universal gratitude?” In physical terms and with respect to your evil-commanding soul you are almost nothing, but your duty or rank makes you an attentive observer of this magnificent universe, an eloquent tongue of beings declaring Divine Wisdom, a perceptive student of this Book of Creation, an admiring overseer of the creatures glorifying God’s praise, a respected master of worshipping beings.

You are, O humanity, an insignificant atom, a poor creature and weak animal in terms of your physical being and soul. And so, you are being carried away by creation’s huge waves. But if you are perfected through the training of Islam, which is illumined by the light of belief containing the radiance of Divine love, you will find a kingliness in your being a servant, a comprehensiveness in your particularity, a world in your small entity, and a very high rank in your insignificance. The realm of your supervision of the rest of creation will be so broad that you can say: “My Compassionate Lord has made the world a home for me. He has given me the sun and moon as lamps, spring as a bunch of roses, summer as a banquet of favors, and animals as obedient servants. He has put plants and vegetation at my disposal, as ornaments and provisions to my home.”

In conclusion, if you obey your evil-commanding soul and Satan, you will fall to the lowest of the low; but if you follow the truth and the Qur’an, you will rise to the highest of the high and become the perfect pattern of creation.

**FIFTH REMARK:** We have been sent here as guests with a special responsibility. Endowed with important potentials, we have been assigned important duties and strongly urged to carry them out. If we do not, we will be punished. To make “being the perfect pattern of creation” more comprehensible, I will summarize the essentials of worship and duties.

Our worship has two aspects. The first aspect concerns reflection and consciousness without having to address Him directly. The second aspect is worship and prayer, done in His presence by addressing Him directly.

The first aspect is:

\* to obediently affirm the Sovereignty of His Lordship over creation and observe Its beauties and perfections in amazement;

\* to draw the attention to and herald the unique arts in creation, which consist of the embroideries of sacred Divine Names; to weigh on the scales of perception and discernment the gems of the Lord’s Names, each of which is a hidden spiritual treasure, and evaluate them with our hearts’ grateful appreciation;

\* to study the pages of creation and the sheets of the heavens and the earth, each of which is a missive of Divine Power, and contemplate them in great admiration; and

\* to gaze in amazement and admiration upon the subtle ornamentation and refined skills seen in creation, and ardently desire to know their All- Beautiful and Gracious Originator and yearn to enter His Presence, where we hope to be received into His favor.

The second aspect of our worship is done in His presence by addressing Him directly. We pass from the works to their Producer and:

\* we see that an All-Majestic Maker wills Himself to be known through His Art’s miracles, and in response we believe in Him and know Him;

\* we see that an All-Compassionate Lord wills to make Himself loved through His Compassion’s beautiful fruits, and in response we love Him and make ourselves loved by Him through devoting our love and adoration to Him;

\* we see that an All-Munificent Provider nourishes us with the best and dearest of His material and spiritual favors, and we respond with gratitude and praise, expressed through our works, deeds, lifestyle and, if possible, through all of our senses and faculties;

\* we see that an All-Beautiful and Gracious One of Majesty manifests His Grandeur and Perfection, Majesty and Beauty, in the mirrors of beings and draws attention to them, and in response, declaring, “God is the All-Great! All-Glorified is God!” we prostrate before Him in wonder and adoration, and in consciousness of our nothingness before Him;

\* we see that One with Absolute Riches displays His limitless wealth and treasuries in an infinitely generous fashion, and, declaring our destitution, we respond with asking for His favors in praise and glorification;

\* we see that that Originator of Majesty has arranged the earth like an exhibition to display His matchless works, and in response we appreciate them by saying, “What wonders God has willed and created!”; confirm their beauty by saying, “God bless them!”; show our wonder by saying: “All-Glorified is God!” and express our admiration by saying, “God is the All-Great!”;

\* we see that One absolutely Unique shows His Oneness throughout creation by His unique signs and specific decrees, and by His inimitable stamps and seals that He has put on each creature; that He inscribes signs of Unity on everything and raises throughout the world the flag of His Unity, proclaiming His Lordship. We respond to this with belief, affirmation, admission, and testimony to His Unity, and with devotion and sincere worship.

We may attain true humanity through such types of worship and reflection. We may show that we are of the best stature as the perfect pattern of creation and, by the grace of belief, become trustworthy rulers of the earth worthy of bearing the Supreme Trust.

Now, O heedless people who move toward the lowest of the low by misusing your will, although you have been created of the best stature as the perfect pattern of creation, listen to me. Like you, I once thought the world was fine and beautiful in heedlessness coming from the intoxication of youth. Then the moment I awoke in the morning of old age, I saw how ugly is the world’s face which is not turned toward the Hereafter, which I had previously imagined to be beautiful. To see this and how extraordinarily beautiful is its other face, which is turned toward the Hereafter, you may refer to the two “Tables of Truth” in the Second Station of the Seventeenth Word.

The First Table depicts the reality of the world of the heedless, while the second one describes the reality of the world of the people of right guidance.

All-Glorified are You! We have no knowledge save what You have taught us. Surely You are the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

O my Lord, expand for me my breast, and make my task easy for me. Loose any knot from my tongue so they may understand my speech.

O God, bestow peace and blessings on Muhammad, his pure, unique essence, who is the sun of the heavens of mysteries, the manifestation of lights, the point upon which manifestations of God’s Majesty are centered, the pivot around which the world of His Grace and Beauty revolves.

O God, for the mystery of him in his relation to You, and for his journeying toward You, secure me from my fears, protect me from falling, diminish my faults, and expel my grief and greed. Be with me, take me away from myself unto You, and favor me with effacement from myself. Do not leave me obsessed with myself, veiled by my feelings. Unveil to me every mystery.

O the All-Living and Self-Subsistent One, O the All-Living and Self-Subsistent One, O the All-Living and Self-Subsistent One! Have mercy upon me and my companions. Have mercy upon all believers and all the people of the Qur’an. Amin, O the Most Merciful of the Merciful, O the Most Munificent of the Munificent!

The conclusion of their call will be: “All praise and gratitude are for God, the Lord of the worlds.”