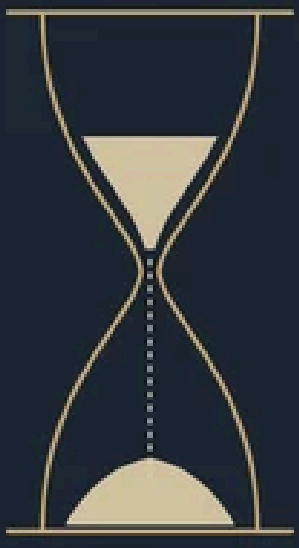
DETACH

Living, giving, loving and caring fully,
with a heart that belongs to Allah



HASSAN HABIB

Detach

Hassan Habib

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Thank you, Lord for all you taught me. Forgive me if I forget anything

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CHAPTER 0

Introduction: The Hourglass

Wake up. Check the phone. Get ready. Commute. Work. Eat something without tasting it. Work again. Come home tired. Scroll. Sleep. Wake up.

Tomorrow looks like today. Next week looks like this week. You did not choose this loop, not really. It was built around you one duty at a time, one reasonable decision at a time, until one day you looked up and realized there was no door. Your heart doesn't want it. Your mind has already rejected it. And still, every morning, your feet carry you back in.

If you have ever felt that, this book is for you.

And if you haven't, if your days feel full and your life feels like it is going well, this book is still for you. Because the loop is only one way the world takes hold of us. Sometimes it holds our hours. Sometimes it holds our hearts. Sometimes it holds our thoughts. Sometimes it holds us in a yesterday we cannot let go of, or a tomorrow we are not promised. Most of the time it holds a little of all of these, and we don't notice until something is taken away.

What this book is not

When people hear the word *detach*, they picture someone walking away. A person who stops caring. Someone who sells everything, leaves the city, and sits alone on a mountain waiting for life to end.

That is not what this book is about.

This book is about living fully. Working hard. Building things. Loving your family. Caring for your friends. Giving generously. Being present in every part of your life. And doing all of it without letting any of it own you.

So if detachment is not walking away, where is it? I picture it as a place in the middle, between two ways of getting it wrong.

On one side is obsession. The heart takes hold of something and will not let go. It is the first thought in the morning and the last thought at night. Every day is measured by whether that thing came closer or moved further away. It can be money, a person, a position, even an idea. Whatever it is, it has moved from the hand into the heart, and it now sits in the place that was made for Allah.

On the other side is indifference. A heart that has been hurt enough times decides to stop holding anything at all. Win or lose, stay or go, it doesn't matter anymore. From a distance this can look like detachment. It is calm. It is quiet. It doesn't despair over anything. But it is not free. It is closed. And if you look closely, it is usually just another attachment wearing a different face: an attachment to the self, and to never being hurt again.

Detachment lives between the two. You care, and you care deeply. You work, you love, you give, you grieve. But what you care about stays in your hands, and your heart stays with Allah.

This middle is not something I came up with. Allah describes the whole community of believers with it:

> "And thus We have made you a middle nation, so that you may be witnesses over the people, and the Messenger a witness over you."
>
> *Quran 2:143*

And when He describes the servants of the Most Merciful and how they handle what they own, He describes the same place:

> "And those who, when they spend, are neither wasteful nor stingy, but are in between, at a just balance."
>
> *Quran 25:67*

The stingy hand is the obsessed one. It cannot open. The wasteful hand doesn't care what happens to what it was given. The servant of Allah stands between them.

And the Prophet ﷺ showed us what this middle looks like on the hardest day of a life. When his young son Ibrahim was dying, his eyes filled with tears. He was not indifferent. And he said: *"The eye sheds tears and the heart grieves, but we say*

only what pleases our Lord" (Sahih al-Bukhari 1303). He was not lost in it either. Tears in the eyes, grief in the heart, and the heart still facing Allah. That is the middle. We will come back to that day later in the book.

There is a saying that is often repeated: *own the world, but don't let the world own you.* I don't know who first said it, and I will not put a name on it that I can't prove. But I know the idea is true, because it is in the Book of Allah.

And just as this book is not about the man on the mountain, it was not written by him either.

I am not a monk. I am not a saint, or a scholar sitting above the world, or a perfect person who has already arrived. There is no such person writing to you here. I am a married father. I go to work every day and earn a living like you do. I make mistakes, some small and some I still think about. I play video games. I watch YouTube. I have social media accounts, and I scroll them more than I should.

I am telling you this because I want you to know who is talking to you. Not someone who escaped the world and is calling back to you from the other side, but someone standing right next to you in the middle of it, trying every day to keep it in his hands and out of his heart. Some days I manage it. Some days I don't. This book is what I have learned from both.

The verse that holds the whole book

> "No calamity strikes the earth or yourselves except that it is written in a record before We bring it into being. Indeed, that is easy for Allah. So that you do not despair over what has escaped you, nor exult over what He has given you. And Allah does not love everyone who is arrogant and boastful."
>
> *Quran 57:22–23*

Read it again, slowly.

Allah does not say: *do not have things.* He does not say: *do not lose things.* He says that both the losing and the gaining were written before any of it existed. And He tells us why He is telling us this: so that we do not fall apart when something leaves our hands, and we do not become arrogant when something lands in them.

If everything is lost tomorrow, it was meant to be. If everything is gained tomorrow, it was also written before creation.

That is detachment. Not an empty heart. A heart that holds the world with an open hand.

Detachment from control

There is one more layer to this verse, and it may be the hardest and highest detachment of all.

Most of us quietly believe we are in control. That if we plan well enough, work hard enough, and choose carefully enough, we can guarantee how things turn out. And when they go wrong, we replay our choices again and again: *if only I had done this, if only I had said that.*

The verse says otherwise. It was written before it happened. The loss and the gain. The door that opened and the door that closed. Allah says:

> "And you do not will, except that Allah wills, the Lord of the worlds."
>
> *Quran 81:29*

To let go of the belief that you are the sole author of your own story is detachment from control. It is surrender. It means believing that whichever way the path goes, that is how the story was meant to be, and that you are here to witness the wisdom of it.

Think of watching a film. We see the actors on the screen and feel as though they are making their choices in that very moment. But the story was written long before the camera started rolling. Our lives are something like that. The script is already written. And yet the actor still has to show up, and play the part with everything they have.

Because surrender is not permission to stop. When the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ told his companions that every person's place had already been written, they asked him: should we not simply rely on what is written and leave off working? He answered:

> "Work, for each person will be made easy toward what he was created for."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 4949; Sahih Muslim 2647*

The effort is still ours, and we will still be asked about it. What we surrender is the outcome. And the Prophet ﷺ taught us exactly what to say when things don't go our way:

> "If something befalls you, do not say, 'If only I had done such-and-such, it would have been such-and-such.' Rather say, 'Allah has decreed it, and what He wills, He does.' For 'if only' opens the door to the work of the devil."
>
> *Sahih Muslim 2664*

So we plan with all our strength. We act with all our heart. And then we let go.

The hourglass

I am an engineer. I think in systems. So let me give you the picture I have carried with me for years.

Imagine your life as an hourglass. Every grain of sand is a moment of your life: a minute, a breath, a choice. The grains fall one by one, and they never go back up.

Now imagine that the bottom of the hourglass is split into two chambers. One side is Allah. The other side is everything else: money, people, things, ourselves, the world. In Arabic this "everything else" has a name, *dunya*, which literally means the nearer, lower life. Every grain that falls lands on one side or the other.

Before we go any further, let me guard this picture against a misreading, because it is an easy one to make. The two chambers are not "religion" on one side and "life" on the other. They are not the prayer mat on one side and the office, the kitchen and the family on the other. What decides where a grain lands is not what you were doing in that moment. It is what that moment was for.

The very first hadith in the collection of al-Bukhari says it in one line:

> "Actions are only by intentions, and every person will have only what he intended."

> *Sahih al-Bukhari 1*

So the hours you spend earning an honest living to feed your children can fall on Allah's side. So can the evening you give to your parents, the patience you show a tired child, the meal you cook for the people you love. The Prophet ﷺ told one of his companions that he would be rewarded for anything he spent seeking the Face of Allah, "even the bite of food you place in your wife's mouth" (Sahih al-Bukhari 56; Sahih Muslim 1628), a hadith we will come back to in *Why Love Dies?*. He told his companions that there is charity even in the intimacy between a husband and his wife (Sahih Muslim 1006). And he said:

> "A gold coin you spend in the path of Allah, a gold coin you spend to free a slave, a gold coin you give in charity to a poor person, and a gold coin you spend on your family: the greatest of them in reward is the one you spent on your family."
>
> *Sahih Muslim 995*

I want to be precise here. This does not turn work or family into prayer, and it does not stand in for the prayer, the fasting, or anything else Allah has made obligatory. Those keep their place at the center. What it means is that an ordinary, lawful deed, done for the sake of Allah, becomes a good deed that He rewards. Whenever this book says that something ordinary can become worship, this is all it means.

And the other side of it is just as true. The same job, the same marriage, the same busy day can fall entirely into the other chamber when it is done only for itself, or when it takes the place that belongs to Allah. Even a prayer can land there, if it is offered to be seen by people. So the hourglass is not asking you to leave your life behind and move into the other chamber. It is asking you to carry your life with you. Most of the time, detachment does not change what you do. It changes who you do it for.

So ask yourself: where did my moments go today?

What was the theme of my day? Was it attached to the world? Attached to Allah? A little of both?

Now ask the same question about your week. Your month. Your year. Your life.

And then the hardest question of all: what forces are moving my life? Are they pulling from below, from the world? Or are they lifting from above, from Allah?

Allah swears by this very thing, by time itself:

> "By time. Indeed, mankind is in loss. Except those who believe, and do righteous deeds, and urge one another to the truth, and urge one another to patience."
>
> *Quran 103:1–3*

The sand is falling either way. The only question is where it lands.

Everything is one or the other

Here is something it took me a long time to see. Every attachment to something is a detachment from something else. That is how life works. You cannot hold two things in the same place at the same time. When the heart turns toward one thing, it turns away from another.

Allah says it plainly:

> "Allah has not made for any man two hearts in his chest."
>
> *Quran 33:4*

There is only one heart. It is always attaching or detaching. Every grain of sand that falls on one side of the hourglass is a grain that did not fall on the other.

That is why every feeling, every thought, and every action is either an attachment or a detachment. The balance between them shapes who we are and what our days feel like.

Jealousy is attachment to the self. It is the heart comparing itself to others and refusing to be at peace.

Mercy is a detachment. It lets go of the need to be right and to make others pay for what they did, and it feels good because it lifts us up. But even mercy can become an attachment. When we are kind so that people will see how kind we are, the act is no longer about Allah. It is about us. The Arabic word for this is *riya'*, showing off: doing good so that you will be seen doing good. Even a virtue can become a chain.

So the line this book draws is not between good deeds and bad deeds. It is about where each deed is anchored.

In the chapters ahead, we will map this carefully. As an engineer, I think of attachment as having dimensions, the way the world has dimensions of space and time. There are four.

Three of them are like space. They are the places inside a person where attachment takes hold: the **mind**, when an idea obsesses us until there is no room for Allah; the **heart**, when we love someone or something so much that it fills the space meant for Him; and the **body**, when our whole life is built around tasks and duties until there is no time left for Him, even when we want there to be.

The fourth is **time**, and it runs through all the others. We can be attached to the past, the present, or the future. Attached to the past, we never move forward. We carry sins Allah has already offered to wipe away, even if they reached the clouds of the sky, when all He asks is that we turn back to Him and start over with a clean plate. Or we hold onto traditions only because our fathers held them, the way those who rejected the messengers answered them: *"we will follow what we found our fathers doing"* (Quran 2:170). Attached to the future, we procrastinate, spending a tomorrow nobody promised us. And attached to the present, we come to believe this life is all there is, that there is no Hereafter. That makes us simple-minded and shortsighted, people who *"know what is apparent of the life of this world, but of the Hereafter they are heedless"* (Quran 30:7).

Like the dimensions of space and time, these are not separate boxes. Every attachment has a position on each of them, and they mix and layer in each of us, in different measures. A person can be attached in heart and body while the mind is not convinced at all.

And we will look at the four things we most often attach to, and what each attachment does to us:

- Love of **money** makes us greedy. Letting go of it makes us generous.
- Love of **people's approval** makes us hypocrites. Letting go of it makes us fair, honest, balanced, and more truly ourselves.
- Love of **things** makes us materialistic. Letting go of them makes us free, because we are not what we own.

- Love of **self** makes us selfish. Letting go of it makes us selfless.

Every disease of the heart I know of is an attachment to the world. And every one of them has a cure waiting on the other side of letting go.

The secret

If detachment is not walking away from life, then what is it, practically? What do you actually *do*?

This is the part that brought me to tears the night I finally put it into words.

There is a hadith in which the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ tells us what Allah says about the person who draws near to Him:

> "My servant does not draw near to Me with anything more beloved to Me than what I have made obligatory upon him. And My servant continues to draw near to Me with voluntary deeds until I love him. And when I love him, I become his hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes, and his foot with which he walks."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 6502*

Voluntary deeds. The extra prayer no one requires of you. The charity no one asked you to give. The good you do beyond what is owed.

Now look closely at what a voluntary deed really is.

Every voluntary deed is a detachment from a worldly alternative.

You were going to spend the evening with friends doing nothing in particular. You chose instead to stand and pray. That prayer is a detachment.

You were going to buy the new video game. You gave that money in charity instead. That gift is a detachment.

And if you gave it so quietly that no one ever knew, not your friends, not your family, not even the person who received it, then you let go of something more. Allah says:

> "If you disclose your charities, that is good. But if you conceal them and give them to the poor, that is better for you, and He will remove from you some of your misdeeds. And Allah is fully aware of what you do."
>
> *Quran 2:271*

Why is hiding it better? Because giving and hiding are two detachments, and giving alone is one. When you give, you detach from the money. When you give in secret, you detach from the money and from the recognition too. The money leaves your hand, and the praise you could have collected for it leaves with it. Two detachments are better than one.

This is *riya'*, showing off, turned inside out. Showing off ties a good deed to the eyes of people. Hidden charity cuts that thread before it can form. Among the seven people whom Allah will shade on the Day when there is no shade but His, the Prophet ﷺ named:

> "...a man who gave charity and hid it, so that his left hand does not know what his right hand spends..."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 1423*

So hidden that even his own left hand did not know.

None of this makes open giving wrong. The same verse calls it good. Once, when the Prophet ﷺ urged people to give for a group of very poor travelers who had come to Madinah, a man brought a bag so heavy his hand could barely hold it, and the others followed him until there were two heaps of food and clothing. The Prophet ﷺ praised the one who starts a good practice that others follow (*Sahih Muslim 1017*). Sometimes the gift that is seen opens the hands of others. But when no one needs to see it, the gift no one sees lets go of more.

That is the secret. Each voluntary deed is one grain of sand that you deliberately moved from one side of the hourglass to the other. Detachment is not one dramatic act of giving everything up. It is a daily choice between two real options, made again and again, grain by grain. And Allah tells us where that road leads: *until I love him.*

The drug of the dunya

Have you noticed that the first video is never the last one? You open the app to watch one thing. One becomes three. Three becomes an hour. And the strange part is that the hour does not leave you full. It leaves you hungrier than when you started.

Or the thing you wanted to buy for months. The day it arrives, you feel a small lift. A week later it is just another object on a shelf, and your eye has already moved on to the next one. Or praise: one person notices you, and soon you need everyone to.

This is how attachment works. It never stays the size it started. Attachments lead to more attachments. I call it the drug of the dunya. Like any drug, every dose promises to be the last one you need, and every dose leaves you needing a bigger one. You go deeper and deeper, and the deeper you go, the harder it is to remember what the surface looked like.

The Prophet ﷺ described this hunger fourteen centuries before anyone had a phone in their pocket:

> "If the son of Adam had a valley full of gold, he would want to have two valleys, for nothing fills his mouth except dust. And Allah forgives the one who repents to Him."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 6439*

In another narration, the one with two valleys wants a third (Sahih al-Bukhari 6436). Notice that the problem is never the amount of gold. It is the hunger itself, and it does not stop on its own. Only the dust of the grave fills that mouth. Allah says the same thing in two short lines:

> "Competing for more distracts you, until you visit the graves."
>
> *Quran 102:1–2*

And the Prophet ﷺ showed us what this does to the heart, one dose at a time:

> "When the servant commits a sin, a black spot appears on his heart. If he stops, asks forgiveness, and repents, his heart is polished clean. But if he returns to it, the spot grows until it covers his whole heart. That is the stain Allah mentioned: 'No! Rather, a stain has covered their hearts from what they used to earn.'"
>
> *Jami' al-Tirmidhi 3334; Quran 83:14*

Read that hadith again and you will see the whole problem and the whole cure. The spot grows if you return. The heart is polished if you turn back. The drug is real, but it is not the end of the story. The way out is always open.

Here is what took me years to understand. The same law that pulls us down also lifts us up. If attachments breed attachments, detachments breed detachments.

The Prophet ﷺ described both directions in one picture:

> "Trials will be presented to hearts the way a reed mat is woven, stick by stick. Any heart that takes them in gets a black mark, and any heart that rejects them gets a white mark, until hearts become of two kinds. One is white like a smooth stone, and no trial will harm it as long as the heavens and the earth remain. The other is dark, like a cup turned upside down. It does not recognize good or reject evil, except what it has absorbed of its own desires."
>
> *Sahih Muslim 144*

Stick by stick. Grain by grain. No heart becomes white in one night, and no heart becomes dark in one night either. Each choice weaves the next one in. And look at what the dark heart becomes: a cup turned upside down. Whatever good is poured onto it runs off. It cannot hold anything anymore.

Now look at the other side. Allah says:

> "And Allah increases those who are guided in guidance."
>
> *Quran 19:76*

> "And those who strive for Us, We will surely guide them to Our ways. And indeed, Allah is with those who do good."
>
> *Quran 29:69*

Our ways, not one way. One door opens onto the next. The first time you put the phone down to pray, it feels like pulling your hand out of a fire. The second time is a little easier. By the tenth time, you start to wonder what you were holding on to. The pull may not disappear forever, and this book is not promising you it will. But its grip loosens, and every grain you move to Allah's side of the hourglass makes the next one lighter. We will see this momentum again in the chapter *Then Let It Be Now*.

Allah puts both directions side by side in a single verse:

> "Allah is the ally of those who believe. He brings them out of the darknesses into the light. And those who disbelieve, their allies are false gods. They take them out of the light into the darknesses."
>
> *Quran 2:257*

Both are journeys. Nobody stands still. Someone is always leading you somewhere.

So what do we gain from all these detachments? It is tempting to say: self-control. The person who can close the app, keep the wallet in the pocket, and walk away from the argument looks like someone who has finally mastered himself. And that is partly true.

But it is not the deepest truth. Think about the drug again. The one who is hooked always believes he is in control. *I can stop whenever I want.* He can't. The drug decides. The Prophet ﷺ gave that person a name:

> "Wretched is the slave of the dinar and the dirham, of fine cloth and fine clothes. If he is given, he is pleased. If he is not given, he is displeased."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 6435*

The slave. He thought he owned his money. His money owned his moods.

The one who detaches does not become his own master. He hands the reins back to the One they belonged to all along. That is the detachment from control we met at the start of this book, and here we see it from the inside. Every small detachment is practice for the great one: letting go of the steering wheel of your own life, and placing it with Allah.

In the same hadith about the slave of the dinar, the Prophet ﷺ describes the opposite man: someone striving in the path of Allah who, if he is placed at the front, is content at the front, and if he is placed at the back, is content at the back (Sahih al-Bukhari 2887). He does not need to control where he stands. He only needs to know Who placed him there.

And Allah promises what that surrender brings:

> "And whoever is mindful of Allah, He will make a way out for him, and provide for him from where he does not expect. And whoever relies upon Allah, He is sufficient for him."
>
> *Quran 65:2–3*

This is the name of the house we live in. *Islam* means submission. The drug of the dunya promises control and delivers slavery. Submission looks like giving control away, and it turns out to be the only freedom there is. And remember where the hadith of voluntary deeds ends: *I become his hearing, his sight, his hand, and his foot.* That is what it looks like when a person has finally given up control to Allah.

The moving force

This is the hardest thing I want this book to say, and the most important.

You can be detached from the world, attached to Allah, and be a moving force on this earth.

You can be an innovator. You can build. You can be generous on a scale that changes lives. You can bring real change into the world. Detachment does not make you smaller. It is what finally sets your hands free.

Look again at the end of that hadith. When Allah loves His servant, He becomes the hearing, the sight, the hand, and the foot of that servant. That is not a description of someone sitting still. That is a person in motion: listening, seeing, working, walking. But moving by Allah's guidance instead of being dragged by the world.

This is the secret of the world itself. Attaching to it is a loss. It is the root of wars, of agony, of pain. People fight over it because they believe it can hold them, and it can't. Detaching from it brings back sanity. It is a reflection of who we were meant

to be.

Where we are going

Every journey needs a destination. Here is ours.

The Prophet Ibrahim, peace be upon him, walked away from the idols of his people. He told them plainly that everything they worshipped was an enemy to him, "except the Lord of the worlds" (Quran 26:77). And then he made a prayer:

> "And do not disgrace me on the Day they are raised up. The Day when neither wealth nor children will be of any benefit, except to the one who comes to Allah with a sound heart."
>
> *Quran 26:87–89*

Wealth and children. The two things people hold onto most tightly in this life. On that Day, neither will help. Only one thing will: a sound heart, *qalb salim* in Arabic.

That is what this book is reaching for. Not an empty heart. Not a cold heart. A whole heart, one that loved and gave and built and cared while it was here, and arrives before Allah holding nothing but Him.

How to read this book

This book is written for everyone. You don't need to be Muslim to read it. If you have ever felt trapped by your own days, compared yourself to someone and felt smaller, or held onto something so tightly that losing it frightened you, you already know what this book is about. Whenever an Arabic word appears, I will tell you what it means. The one name I will not translate is the name of the Creator: Allah.

I am not inventing anything here. I am not offering a new philosophy or a new religion. Every idea in these pages rests on the Quran or on the authentic teaching of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and I will show you the evidence as we go, so you can check it for yourself. The frameworks you will find here, the hourglass, the four dimensions, the four objects, are only lenses. They are my way, as an engineer, of organizing truths that were revealed long before I was born.

And please read this book with mercy toward yourself. If you see yourself deeply attached in these pages, so did I. This book is not a verdict on anyone: not on you, and not on the people you will think of while you read it. It is a mirror, not a window. Every lens in it is meant to be turned on your own heart, never on someone else's. It is a door. You don't have to walk through it all at once. You only have to move one grain of sand today.

Let's begin.

CHAPTER 1

Then Let It Be Now

The phone rings at an hour when phones should not ring.

You already know before you answer. Someone you love is gone. And in the days that follow, something strange happens to the world around you. It goes quiet.

The argument you had with a colleague last week, the one you replayed in your head for three nights, suddenly means nothing. The car you were saving for, the title you were chasing, the comment someone left that hurt your pride: all of it shrinks until you can barely see it. You stand at the edge of a grave and, for the first time in a long time, you see your life from the right distance. You know exactly what matters. You know exactly what doesn't. You make quiet promises to yourself. *I will live differently now.*

And then, a few weeks later, the phone rings again. Not with bad news this time. Just work. A bill. A small annoyance. And slowly, without any single moment you could point to, the world turns its volume back up. The clarity fades. The promises fade with it. One day you notice that you are arguing about the same small things, chasing the same small prizes, as if that graveside had never happened.

Almost everyone who has lost someone dear knows both halves of this experience. The clarity, and the fading.

This chapter is about the space between them.

My father

When my father died, the world stopped.

My heart stopped. A huge ringing filled my ears. I couldn't feel my feet or my hands. Everything that had been moving a moment before simply stood still.

My father was my protection, my mentor, and my role model. He was kind, he was compassionate, and he was very smart.

I remember a time he bought me a Casio watch. Somehow it fell into the toilet, and the toilet was not clean. He didn't stop to think about it. He put his hand in, brought my watch out, and cleaned it for me. Then he gave it back to me with a smile.

I have thought about that smile many times since. It was a smile from Allah. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ told us:

> "Allah made mercy into one hundred parts. He kept ninety-nine parts with Himself, and He sent down one part to the earth. It is from that one part that all of creation shows mercy to one another, so that a mare lifts her hoof away from her foal, fearing she might hurt it."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 6000; Sahih Muslim 2752*

My father's smile, his hand reaching into that toilet for his son's small watch, was a piece of that one part. All the kindness I ever received from him, all the kindness every parent on earth has ever shown a child, comes from one hundredth of Allah's mercy. The other ninety-nine are waiting in the Hereafter.

My father died, and I realized something I had known all my life without ever truly seeing it: good things have a lifetime. And so do the bad.

Allah says:

> "For every appointed term there is a decree."
>
> *Quran 13:38*

In Arabic it is four words, *li kulli ajalin kitab*. Everything has a term, and every term is written. The years I had with my father had an end written for them before he was born. And the pain of losing him has an end written for it too. Nothing in this world, sweet or bitter, is forever.

That was the clarity that came to me when my father died. This chapter is about what to do with it.

Loss is a detachment

In the introduction we said that every attachment to something is a detachment from something else, because the heart is one and it is always turning toward one thing or away from another.

Loss is a detachment too. But it is a different kind. Most of the detachments in this book are ones we choose: the voluntary prayer instead of the wasted evening, the charity instead of the purchase. Loss is a detachment that is *chosen for us*. Something is pulled out of our hands, and we did not agree to it.

And yet here is what I have seen again and again, in my own life and in the lives of the people around me: a detachment, even one that is forced on us, opens a door to a greater one.

When you lose someone dear, the illusion of forever we spoke about in the last chapter breaks, at least for a moment. You see with your own eyes that everything leaves. And once you have seen that about one thing, you can see it about everything. The job will leave. The money will leave. The body will leave. You will leave. That one loss becomes a window through which you can see the whole of life at once.

The question is what you do while the window is open.

The sentence for the moment of loss

Allah does not leave us without words at the moment of loss. He gives us a sentence to say, and He tells us exactly when to say it:

> "And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger, and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits. But give good news to the patient: those who, when a disaster strikes them, say, 'Indeed, we belong to Allah, and indeed, to Him we will return.' Those are the ones upon whom are blessings from their Lord, and mercy. And it is they who are rightly guided."
>
> *Quran 2:155–157*

Look closely at the sentence: *we belong to Allah, and to Him we will return.* In Arabic it is *inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un*, and Muslims all over the world say it the moment they hear of a death.

It is the most complete statement of detachment there is. It does not only say that the person I lost belonged to Allah. It says that *we* belong to Allah. I was never the owner of the one I lost. I am not even the owner of myself. Everything was on loan, including the one holding it. And then the second half of the sentence finishes the thought: we are all going back to the same place.

Allah placed this sentence exactly at the moment of loss. Not a week later. Not after the grief has settled. *When a disaster strikes them.* The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ taught the same thing. He once passed by a woman weeping at a grave and told her gently to be mindful of Allah and to be patient. She did not recognize him, and in her grief she said, *"Leave me alone. You have not been struck by what I have been struck by."* Later she was told who he was, and she came to his door to apologize. He said to her:

> "Patience is at the first strike."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 1283; Sahih Muslim 926*

The first strike. That is the moment of greatest pain, and it is also the moment of greatest clarity. The window is widest right at the beginning.

And Allah honors the one who says that sentence in that moment more than we can imagine. The Prophet ﷺ told us what happens in the heavens when a person loses a child:

> "When the child of a servant dies, Allah says to His angels, 'Have you taken the child of My servant?' They say, 'Yes.' He says, 'Have you taken the fruit of his heart?' They say, 'Yes.' He says, 'And what did My servant say?' They say, 'He praised You, and said: we belong to Allah and to Him we will return.' And Allah says, 'Build for My servant a house in Paradise, and name it the House of Praise.'"
>
> *Jami' al-Tirmidhi 1021*

Allah knows what His servant said. He asks anyway, so that the angels say it out loud. *The fruit of his heart.* Allah Himself names how much this loss hurts. He does not pretend the child was a small thing. And then, at the moment the parent's heart is emptiest, Allah builds them a house.

Think about what that parent did. Everything in them wanted to break. They had every reason to ask *why me?* Instead, they let go of the one thing they would have held onto above all else, and they turned it into praise. They detached, at the first strike, while the window was wide open. And the door that opened behind that detachment was a door in Paradise.

Why the window closes

If the clarity is so real, why does it fade?

Allah describes the pattern exactly:

> "And when harm touches a person, he calls upon Us, lying on his side, or sitting, or standing. But when We remove the harm from him, he goes on as if he had never called upon Us about a harm that touched him."
>
> *Quran 10:12*

He goes on as if he had never called. That is the fading. It is not a failure unique to you. It is how the human being is made.

There is a hadith that I find deeply comforting here. One of the companions of the Prophet ﷺ, a man named Hanzalah, was so troubled by this fading that he accused himself of hypocrisy. He told Abu Bakr: when we sit with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and he reminds us of Paradise and the Fire, it is as if we can see them with our own eyes. Then we go home to our wives and our children and our work, and we forget so much. Abu Bakr said: by Allah, the same happens to us. So the two of them went to the Prophet ﷺ together, and he said:

> "By the One in whose hand is my soul, if you were to remain always as you are when you are with me, and in remembrance, the angels would shake your hands in your beds and on your roads. But, Hanzalah, there is a time for this and a time for that."

> *Sahih Muslim 2750*

He said the last sentence three times.

So the fading is not hypocrisy. It is human. Nobody lives at the graveside forever, and we are not asked to. We are made to go home, hold our children, and go back to work.

But that is exactly why the window matters so much. If the clarity were going to stay, we could act on it whenever we liked. It is *because* it fades that we have to act while it is here.

Musa and the angel of death

There is a story in the authentic hadith that shows this moment of clarity more sharply than anything else I know. It is about the Prophet Musa, known in English as Moses, peace be upon him.

Before we tell it, one thing we need to know: the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ taught that no prophet dies until he is first shown his place and given a choice. Death does not simply take a prophet. It asks him. Keep that in mind, because this story is about a choice.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

> "The angel of death was sent to Musa. When he came to him, Musa struck him and put out his eye. The angel returned to his Lord and said, 'You sent me to a servant who does not want to die.' So Allah restored his eye and said, 'Go back to him and tell him to place his hand on the back of an ox. For every hair that his hand covers, he will be given a year.' Musa said, 'My Lord, and then what?' He said, 'Then death.' Musa said, 'Then let it be now.' And he asked Allah to bring him close to the Holy Land, within a stone's throw of it."
>
> And the Prophet ﷺ said: "If I were there, I would show you his grave, beside the road, at the red sand dune."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 1339 and 3407; Sahih Muslim 2372*

Scholars have explained the first part of this story for centuries. The angel came to Musa in the form of a man, without warning, into his home, demanding his life. Musa did not know who he was, and he did what any strong man would do to a stranger who came for his life: he defended himself. He was not resisting Allah's decree. He was resisting what looked like an intruder.

But it is the second part of the story that I want you to sit with.

Allah sends the angel back, and this time Musa is given a real choice. Place your hand on the back of an ox. Count the hairs under your palm. Each one is a year. That is not one lifetime. That could be hundreds of lifetimes, thousands of years, more time than all of human history.

And Musa asks one question. An engineer's question, if you like. The question that follows any path all the way to its last line:

And then what?

Then death.

And in that instant, Musa sees it. It does not matter whether it is one year or ten thousand. Every road, however long, ends in the same place. A longer life is not a different destination. It is only a longer way to the same door.

Then let it be now.

That is the clarity. He saw the end of the road, and he let go at once. He did not negotiate. He did not ask for a few more years to finish his work. He did not stand in the window admiring the view until it closed. He saw, and he acted, in the same breath.

And notice what he did with that moment. He did not just accept death. He made one request, and it was not for more of the world. It was to be brought close to the Holy Land, the land Allah had blessed. Even as he let go of everything, he attached himself to what Allah loves. One detachment, and immediately a greater attachment on the other side of it. That is the whole of this chapter in a single scene.

And then what?

Musa's question is a gift to us. We can carry it with us.

Take anything your heart is holding tightly right now and ask Musa's question about it.

The promotion. *And then what?* A bigger office, more responsibility, a larger salary. *And then what?* A bigger house, maybe. *And then what?* Retirement. *And then what?*

Then death.

The argument you need to win. The recognition you are waiting for. The thing you want to buy. Ask it of each one, and keep asking until you reach the last line. Every worldly path ends in the same two words.

This is not meant to make life feel pointless. It is meant to do the opposite. When you see where every road ends, you finally see which roads are worth walking. The only paths that go *past* that last line are the ones that lead to Allah. Everything else stops at the grave.

Loss asks this question for us. When we lose someone dear, we are forced to see the *then death* at the end of their road, and for a while we can see it at the end of ours too. Musa's question lets us ask it on purpose.

Doors that open doors

Now we come to the heart of this chapter.

A detachment, acted on, does not stay a single act. It opens a door to the next one. And the next one opens a door to the one after that.

Allah describes this momentum in many places. He says:

> "And those who accept guidance, He increases them in guidance, and gives them their righteousness."
>
> *Quran 47:17*

And:

> "As for the one who gives, and is mindful of Allah, and believes in the best, We will ease his way toward ease."
>
> *Quran 92:5–7*

These are the very verses the Prophet ﷺ recited when he told his companions, *"Work, for each person will be made easy toward what he was created for,"* the hadith we met in the introduction. The one who gives is made to find giving easier. The one who lets go finds letting go easier. Each step makes the next one lighter.

There is a well-known saying among the early Muslims: *the reward of a good deed is the good deed that follows it.* You do one act for Allah, and part of your reward is that Allah opens the door to another. A detachment works the same way. Let go of one thing for His sake, and you will find that the next thing is easier to let go of.

The opposite is also true, and the same passage says so. Allah continues:

> "But as for the one who is stingy, and thinks himself free of need, and denies the best, We will ease his way toward hardship."
>
> *Quran 92:8–10*

Attachment has momentum too. Every time we hold on, the grip tightens. This is the drug of the dunya we met in the introduction: every dose asks for a bigger one, and every detachment makes the next one lighter.

There is a woman in the time of the Prophet ﷺ whose life shows this door opening more beautifully than any other. Her name was Umm Salamah. She lost her husband, Abu Salamah, a man she loved deeply and admired, one of the very first to leave everything behind for Islam. She had heard the Prophet ﷺ teach that whoever is struck by a calamity and says, *"We belong to Allah and to Him we will return. O Allah, reward me in my calamity and give me something better in its place,"* Allah will give them something better.

She later said that when Abu Salamah died, she thought to herself: *who could possibly be better than Abu Salamah?* She could not imagine it. But she said the words anyway. She acted on the instruction while her heart was still breaking, before she could see how it could possibly be true.

And Allah gave her, in place of Abu Salamah, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ himself, who married her.

> *Sahih Muslim 918*

She did not wait for the pain to pass and the clarity to fade. She stepped through the door while it was open, and behind it was another door she could never have imagined.

You don't have to wait for loss

Here is something important. The window does not only open when tragedy forces it open. The Prophet ﷺ taught us how to open it ourselves.

> "Visit the graves, for they remind you of death."
>
> *Sahih Muslim 976*

> "Remember often the destroyer of pleasures," meaning death.
>
> *Jami' al-Tirmidhi 2307*

This is not a call to be gloomy. It is a call to borrow the clarity of loss without having to suffer the loss. To walk to the graveside on a quiet afternoon, stand where you would one day stand in grief, and ask Musa's question while you still have time to act on the answer.

This is the same secret we found in the introduction. A voluntary deed is a detachment you choose. Visiting a grave, remembering death, asking *and then what?* about the thing you are chasing: these are voluntary windows. You open them yourself, on a normal Tuesday, before anything has been taken from you.

Grief is not the enemy

Before we go further, I want to be careful. Nothing in this chapter means you should not grieve.

When the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ held his infant son Ibrahim as he was dying, tears ran down his face. One of his companions was surprised to see him weep, and he said:

> "The eye sheds tears and the heart grieves, but we say only what pleases our Lord. And we are saddened by your parting, O Ibrahim."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 1303*

And when asked about his tears, he said they were *mercy*.

The detached heart is not a numb heart. The Prophet ﷺ wept, and his heart grieved. What he did not do was let the grief carry him into words or choices that Allah would not be pleased with. The tears and the clarity can live side by side. In fact, the tears are often what open the window.

Acting while the window is open

So what do we actually do?

Clarity is a feeling, and feelings fade. That is how we are made, as Hanzalah learned. So the work of this moment is to turn a feeling that will fade into something that will stay. Take what you see clearly in those days and give it a form that will outlast the feeling.

The Prophet ﷺ gave us the key:

> "The most beloved of deeds to Allah are those done consistently, even if they are small."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 6464; Sahih Muslim 783*

Not the grand vow you will break in a month. The small, consistent thing that you begin in the window and keep doing long after the window has closed.

Here is what that can look like:

- **A habit.** One voluntary prayer a day, begun in the week of the funeral and never dropped. Years from now, when the clarity is a distant memory, the prayer is still there, still moving one grain of sand at a time.

- **A gift.** Something given away while you can still see clearly how little it matters. Charity given on behalf of the one you lost, if you like, so that their leaving becomes a door for someone else.
- **A repair.** A phone call to the person you stopped speaking to over something that, standing at the graveside, you can no longer even remember properly.
- **A removal.** One thing taken out of your days that you now see was eating your life: the endless scrolling, the gathering that always ends in backbiting, the second job you didn't need.
- **The sentence.** *We belong to Allah, and to Him we will return.* Said not only at the funeral, but in every small loss after it: the missed opportunity, the broken thing, the plan that fell through. Each time you say it and mean it, the window opens a little again.

None of these is dramatic. That is the point. A detachment acted on in the window becomes the foundation for the next detachment, and that one for the next. One door, then another, then another. Until one day you realize that the clarity you once felt only at a graveside has become the way you see every day.

Detaching from the future

There is one more attachment that closes the window faster than any other, and most of us never notice it, because it does not look like an attachment at all.

It is the attachment to the future.

We are attached to a future that we are not guaranteed. We hold onto it as if it were already ours, and we build our plans around it: *that* is when I will finally pray the way I should. *That* is when I will call my mother more, give more, read the Quran, slow down, make things right. After this project. After the children are older. After I retire. Later.

When we attach to the future, we become procrastinators. We become lazy. We decide that every important thing we have to do now can be done later. And the strange thing is that it feels like faith in tomorrow. It is really a loan we have taken out against a day that was never promised to us.

Allah tells us plainly that it was never promised:

> "Indeed, Allah has the knowledge of the Hour. He sends down the rain, and He knows what is in the wombs. And no soul knows what it will earn tomorrow, and no soul knows in what land it will die. Indeed, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware."
>
> *Quran 31:34*

No soul knows what it will earn tomorrow. Not the young, not the healthy, not the one with a full calendar. The tomorrow we keep spending in our heads is not ours to spend.

And Allah shows us exactly what the attachment to *later* sounds like at the end:

> "And spend from what We have provided you before death comes to one of you and he says, 'My Lord, if only You would delay me for a short while, then I would give charity and be among the righteous.' But Allah will never delay a soul when its appointed time has come. And Allah is fully aware of what you do."
>
> *Quran 63:10–11*

If only You would delay me for a short while. That is the last sentence of every procrastinator. It is the same *later* we say every day, said one final time, when there is no later left. And look at the answer. Allah will never delay a soul when its *ajal*, its appointed term, has come. The same word as in *li kulli ajalin kitab*: for every appointed term there is a decree. My father's term was written. So is mine. So is yours.

The companion Abdullah ibn Umar heard the Prophet ﷺ say, "Be in this world as if you were a stranger, or a traveler passing along a road," and he lived by it with these words of his own:

> "When evening comes, do not wait for the morning. And when morning comes, do not wait for the evening. Take from your health for your sickness, and from your life for your death."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 6416*

Do not wait for the morning. That is detachment from the future in a single line.

This does not mean we stop planning. In the introduction we said that we plan with all our strength, act with all our heart, and then let go. Allah even teaches us how to speak about our plans:

> "And never say of anything, 'I will surely do that tomorrow,' except with, 'If Allah wills.'"
>
> *Quran 18:23–24*

He does not forbid us from saying *tomorrow*. He forbids us from saying it as if we owned it. Plan for tomorrow as a guest plans in someone else's house: gratefully, and knowing it belongs to the Host.

So the detached heart builds for the future without hiding in it. It does the important thing today, because today is the only day it has actually been given. And that is the last lesson of the window. The clarity you feel after a loss will always be tempted to say: *I see it now, and I will act on it soon.* Soon is the future, and the future is where clarity goes to die.

Musa did not say *soon*.

Then let it be now

Come back to Musa, peace be upon him, with his hand on the back of an ox, a thousand years under his palm.

And then what?

Then death.

Then let it be now.

You and I are not being asked to choose the hour of our death. That was a choice given to a prophet. But we are being given a smaller choice, every single day: whether to act on what we already know, or to wait until the knowledge fades.

Whatever you saw clearly the last time you lost someone, whatever you promised yourself while you stood there, it is not too late. The window may have closed, but you know how to open it again. Visit the grave. Remember the destroyer of pleasures. Ask the question.

And when you see clearly, don’t wait.

Let it be now.

CHAPTER 2

I Turn the Night and the Day

Three people sit at the same family table.

The first is a man in his forties. Twenty years ago he did something he is ashamed of. He has asked Allah for forgiveness more times than he can count. He has made it right with the people he could. And still, every time he stands to pray, it is there. A voice in the back of his head says: *you? After what you did?* So he prays a little less than he wants to. He gives a little less. He holds back from the good he could do, because he does not believe a man like him is allowed to do it.

The second is his mother. She is the kindest person at the table, and she runs the family the way her mother ran it, and her mother before her. Some of it is beautiful. Some of it makes no sense at all, and when her grandson asks why they do it, she says the only answer she has ever been given: *this is how we have always done it.*

The third is his younger brother. He is successful, funny, generous with a bill at a restaurant. He lives as though the evening will never end. Ask him about death and he changes the subject. Ask him about Allah and he says he will get to that later. For now, there is the next trip, the next car, the next deal.

Three people, three very different lives. But look closer and you will see they share one thing. Each of them is stuck in time.

The first is stuck in the past, in what he did. The second is stuck in the past too, in what her fathers did. And the third is stuck in the present, so tightly that he cannot see anything beyond it, and he keeps pushing everything that matters into a future he assumes he will have.

This chapter is about the dimension of attachment we most easily forget, because we live inside it: time.

The fourth dimension

In the introduction I described attachment as having dimensions, the way an engineer thinks of space and time. Three of them are the places attachment takes hold inside a person: the mind, the heart, and the body. The fourth is the one all three move through. Time.

Every attachment has a position in time. We can be attached to what has already happened. We can be attached to what is happening now, as if it were all there is. And we can be attached to what has not happened yet. Each one holds us back in a different way.

Remember the hourglass. Every grain of sand is a moment of your life, and the grains fall in only one direction. The grain that fell yesterday will never fall again. The grain that is falling now is the only one in your hand. And the grains still waiting at the top are not yours yet. Nobody has promised you how many are left.

The detached heart lives honestly with all three. It lets the fallen grains go. It uses the falling grain well. And it does not spend grains it has not been given.

Who owns time

Before we look at each one, there is something we need to settle. Who is in charge of time?

The Quran records what the people who denied the Hereafter used to say:

> "And they say, 'There is nothing but our life in this world. We die and we live, and nothing destroys us except time.' But they have no knowledge of that. They are only guessing."
>
> *Quran 45:24*

Nothing destroys us except time. For them, time was the master. It brought them in, it carried them along, and one day it would grind them down, and that was the end of the story. People still talk this way. *Time took him. Time is cruel. Time waits for no one.* We curse the year that went badly, the age we have reached, the times we live in.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ told us how Allah answers this:

> "Allah said: 'The son of Adam hurts Me. He curses time, and I am time. In My hand is the command. I turn the night and the day.'"
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 4826; Sahih Muslim 2246*

The scholars explain *I am time* this way: time is not a power of its own that does things to us. Allah is the One who turns it. Every night that falls and every day that rises is turned by His hand. So when a person curses time for what happened to them, they are really complaining about the One who sends the days, without realizing it.

This matters more than it seems. If time is your master, then the past owns you, the present is all you have, and the future is something you must grab before time takes it away. But if Allah turns the night and the day, then time is not your master. It is a creation, like you. The past is in His hand, and He can forgive it. The present is a trust from Him. And the future belongs to Him alone.

Detachment in time begins with that one shift. You stop serving time, and you remember who turns it.

Attached to the past

What you did

Let us go back to the first man at the table.

What is holding him is not his sin. He repented of it long ago. What is holding him is his attachment to it. He carries it everywhere. He has made it part of who he is. And without ever saying it out loud, he has decided that it is bigger than Allah's forgiveness.

Attachment to the past never lets us move forward. It is like trying to walk with one hand still holding onto a door you already walked out of.

Here is what Allah says about it, in a hadith the Prophet ﷺ told us:

> "Allah said: 'O son of Adam, as long as you call upon Me and hope in Me, I will forgive you for whatever you have done, and I do not mind. O son of Adam, if your sins were to reach the clouds of the sky and then you asked My forgiveness, I would forgive you, and I do not mind. O son of Adam, if you came to Me with sins nearly filling the earth, and then met Me without associating anything with Me, I would come to you with forgiveness nearly filling it.'"
>
> *Jami' al-Tirmidhi 3540*

I do not mind. Read that again. The man at the table minds. He minds very much. And Allah, whom he wronged, says He does not.

The Prophet ﷺ used the image of the sea, too. Of the one who glorifies Allah a hundred times a day, saying *glory be to Allah, and praise be to Him*, he said that his sins are wiped away *"even if they were like the foam of the sea"* (Sahih al-Bukhari 6405; Sahih Muslim 2691). Stand on a beach and try to count the foam. That is how much Allah is ready to wash away, for a few words said sincerely.

So it is not a question of how big the past is. It is a question of whether we will let go of it and turn to the One who is waiting to forgive it.

There is a story I love about this. Amr ibn al-As was one of the fiercest enemies of the Prophet ﷺ before he became Muslim. By his own account, there was no one he hated more, and nothing he wanted more than to kill him. When Allah put the love of Islam in his heart, he came to the Prophet ﷺ and said, *stretch out your hand so that I can pledge to you.* The Prophet ﷺ stretched out his right hand, and Amr pulled his own hand back.

What is wrong, Amr?

I want to set a condition.

What condition?

That I be forgiven.

He was afraid of his past. He could not believe he would be allowed to start again. And the Prophet ﷺ said:

> "Do you not know that Islam wipes away what came before it, and that migration wipes away what came before it, and that pilgrimage wipes away what came before it?"
>
> *Sahih Muslim 121*

Wipes away. Not reduces, not puts on hold. A new plate. You start over.

Allah says the same to those who once fought against Him:

> "Say to those who disbelieve: if they stop, what has already passed will be forgiven for them."
>
> *Quran 8:38*

If that is how Allah treats the one who fought His Messenger, what do you think He has prepared for the one who simply fell, and was sorry, and turned back?

This is not permission to stop caring about sin. A heart that feels nothing about its mistakes is not detached. It is careless. Remorse is part of repentance. But remorse is meant to be a door you walk through, not a room you live in. You feel it, you turn to Allah, you make right what you can, and you walk forward. If you are still standing in that room twenty years later, it is no longer remorse. It is attachment.

And if you fall again after you repent, and most of us do, that is a different trap, the belief that because you are not perfect you have lost your place with Allah. We look at that one closely in *Detach from Perfection*.

What was done to you

There is a second way the past holds us. Not what we did, but what was done to us.

The Prophet Yusuf, known in English as Joseph, peace be upon him, had more reason than almost anyone to hold onto the past. His own brothers threw him into a well as a boy and left him to be sold as a slave. Years of exile and prison followed. And when Allah finally raised him to power, the same brothers came before him, needing his help, at his mercy.

He said:

> "No blame upon you today. May Allah forgive you. He is the Most Merciful of those who show mercy."
>
> *Quran 12:92*

And later, when his whole family was gathered around him, he told the story of his life to his father. Listen to how he tells it:

> "He was good to me when He brought me out of prison, and brought you here from the desert, after Satan had come between me and my brothers."
>
> *Quran 12:100*

Many commentators have noticed what is missing. He mentions the prison. He does not mention the well. The well was his brothers' doing, and they were standing right there. So he left it out. And when he spoke of the rift, he did not say *after my brothers wronged me*. He said *after Satan had come between me and my brothers*.

That is a man who is detached from his past. He has not forgotten it. He is telling the story. But it no longer owns the way he speaks, or the way he treats the people who hurt him. And notice: that detachment did not make him weaker. It made him the one who held the whole family together.

What our fathers did

Now the second person at the table: the mother who does things because they have always been done.

This is the attachment to the past that the Quran speaks about more than almost any other. Again and again, when a messenger came to his people with the truth, the answer he received was the same sentence.

> "And when it is said to them, 'Follow what Allah has revealed,' they say, 'No, we will follow what we found our fathers doing.' Even if their fathers understood nothing and were not guided?"
>
> *Quran 2:170*

> "And when it is said to them, 'Come to what Allah has revealed, and to the Messenger,' they say, 'What we found our fathers upon is enough for us.' Even if their fathers knew nothing and were not guided?"
>
> *Quran 5:104*

Allah tells the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ that this sentence was not new. It was the same answer every messenger had heard:

> "No, they say, 'We found our fathers upon a way, and we are guided by following in their footsteps.' And likewise, We did not send a warner before you to any town except that its wealthy ones said, 'We found our fathers upon a way, and we are following in their footsteps.' He said, 'Even if I brought you better guidance than what you found your fathers upon?'"
>
> *Quran 43:22–24*

Even if I brought you better guidance? That is the question that exposes the attachment. They were not following their fathers because their fathers were right. They were following them because they were their fathers. Show them something better, and it would make no difference.

Ibrahim, peace be upon him, the man whose prayer for a sound heart is the destination of this book, heard the same answer. He asked his father and his people:

> "'What are these statues to which you are so devoted?' They said, 'We found our fathers worshipping them.' He said, 'You and your fathers have been in clear error.'"
>
> *Quran 21:52–54*

And in the passage we met in the introduction, when he asked whether their idols could hear them, help them, or harm them, they did not even try to defend the idols. They only said, *"But we found our fathers doing the same"* (Quran 26:74). That is when he said they were all enemies to him, *"except the Lord of the worlds"* (26:77). His detachment from his people's idols began with a detachment from his people's past.

Look at what the Quran actually objects to. Allah does not say *they followed their fathers*. He says *even if their fathers understood nothing and were not guided?* The problem is not tradition. The problem is tradition that has no reason, no understanding, and no guidance behind it. Things that make no sense, that no one can explain, kept alive only because no one dares to let them go.

Because the Quran honors a right inheritance too. When Yusuf explained his faith to his two companions in prison, he said:

> "And I follow the way of my fathers, Ibrahim, Ishaq and Yaqub. It was never for us to associate anything with Allah."
>
> *Quran 12:38*

And when Yaqub, known in English as Jacob, was dying, his sons promised him: *"We will worship your God, and the God of your fathers, Ibrahim and Ismail and Ishaq, one God"* (Quran 2:133).

So following your fathers is not the problem. Yusuf did it proudly. The difference is the reason. Yusuf followed his fathers because they were following Allah. The people of Ibrahim followed theirs even though they were not. One is an attachment to the truth that happens to come through your family. The other is an attachment to your family that happens to stand in the way of the truth.

And even when a parent calls you to something wrong, the detachment is never from your love and kindness toward them. Allah says:

> "But if they strive to make you associate with Me something of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them. But keep their company in this world with kindness, and follow the way of those who turn to Me."
>
> *Quran 31:15*

Do not obey them in that, and stay kind to them. That is the middle again. Not obsession with the past, and not contempt for it. The mother at the table does not need a grandson who mocks her. She needs one who loves her, keeps what is good, and gently asks the question the Quran asks: *does this have any guidance behind it?*

There is a verse that has helped me with this more than any other. Allah says of the generations that came before:

> "That was a nation that has passed. It will have what it earned, and you will have what you have earned. And you will not be asked about what they used to do."
>
> *Quran 2:134*

You will not be asked about what they did. You will be asked about what you did. Your fathers' grains of sand have already fallen. They are in Allah's hands now, and we pray for His mercy on them. But you cannot fill your hourglass with their sand. On that Day, *"inherited it from my father"* will not be an answer.

Attached to the present

Now the third person at the table: the brother who lives as though the evening will never end.

At first it seems strange to call this an attachment. Aren't we always told to live in the present? Isn't that a good thing?

It is, and we will come back to that. But there is a way of being attached to the present that is not about attention at all. It is the belief that the present is all there is. That this life, this world, this stretch of years between birth and death, is the whole story. That there is no Hereafter, or that if there is one, it is so far away and so uncertain that it may as well not exist.

That was the belief of the people in the verse we began with: *there is nothing but our life in this world. We die and we live.* And Allah describes what it does to the way a person sees:

> "They know what is apparent of the life of this world, but of the Hereafter they are heedless."
>
> *Quran 30:7*

They know what is apparent. They are not stupid. They may be brilliant. They know how to build, trade, invest, and win. But they only know the surface. They see the part of the picture in front of them and have no idea that the picture goes on.

That is what attachment to the present does. It makes us simple-minded, not in intelligence but in vision. Shortsighted. Allah names this in two words:

> "No, but you love the immediate, and you leave the Hereafter."
>
> *Quran 75:20–21*

The immediate. What is right in front of us, now, today. And again:

> "But you prefer the life of this world, while the Hereafter is better and more lasting."
>
> *Quran 87:16–17*

The Quran gives us a whole story about this, in the chapter called The Cave. Two men. One was given two gardens of grapevines, surrounded by date palms, with crops between them and a river running through. Both gardens gave their full harvest, every season, without fail. One day he walked into his garden with his friend, and he said:

> "I do not think this will ever perish. And I do not think the Hour will come. And even if I am brought back to my Lord, I will surely find something better than this."
>
> *Quran 18:35–36*

I do not think this will ever perish. That is the sentence of the heart attached to the present. It looks at what it has right now and assumes it is permanent. The garden is full today, so it will be full forever. I am strong today, so I will be strong forever. There is no Hour, and if there is, I will be fine.

His friend, who had less wealth, reminded him of the One who created him from dust, and asked: *"Why did you not say, when you entered your garden, 'What Allah wills. There is no power except with Allah'?"* (18:39). And then, overnight, the garden was destroyed. The man was left turning his hands over in grief at everything he had spent on it, standing over the collapsed vines, saying, *"I wish I had not associated anyone with my Lord"* (18:42).

The garden was never the problem. The problem was the sentence. *This will never perish.*

The Prophet ﷺ gave us a picture for how small the present is next to what comes after:

> "By Allah, this world compared to the Hereafter is nothing but like one of you putting his finger into the sea. Let him see what it brings back."
>
> *Sahih Muslim 2858*

Put your finger into the ocean and pull it out. Look at the drops on your fingertip. That is this whole life, every year of it, every garden and every deal. And the ocean is what comes after.

The one attached to the present spends everything on the drop and never looks at the sea.

And notice the irony. The person who believes this life is all there is should be the one who values it most. In fact it is the opposite. If nothing comes after, then nothing we do has any final weight, and nothing finally matters. Allah asks:

> "Did you think that We created you without purpose, and that you would not be returned to Us?"
>
> *Quran 23:115*

It is the belief in the Hereafter that gives the present its weight. Because this moment will be asked about, it matters. Because this grain of sand lands somewhere that lasts, it is worth placing carefully.

Living in the present is not the same as being attached to it

So what about living in the present? Isn't that good?

Yes. And this is the difference. The heart that is attached to the present thinks the present is the whole story. The heart that lives in the present knows it is a single page of a much longer book, and that is exactly why it takes this page seriously.

The Prophet ﷺ told Abdullah ibn Umar: *"Be in this world as if you were a stranger, or a traveler passing along a road,"* and Ibn Umar used to say, *"When evening comes, do not wait for the morning, and when morning comes, do not wait for the evening"* (Sahih al-Bukhari 6416). That is a man living fully in the present: not wasting today, not putting today off. But he lives in it as a traveler, not as someone who thinks he has arrived. He gives the road his full attention precisely because he knows it is a road.

The brother at the table has it backwards. He gives the present all of his heart and almost none of his attention. He chases it without ever really being in it. The detached heart does the opposite. It gives the present all of its attention, and keeps its heart with Allah.

Attached to the future

There is one more place in time where the heart can get stuck, and it is the one the brother at the table keeps reaching for when you ask him about Allah: *later*.

Attachment to the future is procrastination. We hold onto a tomorrow that was never promised to us, and we build our plans around it. *That* is when I will pray the way I should. *That* is when I will give, read, repair, slow down. After this project. After the children are older. After I retire.

I wrote about this at length at the end of *Then Let It Be Now*, in the section "Detaching from the future," because that chapter is about the moment of clarity and how quickly *soon* kills it. I will not repeat it here. I will only say that the brother's two attachments are really one. He is attached to the present because he believes it is all there is, and he is attached to the future because he believes it is guaranteed. Both are the same mistake: forgetting who turns the night and the day.

For tomorrow

So what does a heart detached in time look like?

It looks at its past and says: *I have turned to Allah, and He has wiped it away. I will not carry what He has put down.* It looks at what it inherited and says: *I will keep what has guidance behind it, and I will love my family through whatever does not.*

It looks at the present and says: *this is a single drop from the sea, and it is the only drop in my hand. I will give it everything, and I will not mistake it for the sea.*

And it looks at the future and says: *if Allah wills.* It plans, and works, and builds, but it does not spend grains of sand it has not been given.

There is a verse that gathers all three together. Allah says:

> "O you who believe, be mindful of Allah, and let every soul look at what it has sent ahead for tomorrow. And be mindful of Allah. Indeed, Allah is fully aware of what you do."
>
> *Quran 59:18*

Let every soul look at what it has sent ahead for tomorrow. The commentators explain that the *tomorrow* in this verse is the Day of Judgment. Allah calls it tomorrow because it is so close and so certain.

Look at how the verse handles time. It tells us to look *back*, at what we have already sent ahead. It tells us to act *now*, because every deed today is sent ahead too. And it tells us which future to care about. Not the tomorrow of procrastination, the next Monday we keep promising ourselves. The real tomorrow. The one that is coming whether we are ready or not.

The man who cannot let go of his past is not looking at what he has sent ahead. He is staring at what he has already been forgiven for. The mother who follows her fathers without reason is living by what others sent ahead, not by what she sends. The brother who lives for the present has forgotten there is a tomorrow at all, and the one he keeps waiting for is not the right one.

Allah turns the night and the day. The grains are falling. The ones behind you are in His hands; let Him keep them. The ones ahead of you are in His hands too; do not spend them before they come.

Only one grain is in yours. Send it ahead.

CHAPTER 3

Why Love Dies?

Think of a wedding you have been to. The families gathered, the food, the laughter, the two faces at the center of it all. Ask those two people in that moment whether their love will last, and they will look at you as if you had asked whether the sun will rise. Of course it will last. It is forever. They can feel it.

Now come back ten years later.

Some of them are still holding hands. But many are sitting in the same house like two strangers who happen to share a kitchen. Some have already signed the papers. And if you ask them what happened, you will hear the same sentence again and again, in different languages, in different countries, from people who have never met each other:

"It just died."

Nobody killed it. There was no single day it ended. It simply faded, the way a color fades in the sun, until one morning they looked at each other and could not find what used to be there.

Why does that happen? And why does it happen so often to people who were so sure?

Everything leaves

Here is a truth that no one likes to sit with: everything in this life will eventually leave you, or you will eventually leave it.

Your health will leave you. Your youth is already leaving. The house, the car, the job, the title. The people you love will leave you, or you will leave them. There is no exception. Not one.

Allah says:

> "Everyone upon the earth will perish. And there will remain the Face of your Lord, Owner of Majesty and Honor."
>
> *Quran 55:26–27*

And in another place:

> "Whatever you have will run out, and whatever is with Allah will remain."
>
> *Quran 16:96*

There is a narration that the angel Jibril, Gabriel, came to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and said: *"Live as you wish, for you will die. Love whom you wish, for you will part from him. Do as you wish, for you will be repaid for it."*

Love whom you wish, for you will part from him. That is not a threat. It is a fact, stated plainly, so that we can prepare for it.

The illusion of forever

So if everything leaves, why are we so surprised every time it does?

Because that is what attachment does. Attachment whispers one lie into the heart: *this one is different. This one will stay.*

When the heart attaches to something, it stops seeing it as a gift that will one day be taken back and starts seeing it as a part of itself. The heart builds its house on it. It plans its future around it. And it quietly decides that it cannot live without it.

That is the illusion of forever. And infatuation, what people call falling in love, is one of the strongest forms of it. In the first chapter we spoke about the three ways attachment takes hold of us: the mind, the heart, and the body. Romantic infatuation takes all three at once. The mind cannot stop thinking about the person. The heart cannot hold anything else. The days start to rearrange themselves around one face. It feels like the most alive a person has ever been.

But look closely at what is happening. One human being, who will grow old, who will change, who will one day die, is being given a place in the heart that was never built for a human being.

What was the love holding on to?

Ask a simple question about any love: *what is it attached to?*

Very often, if we are honest, the answer is not the person. It is something about the person. Their looks. Their money. Their family name. The way they made us feel about ourselves. The life we imagined we would have with them.

Allah describes exactly what the human heart is drawn to:

> "Made attractive to people is the love of the things they desire: women and sons, heaped-up treasures of gold and silver, fine horses, cattle, and farmland. That is the enjoyment of the life of this world, but with Allah is the best return."
>
> *Quran 3:14*

And the Prophet ﷺ named the same things when he spoke about marriage:

> "A woman is married for four things: her wealth, her lineage, her beauty, and her religion. So choose the one with religion, and you will prosper."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 5090; Sahih Muslim 1466*

The hadith is spoken about a woman, but the lesson goes both ways. Wealth, lineage, beauty. Every one of them is on the list of things that leave. Beauty fades with the years. Wealth comes and goes. Families change, fall out, pass away.

So here is the first answer to the question of this chapter. When a love is tied to a reason, the love lives exactly as long as the reason does. When the looks fade, a love built on looks fades with them. When the money is gone, a love built on money goes with it. The love did not die by accident. It died on schedule, because the thing it was holding on to was always going to leave.

The one thing on that list that does not fade is the fourth: faith. A person's relationship with Allah can grow every year of their life, even as their face ages and their bank account rises and falls. That is why the Prophet ﷺ said to choose it. Not because the other things are evil, but because they cannot carry a lifetime.

The misused heart

There is a second answer, and it goes deeper.

The heart was made for something. It has a purpose, the way an eye has a purpose and a hand has a purpose. Allah tells us what it is:

> "Truly, it is in the remembrance of Allah that hearts find rest."
>
> *Quran 13:28*

The heart was made to be attached to its Creator. That is the only attachment it was designed to carry with its full weight. When it rests there, it is at peace.

Now watch what happens when we take that place and give it to a person instead.

We ask them to be the source of our happiness. We ask them to make us feel complete. We ask them to never disappoint us, never change, never leave. We ask them, without ever saying it out loud, to be for us what only Allah can be.

No human being can carry that. Not the most loving spouse on earth. They will fail, not because they are bad, but because they are human. And every time they fail, the heart feels betrayed, because it was expecting something it should never have expected. Disappointment builds into resentment. Resentment builds into distance. And one day the love is gone.

That is the secret of why love dies. **Love dies because it is a form of attachment that misuses the heart.** The heart was meant for the Creator. When it is given to the creation in His place, it crushes the very thing it loves under a weight that thing was never built to hold.

Allah describes this misplaced love directly:

> "And among the people are those who take others besides Allah as equals, loving them as they should love Allah. But those who believe are stronger in their love for Allah."
>
> *Quran 2:165*

The problem is not loving people. The problem is loving them *as one should love Allah*: with the whole heart, as the center of everything, as the thing you cannot live without.

And in one verse, Allah names every love we have spoken about in this chapter, one by one:

> "Say: If your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your spouses, your relatives, the wealth you have earned, the trade you fear will decline, and the homes you are pleased with are more beloved to you than Allah and His Messenger and striving in His cause, then wait until Allah brings about His command. And Allah does not guide the defiantly disobedient people."
>
> *Quran 9:24*

Read the list slowly. Parents, children, brothers and sisters, spouses, family, money, work, home. These are not sins. They are the best things in an ordinary life, the very things we are told to care for. The verse does not tell us to stop loving any of them. Its weight sits on three words: *more beloved than*. It is a question of order. Every one of these loves has a place in the heart, and none of them is meant to sit in the first place. When one of them takes that seat, the heart is misused, and sooner or later that love is crushed under a weight it was never made to carry.

Love is not the enemy

It would be easy to misread everything above. So let me be very clear.

This book is not telling you to love your husband or your wife less. It is not telling you to keep your heart cold so it won't get hurt. That is not detachment. That is fear dressed up as wisdom.

The love between a husband and a wife is not something the Quran is suspicious of. It is something the Quran celebrates. It calls it one of the signs of Allah, like the heavens and the earth:

> "And among His signs is that He created for you, from among yourselves, spouses so that you may find tranquility in them, and He placed between you affection and mercy. Indeed, in that are signs for people who reflect."

> *Quran 30:21*

Look at who placed that affection. *He* placed it. The love between two spouses is not a rival to Allah. It is a gift from Allah, and a sign that points back to Him.

And the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself loved his wife Khadijah with a love that did not die even after she did. Years after her death he would still speak of her so often that his wife Aisha said she was never as jealous of any woman as she was of Khadijah, a woman she had never even met. He would send gifts to Khadijah's old friends, simply because they had been her friends. And he said of her:

> "I was given her love as a provision."
>
> *Sahih Muslim 2435*

That is not a love that faded after a few years. That is a love that outlived death.

So the question was never whether to love. The question is *where the love is anchored.*

The anchor

A boat with no anchor goes wherever the waves take it. In calm weather, you might not notice the difference. But when the storm comes, and in every marriage it will come, the boat without an anchor is carried away.

A love anchored in looks, money, or family is a boat with no anchor. A love anchored in Allah is tied to the one thing that never moves.

What does that look like in a real marriage?

It means I love my spouse *because* I love Allah, not *instead* of Him. It means my kindness to them is an act of worship, so it does not depend on whether they deserved it today. It means when they disappoint me, my heart does not collapse, because my heart was never resting its full weight on them in the first place. It means I can forgive more easily, give more freely, and stay longer, because what I am really doing is serving the One who gave them to me.

The Prophet ﷺ described the person who has tasted the sweetness of faith:

> "Three things, whoever has them has found the sweetness of faith: that Allah and His Messenger are more beloved to him than anything else; that he loves a person and loves him only for the sake of Allah; and that he hates to return to disbelief as he would hate to be thrown into fire."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 16; Sahih Muslim 43*

Loving someone *for the sake of Allah* is not a lesser love. According to this hadith, it is part of what makes faith *sweet.*

And this is where marriage becomes something surprising. The Prophet ﷺ told one of his companions:

> "You will not spend anything seeking the Face of Allah except that you will be rewarded for it, even the bite of food you place in your wife's mouth."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 56*

The bite of food you place in your wife's mouth. The smallest, most ordinary act of tenderness. When it is anchored in Allah, it becomes worship.

So marriage, when it is anchored correctly, is not a distraction from Allah. It becomes a form of attachment *to* Him. Every grain of sand spent in loving and caring for your spouse for His sake falls on His side of the hourglass. The same hours, the same dinners, the same arguments and reconciliations, but now they are going somewhere.

This is the same secret we found in the voluntary deeds. When you choose patience instead of the sharp word you wanted to say, that is a detachment from your ego. When you give your time to your family instead of to the screen, that is a detachment from the world. Each one is a grain of sand moved deliberately. And each one, done for Allah, is a step on the path to *"until I love him."*

Which version do you love?

There is something nobody says at the wedding. The person you are marrying is not one person. Over a lifetime, they will be many.

The one standing beside you that day is the early version. In the years ahead you will meet the others. The version who is exhausted after the first child. The version who lost the job. The version who fell ill, who grew quieter, who changed their mind about things you thought were settled for good. Some of those versions you will love more than the first. Some you will hardly recognize. And all the while, they will be meeting new versions of you.

If you are in love with the early version of your partner, every change feels like a loss, because the person you fell for keeps disappearing in front of you. Then it is not hard to see why so many marriages end in divorce. The divorce is not the disease. It is just a side effect. The disease began much earlier, on the day the heart attached itself to one version of a human being, as if that version would stay.

But if you are in love with the Creator, then it doesn't matter which version of your partner you are falling in love with.

That does not mean your partner stops mattering. It means your love was never tied to one season of their life. It is tied to the One who gave them to you, who knew every version of them before you ever met, and who placed between you *"affection and mercy."* The versions change. The anchor does not. So each new version is not a stranger who took the old one away. It is someone new to love, for His sake, all over again.

Look again at those two words in the verse. Affection is the warmth that comes easily, the kind that fills the early years. Mercy is what holds two people together when the warmth is harder to find: when one of them is sick, or tired, or not the person they used to be. Allah did not give a marriage only one of them. He gave it both, for every season.

The Prophet ﷺ gave husbands this very advice:

> "Let a believing man not hate a believing woman. If he dislikes one of her traits, he will be pleased with another."
>
> *Sahih Muslim 1469*

And Allah says, speaking about living with one's wife:

> "Live with them in kindness. For if you dislike them, perhaps you dislike something in which Allah has placed much good."
>
> *Quran 4:19*

Both are spoken to men, and as with the earlier hadith, the lesson goes both ways. Neither text pretends that a spouse will always be easy to love. Both assume there will be days, even whole versions, that you do not like. And both answer the same way: do not let one trait, or one season, become the whole person. Look for the good that Allah has placed there. A heart anchored in Him can do that, because it is not waiting for the early version to come back.

The love that doesn't die

Here is the most beautiful part of all of this.

Love anchored in Allah is the one love that doesn't die. Not because the people stop changing or stop aging, but because its root is in the One who never leaves. When the looks fade, it remains. When the money is gone, it remains. When one of the two passes away, it still remains, and Allah promises that it can continue beyond this life.

Allah describes the Day of Judgement:

> "Close friends on that Day will be enemies to one another, except the righteous."
>
> *Quran 43:67*

Every friendship and every love built on the world will turn into blame on that Day. *You distracted me. You led me away.* Only the love built on Allah survives. And a few verses later:

> "Enter Paradise, you and your spouses, rejoicing."
>
> *Quran 43:70*

The love that was anchored in Allah does not end at the grave. It is carried into Paradise.

There is a moment in history that shows this anchor more clearly than anything else I know. When the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ died, his companions were shattered. Some refused to believe it. Then Abu Bakr, his closest friend, the man who loved him perhaps more than anyone alive, stood before the people and said:

> "Whoever used to worship Muhammad, Muhammad has died. And whoever worships Allah, Allah is Ever-Living and does not die."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 3668*

No one loved the Prophet ﷺ more than Abu Bakr. And yet his heart did not collapse, because his love for the Prophet ﷺ was anchored in something that could not die. That is not a cold heart. That is a sound heart: *qalb salim*, the whole, healthy heart Ibrahim prayed for, the one this book is reaching toward.

The question to ask

So come back to the couple at the wedding. And come back to your own heart.

Ask yourself honestly: what is my love attached to?

If it is attached to how they look, it will fade with the years. If it is attached to what they have, it will move when the money moves. If it is attached to how they make me feel, it will die the first time they make me feel something else. If I have given them the place in my heart that belongs to Allah, I will crush them under it, and call it their fault.

But if my love for them is anchored in Allah, it has a root that never leaves. Then I can love them fully, generously, tenderly, for a whole lifetime, and hope to keep loving them after it.

Love does not have to die. It only dies when it is tied to something that does.

CHAPTER 4

Detach from Perfection

For a while, it was working.

You read something, maybe even a book like this one, and something in you woke up. You started to see where your hours were going. You gave away money you would once have held onto. You stood up to pray at night when you would once have been scrolling. You let go of a grudge you had carried for years. You felt lighter than you had in a long time. For the first time, you could feel the grains of sand falling on the right side of the hourglass.

And then, one ordinary day, it came back.

You lost your temper over money. You spent an evening refreshing your phone to see who had noticed what you posted. You caught yourself measuring your life against someone else's, and feeling smaller. You slipped back into the old loop, and a week went by before you even noticed. Or worse: you did something you had promised Allah you would never do again.

And then a voice inside you said something that felt like the truth:

You were never really detached. You were fooling yourself. You've ruined it now. Whatever you had with Allah, you've lost it.

This chapter is about that voice. Because that voice is not humility. It is not honesty. It is one more attachment, and maybe the most dangerous one of all.

The last attachment

Everything in this book so far has been about letting go: of money, of people's approval, of things, of the self, of control. And there is a danger hidden inside all of it.

The danger is that *detachment itself* becomes the thing we hold onto.

Not detachment as a direction we are walking in, but detachment as a finished state. A picture of ourselves as someone who has arrived: fully free of the world, never pulled back, never falling. We fall in love with that picture. And the moment we make a mistake, the picture cracks, and we decide that because we are not perfectly detached, we are not detached at all. That because we fell, we have lost our way back.

That is attachment to perfection.

Look at how it fits everything we have said about attachment. It is an attachment to the **self**: not the real self, which is weak and keeps falling, but an image of a self that never falls. It is an attachment to **control**: the belief that our future with Allah is something we build and hold in our own hands, and so something we can break with our own hands. And it ends where every attachment ends. Not in freedom, but in pain.

So we need one more detachment. The detachment from full detachment. The letting go of the idea that we must be perfect to remain His.

The people He would bring

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said something that, the first time most people hear it, sounds almost impossible:

> "By the One in whose hand is my soul, if you did not sin, Allah would take you away and bring a people who sin, and then seek Allah's forgiveness, and He forgives them."
>
> *Sahih Muslim 2749*

Read it again, slowly.

He does not say: *if you never sinned, Allah would love you more.* He does not say: *if you never sinned, you would be the best of people.* He says that if we did not sin, Allah would *replace* us. He would bring another people, people who fall and then turn back to Him, so that He could forgive them.

Allah already has creatures who never fall. He describes the angels as those who "do not disobey Allah in what He commands them, and do what they are commanded" (Quran 66:6). He did not create us to be angels. He created us to be the ones who fall, and return.

So when you fall back into an old attachment, you have not stepped outside of what Allah made you for. You have stepped right into it. The only question is the second half of the hadith: *and then seek Allah's forgiveness.* The falling was always expected. The returning is what is asked of you.

And notice where this hadith sits. Imam Muslim placed it in his Book of Repentance, under a chapter whose title is the whole message: *sins are erased by seeking forgiveness.* The hadith is not about the fall. It is about the door that is still open after it.

Nobody stays at the summit

In the chapter "Then Let It Be Now," we met Hanzalah, the companion who accused himself of hypocrisy. When he sat with the Prophet ﷺ, he felt as if he could see Paradise and the Fire with his own eyes. Then he went home to his family and his work, and the feeling faded. He thought that fading meant he was a hypocrite. And the Prophet ﷺ told him: if you stayed always as you are with me, the angels would shake your hands in your beds and on your roads, *"but, Hanzalah, there is a time for this and a time for that"* (Sahih Muslim 2750).

It is no accident, I think, that this hadith comes right after ours in Imam Muslim's collection.

Hanzalah was attached to perfection. He believed that a true believer must live at the summit all the time, and that anything less proved he was false. The Prophet ﷺ detached him from that idea with a single sentence, said three times.

Detachment is the same. No one lives at the summit. There will be days when your heart is light and turned completely toward Allah, and days when the world pulls you back down. The heart in Arabic is called *qalb*, from a root that means *to turn over*. It was named for how often it turns. Expecting it to stay perfectly still is expecting it to be something it was never made to be.

Two falls, two futures

The very first story of humanity in the Quran is the story of a fall. Two falls, in fact. And the difference between them is the whole lesson of this chapter.

When Allah commanded the angels to bow to Adam, peace be upon him, Iblis, the one who would become Satan, refused. And when Allah asked him why, he did not say *I was wrong*. He said:

> "I am better than him. You created me from fire, and You created him from clay."
>
> *Quran 7:12*

Iblis was attached to an image of himself. When his disobedience exposed him, he would not let the image go. He defended it, and that refusal sealed his future.

Then Adam and his wife made their own mistake. They ate from the tree they had been told not to approach. And they did not defend themselves. They said:

> "Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves. And if You do not forgive us and have mercy on us, we will surely be among the losers."
>
> *Quran 7:23*

Now look at what Allah says happened to Adam *after* his mistake:

> "Then his Lord chose him, and turned to him in forgiveness, and guided him."
>
> *Quran 20:122*

Then his Lord chose him. Not before the fall. After it. The mistake did not end Adam's future with Allah. His return to Allah opened it. Adam went on to be the father of humanity and a prophet of Allah.

Both of them fell. The one who lost his future was not the one who made the mistake. It was the one who would not come back.

The man who killed a hundred people

If you believe your mistake has cost you your future with Allah, the Prophet ﷺ told a story for you.

There was a man among the people before us who had killed ninety-nine people. He went looking for someone who could tell him whether there was still a way back for him. He was sent to a monk, and asked him: *is there any repentance for me?* The monk said no. So the man killed him too, and made it a hundred.

Then he asked again, and was sent to a man of knowledge. He asked the same question. And the scholar said:

> "Yes. Who could come between you and repentance? Go to such-and-such a land, for there are people there who worship Allah. Worship Allah with them, and do not return to your land, for it is a land of evil."
>
> *Sahih Muslim 2766; Sahih al-Bukhari 3470*

The man set out. Halfway there, death came to him. And the angels of mercy and the angels of punishment disputed over him. The angels of mercy said: *he came repenting, turning his heart toward Allah.* The angels of punishment said: *he never did a single good deed.* So Allah sent them a way to judge: measure the land, and see which land he was closer to. They measured, and found him closer to the land he was walking toward. And the angels of mercy took him.

Look at the monk in this story. He was attached to a picture of how forgiveness should work: some things are too big, some people are too far gone. That picture cost him his life, and it nearly cost the sinner his hope. The scholar was the one who knew Allah. *Who could come between you and repentance?*

And look at the man. He never arrived. He died on the road, with nothing to show but his direction. And it was enough.

That is what Allah asks of you. Not to have arrived. To be walking toward Him.

Do not despair

The verse at the heart of this book tells us not to despair over what has escaped us (Quran 57:23). Sometimes what escapes us is money, or a person, or a chance. And sometimes what escapes us is our own picture of ourselves: the person we thought we had become.

Allah speaks directly to that despair:

> "Say: O My servants who have wronged themselves, do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. Indeed, He is the Forgiving, the Merciful."
>
> *Quran 39:53*

All sins. Not the small ones. Not the first-time ones. All of them, for the one who turns back.

And in another verse, the Prophet Ya'qub, known in English as Jacob, peace be upon him, tells his sons something that should stop every one of us when that voice starts speaking:

> "And do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, no one despairs of the mercy of Allah except the people who disbelieve."
>
> *Quran 12:87*

Think about what that means. The voice that tells you *you have lost your future with Allah* sounds like humility. It sounds like you are taking your sin seriously. But listen to what it is really saying: that your mistake is bigger than His mercy. That your failure has more power than His forgiveness. That is not humility. That is despair, and despair, the verse tells us, is not the way of those who know Allah.

How Allah receives the one who returns

The Prophet ﷺ told us how Allah feels when a servant turns back to Him. And the picture he chose is one of the most human in all of his teaching:

> "Allah is more joyful at the repentance of His servant, when he turns to Him, than one of you would be who was riding his camel in a barren desert, and it ran away from him carrying his food and his drink. He lost all hope of finding it, so he came to a tree and lay down in its shade, having given up on his camel. And while he was lying there, suddenly there it was, standing beside him. He took hold of its reins and, from the intensity of his joy, he said: 'O Allah, You are my servant and I am Your lord!' He made a mistake out of the intensity of his joy."
>
> *Sahih Muslim 2747*

Picture that man. Alone in the desert, with no food and no water, lying down under a tree to wait for death. And then he opens his eyes, and his camel is standing over him.

Allah is *more* joyful than that when you come back to Him.

And look at the end of the story. Even in his gratitude, the man got his words wrong. He said the very opposite of what he meant. And the Prophet ﷺ did not tell this story to correct him. He told it with warmth, as a picture of joy.

You do not have to come back perfectly. You do not even have to say it right. You only have to come back.

The one who keeps coming back

But what if it is the same mistake? Again. And again.

This is where most of us give up. *I've repented for this before. I promised. And I did it again. Allah must be tired of me.*

The Prophet ﷺ told us of a servant who sinned, and then said, *"O my Lord, forgive me my sin."* And Allah said: *"My servant has sinned, and he knew that he has a Lord who forgives sins and holds to account for them."* Then the servant sinned again, and again he asked forgiveness, and again Allah said the same. And a third time. And then Allah said:

> "I have forgiven My servant, so let him do as he wishes."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 7507; Sahih Muslim 2758*

The scholars have always explained this carefully. It does not mean: *sin freely*. It means that as long as this servant keeps falling and then sincerely returning, regretting what he did and meaning to stop, Allah keeps forgiving him. The door does not lock after the third time, or the thirtieth.

Allah is not tired of you. The only one tired of you is the voice of perfection inside you, the one that cannot forgive you for not being the person in your own picture.

Even the best of creation kept returning

If anyone could have claimed to have arrived, it was the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. And yet he said:

> "By Allah, I seek Allah's forgiveness and turn to Him in repentance more than seventy times a day."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 6307*

In another narration, he said a hundred times (Sahih Muslim 2702).

The Arabic word for repentance is *tawbah*, and it means *returning*. Seeking forgiveness, *istighfar*, means asking Allah to cover what went wrong. The Prophet ﷺ did not treat these as emergency measures for the worst moments of life. He returned to Allah seventy, a hundred times a day. Returning was not the sign that something had gone wrong with his journey. Returning *was* the journey.

That is what detachment really looks like. Not a line that goes up and never comes down. A heart that drifts, and returns. Drifts, and returns. Again and again, for a whole life.

Your future was never in your hands

Here is the deepest root of attachment to perfection. Underneath it is the belief that our future with Allah rests on our record. That if the record is clean enough, we are safe, and if it is stained, we are lost.

The Prophet ﷺ cut that root:

> "Aim for what is right, and come close, and rejoice. For no one's deeds alone will bring them into Paradise." They said, "Not even you, O Messenger of Allah?" He said, "Not even me, unless Allah covers me with His mercy."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 6467*

Not even me.

If the Prophet ﷺ himself did not rest his future on his own record, then neither can we. And that is not bad news. It is the best news in this chapter. It means your future with Allah was never resting on a perfect record in the first place. It was always resting on His mercy. And a mistake cannot take away what was never yours to lose.

We said in the introduction that detachment from control is perhaps the hardest and highest detachment of all. Here it is again, in its most personal form. You do not control your own salvation. You do your part, with everything you have. And then you let go of the outcome, and trust the One who holds it.

Look at the instruction in that hadith, too: *aim for what is right, and come close*. In Arabic, *saddidu wa qaribu*. Aim for the target. And if you don't hit the very center, come as close as you can. That is what is asked. Not perfection. Aiming, and coming close, and then rejoicing.

All or nothing

Attachment to perfection has a favorite way of thinking: all or nothing.

If I can't pray every night, why pray at all? If I can't give up this habit completely, why try? If I fell back after a month, the month was worthless.

The Prophet ﷺ warned us about exactly this:

> "This religion is easy, and no one makes it too hard for himself except that it overwhelms him. So aim for what is right, come close, and receive good news."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 39*

It overwhelms him. That is the person who tried to leap straight to full detachment, fell, and decided the whole road was closed to him.

And here is the other way:

> "The most beloved of deeds to Allah are those done consistently, even if they are small."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 6464; Sahih Muslim 783*

Small and steady. Not perfect and occasional. One grain of sand moved every day, even on the days when other grains fell the wrong way.

Grains that rise

I said in the introduction that every grain of sand in the hourglass falls only once, and never goes back up.

That is true of time. But there is something about Allah's mercy that does not fit into the picture. When we fall, the grains we spent on the world are gone. And still, Allah says:

> "And establish prayer at the two ends of the day and in some hours of the night. Indeed, good deeds remove bad deeds. That is a reminder for those who remember."
>
> *Quran 11:114*

And of those who did wrong, and then repented, and believed, and did good, He says something even greater:

> "For them, Allah will replace their bad deeds with good deeds. And Allah is Forgiving, Merciful."
>
> *Quran 25:70*

Not only erase. *Replace.* The grains that fell on the wrong side, the days you wish you could take back, the relapse you are most ashamed of, can by His mercy be turned into something good. Sometimes the very fall becomes the thing that

breaks your pride, softens your heart, and brings you nearer to Him than you were before you fell.

No perfect record could ever do that. Only a returning heart can.

Not taking it lightly

I need to be honest about the other side, because it is real.

The companion Abu Ayyub al-Ansari heard a version of our hadith from the Prophet ﷺ, *"if you did not sin, Allah would create a creation who would sin, and He would forgive them,"* and he kept it to himself for most of his life. He only shared it on his deathbed (Sahih Muslim 2748). The likely reason is that he feared people would hear it and take sin lightly. He understood how easily a message of mercy can be bent into an excuse.

So detaching from perfection is not the same as no longer caring. The companion Abdullah ibn Mas'ud said:

> "The believer sees his sins as if he were sitting at the foot of a mountain, afraid it will fall on him. And the wicked person sees his sins like a fly that passes over his nose, and he waves it away."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 6308*

The believer feels the weight of the mountain. That is right. The difference is what they do with that weight. Attachment to perfection turns it inward, into shame, and self-punishment, and despair, all of it still centered on the self. The believer turns it upward, toward Allah. One ends with *I have lost Him.* The other ends with *Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves.*

So this chapter does not say: *your mistakes don't matter.* It says: *your mistakes are not the end of you.* Feel the weight. Then take it to the only One who can lift it.

The next grain

Come back to that day when it all came back. The temper, the scrolling, the old loop, the promise you broke.

The voice is still there, telling you that you've ruined it. That the person you were becoming is gone. That whatever you had with Allah is over.

Now you know what that voice is. It is not the truth. It is your last attachment: to a picture of yourself as someone who would never fall. And like every attachment in this book, it is heavier than it looks, and it is holding you down.

Let it go.

You were never going to be perfectly detached. No one is. Not Hanzalah. Not the companions. Even the Prophet ﷺ returned to Allah a hundred times a day. The journey was never a straight line upward. It is a heart that falls, and turns back. Falls, and turns back. Until the day it meets its Lord.

So say what your father Adam said: *Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves.* Then get up, and move the next grain of sand.

You were never meant to be perfect. You were meant to come back.

CHAPTER 5

Do Not Claim Yourselves Pure

It usually starts as a quiet thought.

You have been changing. You have been reading, praying more, giving more. You turned off the phone at night. You let go of things you used to hold onto. And it feels good. You can see where your hours are going, and for the first time in a long time, more of them are going to the right side of the hourglass.

Then one evening you are sitting with your family, or your friends, or your colleagues at lunch. Someone is scrolling through their phone the whole time. Someone is talking about the new car they are going to buy, and the one after that. Someone mentions, almost proudly, that they have not prayed in months.

And a thought arrives, very calmly:

They are so attached.

It does not feel like anger. It feels like clarity. You can see it so clearly in them now. The grip of the world. The loop. The grains of sand all falling the wrong way. You almost feel sorry for them. And somewhere under the pity, if you are honest, there is something warm and pleasant. A feeling of standing a little higher. Of being one of the people who *sees*.

This chapter is about that warm feeling. Because it is not clarity. It is one of the oldest attachments there is, and it is the one most likely to grow out of a book like this.

A mirror, not a window

Everything in this book is a lens. The hourglass. The four dimensions. The idea that every feeling and every action is either an attachment or a detachment. These are ways of seeing.

And a lens can be turned in two directions.

Turned toward yourself, it is a mirror. It shows you where your own heart is tied, and it helps you let go. Turned toward other people, it becomes a window you look through at their lives, sorting them. *Attached. Very attached. Hopeless.* The same words that were meant to free you become a measuring stick for everyone else.

The second way feels like progress. It is not. It is one more thing the heart has taken hold of: an image of itself as the one who is further along. And it may be the most dangerous image of all, because it is made out of good things. Out of prayer, and charity, and letting go. It is an attachment that wears the clothes of detachment.

In the chapter "Detach from Perfection," we saw a heart that falls, and then believes it has lost its future with Allah. That heart is attached to despair. This chapter is about its twin: a heart that rises a little, and then believes it has *secured* its future with Allah, and can now see everyone else's. That heart is attached to certainty. Both have forgotten the same thing. Neither of us knows how our story ends.

An arm's length

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ described how every human being is formed in the womb, stage by stage, and how an angel is sent to write down four things for each of us: our provision, our lifespan, our deeds, and whether we will end in misery or in happiness. And then he said something that should silence every one of us who has ever felt safe:

> "A man among you may do the deeds of the people of Paradise until there is only an arm's length between him and it. Then what was written overtakes him, and he does the deeds of the people of the Fire, and he enters it. And a man may do the deeds of the people of the Fire until there is only an arm's length between him and it. Then what was written overtakes him, and he does the deeds of the people of Paradise, and he enters it."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 3208, 6594; Sahih Muslim 2643*

An arm's length. After a whole life of walking toward Paradise, the distance left could be shorter than your own arm. And the man walking toward the Fire could be just as close to the turn.

This hadith is not saying that our deeds are meaningless, or that Allah treats anyone unjustly. The Prophet ﷺ explained what it means in another story, and the explanation is the whole point of this chapter.

There was a battle. One man fought for the Muslims more fiercely than anyone else. He chased down every enemy fighter who strayed from the lines. The companions said that no one had done better that day. And the Prophet ﷺ said: *if anyone wants to see a man of the people of the Fire, let him look at him.*

One of the companions decided to follow the man and watch. The man was wounded. He could not bear the pain, and he rushed his own death, setting the tip of his sword against his chest and leaning on it until it came out through his back. The companion ran back to the Prophet ﷺ, and the Prophet ﷺ said:

> "A man may do what *appears to the people* to be the deeds of the people of Paradise, while he is of the people of the Fire. And a man may do what *appears to the people* to be the deeds of the people of the Fire, while he is of the people of Paradise. And deeds are judged by their endings."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 6493, 6607; Sahih Muslim 112*

What appears to the people. That is what we see. The surface. The prayer we watched him pray, the bottle we saw in her hand, the post, the car, the empty seat in the mosque. We see the deeds. We never see the heart that is doing them, and we never see the ending.

The scholars who explained this hadith said that this is what the "arm's length" really means: the one who turns at the end was carrying something hidden all along, something no one else could see, sometimes something he could barely see himself. And the one who turns toward Paradise at the end was carrying something hidden too. A sincerity. A regret. A small, private goodness that only Allah knew about.

Which means that when you look at someone and decide what they are, you are deciding with half the information. Less than half. You are reading one page of a book and announcing how it ends.

Nearer than your sandal strap

There is a short hadith that I keep coming back to, because it cuts both ways at once:

> "Paradise is nearer to any of you than the strap of his sandal, and so is the Fire."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 6488*

The strap of your sandal is the closest thing to you that you never think about. It is right there, against your foot, with every step.

That is how near Paradise is. And that is how near the Fire is. The Prophet ﷺ explained how small the step can be:

> "A servant may speak a word that pleases Allah without giving it a thought, and Allah raises him by degrees because of it. And a servant may speak a word that angers Allah without giving it a thought, and it drops him into the Fire."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 6478*

One word, said without thinking. That is the width of a sandal strap.

Now put the hadith of the sandal strap next to the person you are looking down on. Paradise is as close to them as their sandal strap. One sincere word in the night, one turning of the heart that you will never see, and they are there.

And then put it next to yourself. The Fire is as close to you as your own sandal strap. And the word that takes you there could be the very word you were about to say about them.

The woman and the dog

The Prophet ﷺ told a story that I think was meant to unsettle exactly the kind of person who feels sure about other people.

> "A dog was circling a well, about to die of thirst. A prostitute from the Children of Israel saw it. She took off her shoe and drew water for it with it, and gave it to drink. And Allah forgave her because of it."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 3467*

Think about who would have passed that woman in the street that day. Think about what they would have thought of her, and what they would have said about her later. Most of us would have been certain. We would have known exactly what she was and where she was going.

And Allah forgave her, for one act of mercy toward a thirsty dog, that no one saw.

The Prophet ﷺ also said:

> "Many a person with disheveled hair, covered in dust, turned away from people's doors, is such that if he swore by Allah, Allah would fulfill it."
>
> *Sahih Muslim 2622*

The person turned away from the door. The one nobody wanted at the table. The one we did not look at twice. That person may be so close to Allah that Allah would not let their word fall.

We do not know who is who. That is the lesson, over and over. We do not know.

Who swears on My behalf?

Now we come to the hardest story in this chapter, because the man in it was not a sinner. He was a worshipper.

The Prophet ﷺ told of two men among the Children of Israel. One of them kept falling into sin. The other worked hard in worship. The worshipper kept seeing his friend in sin, and kept telling him: *stop.* One day he found him in sin again, and said again: *stop.* And the man said:

"Leave me with my Lord. Were you sent as a watchman over me?"

And the worshipper said: *"By Allah, Allah will not forgive you. Allah will not admit you into Paradise."*

Then both of them died, and they stood before the Lord of the worlds. And Allah said to the worshipper:

> "Did you have knowledge of Me? Or did you have power over what is in My hand?"

And He said to the sinner: *"Go, and enter Paradise by My mercy."* And of the worshipper, He said: *"Take him to the Fire."*

Abu Hurairah, who narrated it, said: *"By the One in whose hand is my soul, he spoke a word that destroyed his world and his Hereafter."*

> *Sunan Abi Dawud 4901 (graded authentic by al-Albani). A shorter version is in Sahih Muslim 2621: "Who is this who swears on My behalf that I will not forgive so-and-so? I have forgiven him, and I have made your deeds worthless."*

Look carefully at what the worshipper did right, and what he did wrong.

He was right that sin is sin. He was right to tell his friend to stop. Nothing in the story says that caring about someone's sin is wrong. His mistake came at one moment, in one sentence: when he stopped talking about what his friend was *doing* and started announcing where his friend would *end*. When he took Allah's mercy, which belongs to Allah alone, and spoke as if it were his to hand out.

Did you have power over what is in My hand?

In the introduction we said that detachment from control may be the hardest detachment of all. This is control in its most extreme form. Not controlling your money, or your children, or your future. Trying to control someone else's ending with Allah. Self-righteousness is, at its root, a person reaching for the one thing that was never in human hands.

Remember, too, the monk in "Detach from Perfection," who told the man who had killed ninety-nine people that there was no repentance for him. The monk and this worshipper made the same mistake from two different directions. One closed the door of mercy on a sinner who was asking for it. The other closed it on a sinner who was not. Both of them were wrong about the door. It was never theirs to close.

Do not claim yourselves pure

So where does the warm feeling come from? The one from the beginning of this chapter, the feeling of standing a little higher?

It comes from forgetting where the good in us came from.

Allah says:

> "He knew you best when He produced you from the earth, and when you were hidden in your mothers' wombs. So do not claim yourselves pure. He knows best who is truly mindful of Him."
>
> *Quran 53:32*

He knew you when you were dust. He knew you when you were hidden in the dark of the womb, before you had done a single good deed. He knows every version of you that has existed since. And He says: *do not claim yourselves pure.* You are not the one who decides that. *He knows best.*

And in another verse:

> "Have you not seen those who claim themselves to be pure? Rather, Allah purifies whom He wills."
>
> *Quran 4:49*

And then a verse that should end the warm feeling for good:

> "And if not for the favor of Allah upon you and His mercy, not one of you would have been pure, ever. But Allah purifies whom He wills."
>
> *Quran 24:21*

Not one of you. Ever.

Every prayer you prayed was a door He opened. Every coin you gave away, He gave to you first, and then He gave you the heart to let it go. Every detachment in this book that you have managed, even one, was His gift. The light you feel you have is borrowed light.

There is a verse in the Quran that was revealed about believers who were quick to dismiss others. Allah told them not to say to someone who greeted them with peace, *you are not a believer*, and then He reminded them:

> "You yourselves were like that before. Then Allah conferred His favor on you."
>
> *Quran 4:94*

You were like that before. Every one of us has a "before." The person you are looking down on may simply be standing where you stood a few years ago, before Allah did for you what He has not yet done for them. Or what He is about to do.

Now go back to the verse that holds this whole book:

> "So that you do not despair over what has escaped you, nor exult over what He has given you. And Allah does not love everyone who is arrogant and boastful."
>
> *Quran 57:23*

We have always read this verse about money, and people, and things. But guidance is also something *given*. Faith is also something *given*. The ability to let go of the world is also something *given*. And the verse says: do not exult over what He has given you. Do not turn His gift into your pride.

Look at how the verse ends. *Allah does not love everyone who is arrogant and boastful.* The verse of detachment ends with a warning about arrogance. As if Allah knew that the person most at risk of arrogance would be the one who had just learned not to be attached to the world.

I am better than him

The first arrogance in all of creation was spoken in five words. When Allah commanded the angels to bow to Adam, and asked Iblis why he refused, Iblis said:

> "I am better than him. You created me from fire, and You created him from clay."
>
> *Quran 7:12*

We met these words in "Detach from Perfection," as the words of someone who would not admit his mistake. Here they show us something else. Iblis had been among the angels when the command came (Quran 2:34). He was not ignorant of Allah, and he was not far from Him. And his fall did not begin with a sin of the body. It began with a comparison. *I am better than him.*

Every self-righteous thought is a small echo of that sentence. *I pray, and he doesn't. I give, and she doesn't. I've detached, and they haven't. I am better than them.*

The Prophet ﷺ gave us the clearest definition of arrogance that I know:

> "No one will enter Paradise who has in his heart an atom's weight of arrogance." A man said, "A man loves for his clothes to be good and his sandals to be good." He said, "Allah is beautiful and loves beauty. Arrogance is rejecting the truth and looking down on people."
>
> *Sahih Muslim 91*

Notice first what arrogance is *not*. It is not good clothes. It is not nice sandals. It is not doing well in life. The man asked exactly the question many of us would ask, and the Prophet ﷺ freed him from it: *Allah is beautiful and loves beauty.* Arrogance does not live in what you wear or what you own. It lives in the heart.

And then he named its two halves. *Rejecting the truth*: refusing to accept what is right because it came from the wrong person, or because accepting it would make you smaller. And *looking down on people*.

These are two attachments. The first is attachment to *being right*. The second is attachment to *being above*. And both are attachments to the self, the one we called, at the start of this book, the most stubborn of the four.

The Prophet ﷺ pointed to his own chest three times and said:

> "Mindfulness of Allah is here. It is enough evil for a person to look down on his brother."
>
> *Sahih Muslim 2564*

Here. In the chest, where no one can see. That is where the real measure of a person is kept. And he said it is *enough* evil, enough on its own, even with nothing else, simply to look down on someone.

Allah describes the same disease from the outside, in the advice of Luqman to his son:

> "And do not turn your cheek away from people in contempt, and do not walk through the earth arrogantly. Indeed, Allah does not love everyone who is self-deluded and boastful."
>
> *Quran 31:18*

And in another place, He puts it in a way I find almost gentle in its honesty:

> "And do not walk upon the earth arrogantly. You will never tear the earth apart, and you will never reach the mountains in height."
>
> *Quran 17:37*

However high you feel, you are still small. The mountains are taller than you. The ground under your feet will outlast you. Standing a little higher than someone else is standing a few inches higher, on an earth you did not make.

And the reward, in the end, is promised to the ones who let this go:

> "That home of the Hereafter, We give it to those who do not seek to be high on the earth, nor to spread corruption. And the best ending is for those who are mindful of Allah."
>
> *Quran 28:83*

Those who do not seek to be high. Not only those who do not seek to be high over others in wealth or power. Also those who do not seek to be high over others in righteousness.

“The people are ruined”

There is a kind of self-righteousness that does not point at one person. It points at everyone.

People today have no values. Everyone is attached to their phones. This generation is lost. The whole world has gone mad.

The Prophet ﷺ said:

> “When a man says, ‘The people are ruined,’ he is the most ruined of them.”
>
> *Sahih Muslim 2623*

The narrator was not sure of one vowel in the last word, and the scholars note that it can be read in two ways: *he is the most ruined of them*, or *he is the one who ruined them*. Both readings say the same thing to us. The person who stands outside the crowd and declares it lost has not escaped the problem. He has become its worst case. Because in that moment he has forgotten his own heart, and he is despairing of the mercy of Allah on behalf of everyone else.

It is very easy to say this about the world, especially in a book about how attached the world is. I need to say plainly: this book is not a diagnosis of *people today*. It is an invitation to *you*, and to me.

The speck and the stump

There is a sentence that is quoted very often, and I have loved it for a long time. But I want to tell you what I found when I looked into it.

> “Blessed is the one whose own faults keep him too busy to look at the faults of others.”

It is usually quoted as a saying of the Prophet ﷺ. But when the scholars of hadith examined its chains, they found them weak. Al-Iraqi said its chain is weak, al-Albani graded the longer version very weak, and al-Dhahabi listed the longer sermon it

comes from among fabricated narrations. So, following the rule of this book, I will not put his name on it. But the meaning is true, and it is confirmed by things that are authentic.

The companion Abu Hurairah said, in his own words:

> "One of you sees the speck in his brother's eye, and forgets the tree stump in his own."
>
> *Al-Adab al-Mufrad 592 (the words of Abu Hurairah)*

A speck. A stump. The size difference is the point. Our own faults are always bigger to us than they appear, if we are honest, and other people's faults are always smaller than they appear, because we cannot see the rest of their story.

And Allah asked a question of people who had knowledge and used it only on others:

> "Do you command people to righteousness and forget yourselves, while you recite the Book? Will you not then reason?"
>
> *Quran 2:44*

And forget yourselves. That is the self-righteous person exactly. Not wrong about what is right. Just pointed in the wrong direction.

Now look at what the best people who ever lived did instead. Imam al-Bukhari, in his book of authentic hadith, opened a chapter titled *the believer's fear that his deeds may come to nothing without his realizing it*. And at the top of that chapter he recorded what Ibn Abi Mulaykah, one of the generation after the companions, said:

> "I met thirty of the companions of the Prophet ﷺ, and every one of them feared hypocrisy for himself. Not one of them claimed that his faith was like the faith of Jibril or Mika'il."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari, Book of Faith, chapter heading before hadith 48*

In the same place, he recorded the words of al-Hasan al-Basri: *only a believer fears hypocrisy, and only a hypocrite feels safe from it.*

Thirty companions. People who had prayed behind the Prophet ﷺ, who had fought beside him, who had given everything. And each of them was afraid *for himself*. They were not busy measuring anyone else's faith. They were too busy worrying about their own.

Aishah once asked the Prophet ﷺ about the verse that describes "those who give what they give while their hearts are fearful" (Quran 23:60). She asked: *are they the ones who drink and steal?* He said:

> "No, daughter of al-Siddiq. They are the ones who fast, and pray, and give charity, and they are afraid that it will not be accepted from them."
>
> *Jami' al-Tirmidhi 3175 (graded hasan, good)*

That is the opposite of self-righteousness. Not a person who has done nothing and fears. A person who has done everything, and *still* fears, because they know the deeds are not the guarantee. The ending is with Allah.

This is not detachment from caring

I need to be careful here, because there is a way to misread this chapter too.

Detaching from self-righteousness does not mean we stop caring about right and wrong. It does not mean we never tell anyone the truth, or that we pretend sin is not sin. The worshipper in the story was not condemned for saying *stop*. He was condemned for saying *Allah will not forgive you*.

In the introduction we said that detachment lives in the middle, between obsession and indifference. This is one more place where that middle matters. On one side is the person who looks at everyone else's faults and appoints himself their judge. On the other side is the person who does not care what happens to anyone, and calls that tolerance. Neither is the middle.

The middle looks like this. You can see a wrong and name it, gently, the way you would want it named to you. You can advise someone, privately, without needing them to know that you are better. You can hate a sin and still pray, sincerely, for the

person committing it, because you know that the arm's length could turn for them, and you know it could turn for you.

And when you see a fault, you can do what the Prophet ﷺ encouraged: cover it.

> "No servant covers the faults of another servant in this world, except that Allah will cover his faults on the Day of Resurrection."
>
> *Sahih Muslim 2590*

The self-righteous person needs other people's faults to be seen, because their faults are what make him look higher. The detached heart does not need that. It has let go of the need to be above anyone. So it can cover, and advise, and pray, and leave the ending to the only One who knows it.

Turn the lens around

Come back to that evening. The family, the friends, the colleagues at lunch. The phone, the car, the prayer that was missed for months. And the warm, calm thought: *they are so attached.*

Now you know what that thought is. It is not clarity. It is the lens turned the wrong way. It is a grain of sand that fell, without you noticing, onto the wrong side of the hourglass, because a moment spent standing over someone else is a moment spent on the self.

So turn the lens around.

Instead of *they are so attached*, ask: *what am I attached to, right now, in this feeling?* And the honest answer is usually: to being the one who sees. To being further along. To being better than him.

Then let it go, the way you would let go of anything else in this book. Not by pretending you see nothing. By remembering what you do not see. Their heart. Their struggle. The secret goodness between them and Allah. And their ending, which may be an arm's length from Paradise.

And then look down, not at them, but at your own feet. The strap of your sandal is right there. Paradise is that close to you. So is the Fire. That is enough to keep any one of us busy for a lifetime.

So do not claim yourselves pure. He knows best who is truly mindful of Him.

CHAPTER 6

Here I Am

You may know someone who cannot look away from the screen. You may be that someone.

I was that person once.

My eyes were glued to the screen. I was building something, and I couldn't see anything else or think about anything else. It was there when I woke up and there when I tried to sleep. Everything else in my life became noise around it.

Then the call to prayer would come. And I would delay it. Twenty minutes. Thirty. Sometimes an hour. *Just let me finish this one thing.*

The call to prayer has two lines in the middle of it:

> "Come to prayer. Come to success."
>
> *Sunan Abi Dawud 499*

Come to success. I heard it. Every time, I heard it. And I didn't move. I sat there with the heavy weight of the world pressing down on me, holding me to the chair, while the One who made the world was calling me to the only success there is. I knew the words. I knew what they meant. And there was no action.

This is the state of so many people. Picture any engineer, any builder, any person who has given their life to their work. They think about it in the shower. They think about it at the dinner table while their children are talking to them. Their family stops asking when they will be done. Their friends stop calling. The duties they owe to the people around them pile up, unanswered. Day and night they sit in front of it, like monks in their cells who never leave.

Ask them what they worship, and they will look at you strangely. *Nothing,* they will say. *I'm just working.*

But look at what they do, not what they say. Look at what they give their best hours to. Look at what they abandon everything else for: their prayers, their family, their children, their rest, their duties. Look at what sits at the center of their life, with everything else arranged around it.

That is worship. It does not need an altar or a statue. It only needs a heart that has given itself to something.

And here is what I see now that I could not see then. None of it matters, not the way I thought it did. Allah says about the earth:

> "From it We created you, and into it We will return you, and from it We will bring you out once again."
>
> *Quran 20:55*

We were made from dust, and we are going back to dust. And so is everything we build. When I sat glued to that screen, I was dust obsessed with dust.

And the recognition I was hoping that work would bring me, from the people who would see it and praise it? Allah said to His own Messenger ﷺ:

> "Indeed, you will die, and indeed, they will die."
>
> *Quran 39:30*

If that is true of the best of creation, it is true of me and of everyone whose praise I wanted. I was a dead man seeking recognition from the dead.

Not except lazily

There is a description in the Quran that frightened me when I finally saw myself in it. Allah describes people who pray, but whose hearts are somewhere else:

> "And when they stand for prayer, they stand lazily, showing themselves to people, and they do not remember Allah except a little."
>
> *Quran 4:142*

And in another place:

> "And they do not come to prayer except while lazy, and they do not spend except while unwilling."
>
> *Quran 9:54*

These verses describe the hypocrites. I am not saying that everyone who delays a prayer is one of them, and I am not saying it about myself. But Allah did not put these descriptions in His Book only so we could point at other people. He put them there as a mirror. *Lazily. Unwillingly. Not except a little.* When I delayed the prayer by an hour for my screen and then stood up heavy, tired, and in a hurry to get back, I could see the edge of that picture in my own life. That is a frightening thing to see.

Where does that laziness come from? It is not tiredness of the body. It is weight. And Allah names the weight:

> "O you who believe, what is wrong with you that, when you are told to go forth in the way of Allah, you cling heavily to the earth? Are you satisfied with the life of this world in place of the Hereafter? But the enjoyment of the life of this world, compared to the Hereafter, is only a little."
>
> *Quran 9:38*

We met this verse in "I Hastened to You." *You cling heavily to the earth.* That was me in my chair. Not lazy because I was weak, but heavy because I was holding on. And look at what I was holding on to. Allah gives it its true size in the same verse: *only a little.* I was letting a little thing pull me down while the call said *come to success.*

Allah also tells us who does *not* find the prayer heavy:

> "And seek help through patience and prayer. And indeed, it is heavy, except for the humble."
>
> *Quran 2:45*

Heavy, except for the humble. The prayer is not heavy in itself. It feels heavy to a heart that is full of the world, because the heart has to put everything down to lift it. To a heart that has already let go, it is the lightest thing in the day.

That is the whole story of my years at that screen. Attachment to the little made the prayer heavy. The weight was never in the prayer. It was in what I would not put down.

A house built on five

Most people, Muslim or not, have heard that Islam has five pillars. Fewer people have stopped to ask what those pillars are *for*.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said:

> "Islam is built on five: testifying that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, establishing the prayer, giving the charity, the pilgrimage to the House, and fasting in Ramadan."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 8; Sahih Muslim 16*

The testimony. The prayer. The charity. The fasting. The pilgrimage. The whole house of faith stands on these five.

The name of the house

But before we walk through the pillars, look at the name of the house they hold up.

Islam means submission. Submission to Allah. A Muslim is simply one who submits.

And submission is the highest form of detachment there is. Every other detachment in this book lets go of something outside us: money, things, people's praise, a screen. Submission lets go of what is inside. It detaches us from our own ideas, when Allah has said otherwise. From our obsessions, the things our minds circle around day and night. And from the self, the last and heaviest thing any of us holds.

Allah tells us what it looked like in the man this book has followed from the beginning:

> "When his Lord said to him, 'Submit,' he said, 'I have submitted to the Lord of the worlds.'"

> *Quran 2:131*

Ibrahim, peace be upon him, did not negotiate. He did not ask what it would cost him. One word was spoken, and he answered with the same word. That submission cost him his people and his father's house, and later, as we will see when we reach the pilgrimage, it asked him to leave his wife and child in a dry valley. Every one of those detachments began here, in a single sentence.

Allah describes the one whose religion is best:

> "And who is better in religion than one who submits his face to Allah while doing good, and follows the way of Ibrahim, inclining toward the truth?"
>
> *Quran 4:125*

Submits his face. The face is the part of us that faces the world. It is where we show who we are. To submit the face is to turn the whole self toward Allah, and away from everything else. And notice the words that come with it: *while doing good.* Submission is not giving up. The one who submits is still working, still doing good, still moving. Only now he is facing the right direction.

And Allah promises that this is the one who has nothing left to fear:

> "Rather, whoever submits his face to Allah while doing good will have his reward with his Lord. And there will be no fear for them, nor will they grieve."
>
> *Quran 2:112*

No fear, and no grief. That is 57:23 again: not despairing over what is lost, not exulting over what is gained. The heart that has given itself to Allah has nothing left that the world can take from it.

Then Allah teaches the Prophet ﷺ to say the whole of submission in two verses:

> "Say: Indeed, my prayer, my sacrifice, my living, and my dying are for Allah, Lord of the worlds. He has no partner. And this I have been commanded, and I am the first of those who submit."
>
> *Quran 6:162–163*

My prayer. My sacrifice. My living. My dying. Not only the acts of worship, but life itself, and even death. Nothing kept back. That is what it means to detach from the self: there is no corner of my life that belongs only to me.

I think of myself at that screen, holding the prayer back by an hour, and I see now what I was really holding on to. Not the program. Myself. My idea of what mattered. My plan for my own time. Submission was the one detachment I was refusing.

So the five pillars are not five separate rules. They are five ways of practicing one thing: the submission that gives the whole religion its name.

Here is what I want to show you in this chapter. Look closely at each pillar, and you will find that every single one of them is a detachment. Each one takes something specific out of your hands, on purpose, and turns your heart toward Allah in its place.

I said at the start of this book that I am not inventing anything. This chapter may be the clearest proof of it. Detachment is not an idea I have laid on top of the religion. It is built into its foundations, five times over.

And remember the hadith we have returned to again and again:

> "My servant does not draw near to Me with anything more beloved to Me than what I have made obligatory upon him."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 6502*

We have spent much of this book on voluntary deeds, the extra prayer, the extra gift, the small daily choices that move one grain of sand at a time. But Allah says that what He loves *most* is what He has made obligatory. And the five pillars are the heart of what He has made obligatory. They are the detachments Allah Himself chose for us. The ones He loves most of all.

The testimony: no god, then Allah

Everything begins with one sentence. In Arabic it is *la ilaha illa Allah*: there is no god but Allah. Saying it, and meaning it, is called the *shahadah*, which means the testimony, because the one who says it is bearing witness.

Notice the order of the words.

The sentence does not begin with Allah. It begins with *no*. *There is no god.* First, everything is cleared away. Every idol, every false center, every thing the heart might bow to, is denied. Only then, after the room has been emptied, comes the name: *but Allah.*

Detachment first. Then attachment.

That is the shape of the whole religion in one sentence, and it is the shape of this whole book. You cannot fill a heart that is already full. The testimony empties it before it fills it.

Allah describes this order in the Quran:

> "So whoever rejects false gods and believes in Allah has grasped the firmest handhold, which will never break."
>
> *Quran 2:256*

Rejects, and then believes. Lets go, and then grasps. And what he grasps is a handhold that will never break, unlike everything he let go of.

Worship comes in all shapes

When people hear the words "false gods," they picture statues of stone or wood. But the Quran describes something far closer to home:

> "Have you seen the one who takes his own desire as his god?"
>
> *Quran 45:23*

His own desire. Not a statue. Something inside him that he obeys before he obeys anything else.

And the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ named other false gods, ones that every one of us would recognize:

> "Wretched is the slave of the gold coin, the slave of the silver coin, and the slave of the fine garment. If he is given, he is pleased, and if he is not given, he is displeased."

> *Sahih al-Bukhari 2887*

The slave of money. The slave of clothing. He did not call this person a *lover* of money. He called him its *slave*. And look at the sign he gave us of that slavery: whether the person is happy or unhappy depends entirely on whether he gets what he wants. His heart rises and falls with it. That is exactly the heart that 57:23 warns us about, the heart that despairs over what it lost and exults over what it gained.

Now come back to that screen.

I would never have said that what I was building was my god. But it was the thing I served before I served Allah. It was the thing my days were built around. It was the thing I delayed my prayers for. If it went well, I was on top of the world. If it went badly, my world collapsed. By the Prophet's ﷺ own description, I had become its slave.

And the same can be true of a career, a business, a body, a reputation, a phone, a child, a spouse, a cause. Anything at all, if it takes the center.

The test

So how do you know what you worship?

Not by what you say. By what you give up for it.

Ask yourself honestly: what would I leave my prayer for? What would I leave my family for? What do I give my best hours to, and what gets whatever is left over? Whatever sits at the top of that list, whatever everything else is arranged around, that is what your life is bowing to.

I want to be careful here, because this book is not against work. We have said from the very first page that detachment is not withdrawal. The work was never the problem. Work can be one of the greatest good deeds of a life. You can build something that helps millions of people. The problem is not that we work. The problem is when the work owns us, and everything else, Allah included, has been pushed to the edges to make room for it.

The testimony sets the tone for the whole of life. It says: detach from all of it, and attach only to Allah. And then, from that center, go and build whatever you were made to build.

Every other pillar is this sentence, practiced.

The prayer: five doors out of the day

If the testimony is the sentence, the prayer is where we say it with our bodies, five times a day, every day, for the rest of our lives.

Allah says:

> "Indeed, the prayer has been prescribed for the believers at fixed times."
>
> *Quran 4:103*

At fixed times. Not when it suits us. Not when we have finished what we were doing. The prayer does not wait for a gap in our schedule. It cuts into the schedule, wherever we are, whatever we are holding, and asks us to put it down.

Not even war is a reason to let it go.

Just before that verse, Allah teaches the believers how to pray on the battlefield itself, with the enemy in front of them:

> "And when you are among them and lead them in prayer, let a group of them stand with you, and let them carry their weapons. And when they have prostrated, let them take their positions behind you, and let the other group, who have not yet prayed, come forward and pray with you, and let them be on their guard and carry their weapons."
>
> *Quran 4:102*

One group prays while the other stands guard. Then they change places. And the very next verse, the one we just read, says the prayer is prescribed *at fixed times*.

Think about what that means. There is nothing in the world more urgent than a battle. Your life is in danger. The lives of the people beside you are in danger. If there were ever a moment when a person could say, *I'm too busy to pray right now,* it would be that one. And Allah does not excuse it. He makes the prayer shorter and changes its shape, but He does not take it away.

And in another place, He says that if the fear is too great even for that, you pray however you can:

> "Guard the prayers, and the middle prayer, and stand before Allah in devotion. And if you are afraid, then pray on foot or riding."
>
> *Ouran 2:238–239*

On foot. On horseback. Moving. But praying. Detaching.

So when I sat at my screen and pushed the prayer back thirty minutes, then an hour, for a program, I have to ask myself honestly: what was I doing that was more urgent than a battle?

And look at how the prayer begins. You stand, raise your hands, and say *Allahu akbar*: Allah is greater. Greater than what? Greater than whatever you just walked away from. The meeting, the meal, the conversation, the screen. Whatever it was, Allah is greater.

The Prophet ﷺ described that opening word in a striking way:

> "The key to the prayer is purification. What makes it sacred is saying *Allahu akbar*. And what releases it is saying *peace*."
>
> *Sunan Abi Dawud 61; Jami' al-Tirmidhi 3*

The Arabic word for "makes it sacred" comes from the same root as *haram*, forbidden. With that one word, *Allahu akbar*, everything that was allowed a moment ago, eating, talking, looking at your phone, becomes forbidden until the prayer is over. For a few minutes, the whole world is placed out of reach. That is detachment, built into the very first word of the prayer.

And then each of the five prayers comes at a moment when we are holding onto something different.

Dawn: detaching from sleep

The first prayer, *Fajr*, comes before sunrise, when the bed is warmest and sleep is sweetest. Nothing in the world is easier to hold onto than a pillow at that hour.

And it is at that very hour that the call to prayer adds a line it does not have at any other time of day:

> "Prayer is better than sleep."
>
> *Sunan Abi Dawud 500; Sunan al-Nasa'i 647*

The first detachment of the day is from the body's own comfort. Before you have done anything else, before you have touched your work or your phone or your family, you are asked to let go of the one thing you are lying in. Allah describes the people who do it:

> "Their sides forsake their beds as they call upon their Lord in fear and in hope."
>
> *Quran 32:16*

Their sides forsake their beds. The day begins with a small leaving.

Noon: detaching from work

The second prayer, *Dhuhr*, comes in the middle of the day, when work is at its fullest. The meetings are running, the emails are piling up, the deadline is close. This is the hour when the world feels most urgent.

And this is exactly the hour Allah asks us to stop. He describes the people who do:

> "Men whom neither trade nor selling distracts from the remembrance of Allah, and from establishing the prayer, and giving the charity."
>
> *Quran 24:37*

Notice that these men *have* trade. They are buying and selling. They are in the middle of the market. Allah does not praise them for having left the market. He praises them because the market did not take hold of them.

And on Friday, when the noon prayer becomes the congregational prayer, Allah makes this even clearer:

> "O you who believe, when the call is made for the prayer on Friday, hurry to the remembrance of Allah and leave off trade. That is better for you, if only you knew. And when the prayer is finished, spread out through the land and seek the bounty of Allah, and remember Allah often so that you may succeed."
>
> *Quran 62:9–10*

Leave the trade. Pray. And then go back out and seek Allah's bounty. That is the whole of this book in two verses. Detachment is not quitting your work. It is stepping out of it when Allah calls, so that when you step back in, you are carrying it, and it is no longer carrying you.

Afternoon: detaching from family

The third prayer, *Asr*, comes in the late afternoon. For many people, it is the hour they come home. The children are there, the house is full, the evening is beginning. It is the hour we are most wrapped up in the people we love.

And it is the prayer the Prophet ﷺ warned about more strongly than almost any other. Listen to the words he chose:

> "The one who misses the afternoon prayer is like one who has lost his family and his wealth."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 552; Sahih Muslim 626*

Lost his family. Of all the images he could have used, he chose that one. The person who will not step away from his family for a few minutes to stand before Allah has, in truth, lost something far greater than he gained.

Allah warns us about this very pull:

> "O you who believe, do not let your wealth or your children distract you from the remembrance of Allah. And whoever does that, it is they who are the losers."
>
> *Quran 63:9*

This does not mean love your family less. We said in "Why Love Dies?" that love anchored in Allah is the love that lasts. The afternoon prayer is that anchor, dropped every single day, right at the hour the family is closest. You step away for a few minutes and come back to them, and your love for them is set back on the foundation it was always meant to stand on.

Sunset: detaching from friends and wasted hours

The fourth prayer, *Maghrib*, comes as the sun goes down. The work is done. The evening is open. For many of us, this is the hour of friends, of gatherings, of conversations that wander on for hours, and of time that slips away without our ever deciding to spend it.

The Prophet ﷺ said:

> "There are two blessings that many people are cheated of: health and free time."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 6412*

Free time is a blessing. But it is a blessing that is easy to lose without noticing, because nothing demands it. Work demands our hours. Family demands our hours. Free time simply leaks away.

And the sunset prayer comes right at the start of that open time, and puts a door in front of it. Before the evening is given to anyone else, the first of it is given to Allah.

Friends are a gift. But Allah tells us how most friendships end:

> "Close friends, on that Day, will be enemies to one another, except for those who were mindful of Allah."
>
> *Quran 43:67*

The friendship that survives is the one that had room in it for Allah. The sunset prayer is how we make that room. You leave the gathering for a few minutes, or better, you bring the gathering with you to pray.

Night: detaching from everything

The last prayer, *Isha*, comes after dark, when the whole day is behind you. It is the final door. Not from one thing, but from all of it: the work, the family, the friends, the noise, the day itself.

The Prophet ﷺ disliked two things around this prayer:

> "He disliked sleeping before it and talking after it."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 568; Sahih Muslim 647*

Do not sleep before you have given the day back to Allah. And once you have, do not pick the world back up again. Let it go, and rest.

Because the sleep that follows is itself a kind of leaving. Allah says:

> "It is Allah who takes the souls at the time of their death, and those that have not died, during their sleep."
>
> *Quran 39:42*

Every night, sleep is a small rehearsal of death. And the Prophet ﷺ taught us to go into it with these words:

> "In Your name, O Allah, I die and I live."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 6312*

So the night prayer is the last detachment before the smallest death. You hand back the whole day, and then you lie down and hand back yourself.

Five times a day

Put it all together.

Dawn: let go of sleep. Noon: let go of work. Afternoon: let go of family. Sunset: let go of friends and idle time. Night: let go of everything.

Five times a day, every day, the prayer walks through the day and touches each thing we are most likely to hold too tightly, and loosens our grip on it just before it closes. No single prayer takes more than a few minutes. But five times a day, for a

lifetime, that is tens of thousands of small detachments. Grain by grain.

And it is not only a duty. The Prophet ﷺ would say to Bilal, the companion who made the call to prayer:

> "O Bilal, call the prayer. Give us rest by it."
>
> *Sunan Abi Dawud 4985*

Give us rest by it. Not *give us rest from it.* The prayer was not a weight added to his day. It was the moment the weight came off. That is what detachment feels like from the inside: not loss, but relief.

And at the end of every prayer, you turn your head to the right and to the left and say *peace be upon you*. You are released. You go back to the world, to the work and the family and the friends, carrying peace into it. The prayer does not take you out of life. It sends you back into it, lighter.

The great distinguisher

There is one more thing to say about the prayer, and it may be the most important. The prayer is the great distinguisher between detachment and attachment. More clearly than anything else in our lives, it shows which side of the hourglass a heart is really on.

Anyone can say they love Allah. Anyone can say the world has no hold on them. Words cost nothing. But think of a cold winter morning, in the dark before dawn. You are deep in a good sleep, warm under the covers. Nobody is watching. Nobody would know if you stayed where you are. And you get up anyway, walk to the tap, and wash your face, your arms and your feet in cold water, so that you can stand before Allah.

You won't leave your good sleep and go and wash in cold weather unless you have the power. That power does not come from the body. The body wants the bed. It comes from a heart that is attached to something greater than the bed.

The Prophet ﷺ spoke about that very moment:

> "Shall I not tell you of something by which Allah wipes away sins and raises ranks?" They said, "Yes, O Messenger of Allah." He said: "Completing the washing for prayer even when it is hard, taking many steps to the mosques, and waiting for the next prayer after the prayer. That is the guarding of the frontier."
>
> *Sahih Muslim 251*

Even when it is hard. The Arabic word means the things we dislike, and the scholars who explained this hadith name severe cold as the first example. And he called it the guarding of the frontier, the watch a soldier keeps at the border. The person who leaves a warm bed for cold water is standing guard over his own heart.

Now remember the verse that frightened me at the start of this chapter:

> "And when they stand for prayer, they stand lazily, showing themselves to people, and they do not remember Allah except a little."
>
> *Quran 4:142*

Put the two pictures side by side. One person stands for prayer heavy and slow, and stands well when people are watching. The other gets up alone in the dark, into cold water, when no one is watching at all. Both are standing for the same prayer. What separates them is not the prayer. It is what each heart is holding. That is why the prayer is the great distinguisher. It does not create the difference between attachment and detachment. It reveals it.

The Prophet ﷺ said the same about the two prayers at the edges of the night:

> "No prayer is heavier on the hypocrites than the dawn prayer and the night prayer. And if they knew what is in them, they would come to them even if they had to crawl."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 657; Sahih Muslim 651*

The dawn and the night. The two prayers that ask us to leave our sleep or give up our evening. The two prayers that almost no one sees us pray. Heavy for the heart that is attached, and so precious to the heart that knows what is in them that it would crawl to reach them.

And he drew the line even more sharply:

> "Between a person and associating partners with Allah and disbelief is the leaving of the prayer."
>
> *Sahih Muslim 82*

The prayer is the line. On one side is the heart that gives its first loyalty to Allah. On the other is the heart that has given it to something else, and that, at its root, is what associating partners with Allah means. This is not a line for measuring other people. We said that in "Do Not Claim Yourselves Pure." It is a line to check our own feet against.

The great, great distinguisher.

The first question

And there is a reason it matters so much. When we die and stand before Allah, the prayer is the first thing we will be asked about. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> "The first of his deeds that the servant will be held to account for on the Day of Resurrection is his prayer. If it is sound, he has succeeded and prospered. And if it is corrupt, he has failed and lost. And if anything is lacking from his obligatory prayer, the Lord, Mighty and Majestic, will say: 'Look, does My servant have any voluntary prayer?' And with it what is lacking from the obligatory will be completed. Then the rest of his deeds will be treated in the same way."
>
> *Jami' al-Tirmidhi 413; Sunan al-Nasa'i 465; Sunan Abi Dawud 864*

Of everything we did in this life, the work, the money, the projects, the recognition we chased, none of it is the first question. The first question is the prayer. When He called, did you come?

And look at the mercy at the end of the hadith. Where our obligatory prayers fall short, our voluntary prayers fill the gap. We saw in the introduction that every voluntary deed is a detachment, a grain of sand we choose to move to Allah's side of the hourglass when nothing requires it. Here we see what those grains are for. On the Day we need them most, the small detachments we chose freely are the ones that complete what we owe.

So the prayer is not one deed among many. It is the first thing we will be asked about, and every single day it is the clearest sign of what our hearts are holding.

The charity: letting go of money

The third pillar is the *zakat*, the obligatory charity. Once a year, a small, fixed portion of the wealth a person has saved leaves their hands and goes to those in need.

The word *zakat* itself means two things in Arabic: purification, and growth. Allah says to the Prophet ﷺ:

> "Take from their wealth a charity by which you purify them and cause them to grow."
>
> *Quran 9:103*

Purify *them*. Not purify the money. The people. The charity is not only something that helps the poor. It is something that cleans the heart of the one who gives it. It cleans away the grip.

We spoke in "I Hastened to You" about what giving feels like: the weight that comes off when you let go of something you were holding onto. The obligatory charity makes that letting go a part of the cycle of every year. You don't wait to feel generous. Every year, whether you feel it or not, a part of what you hold is released.

And notice what it is released from. Not from what you are spending. From what you have *saved*. The charity reaches exactly the part of our wealth we are most likely to cling to: the part we have put aside, the part that makes us feel safe. Allah asks us to open our hand at precisely that point.

The Prophet ﷺ told us what is really ours:

> "The son of Adam says, 'My wealth, my wealth.' But what do you have of your wealth, son of Adam, except what you ate and used up, or wore and wore out, or gave in charity and so sent ahead?"
>
> *Sahih Muslim 2958*

Everything else, you will leave behind. What you gave away is the only part you keep.

And the fear that holds our hands closed, that if we give, we will have less, the Prophet ﷺ answered directly:

> "Charity never decreases wealth."
>
> *Sahih Muslim 2588*

That is the second meaning of *zakat*. Growth. You let go, and what grows is not smaller.

The fast: letting go of what is allowed

The fourth pillar is *sawm*, fasting. In the month of Ramadan, from dawn until sunset, a person leaves food, drink, and intimacy with their spouse.

Allah says:

> "O you who believe, fasting has been prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may become mindful of Allah."
>
> *Quran 2:183*

Think about what is being let go of here. Not luxuries. Not sins. The body's most basic needs. Food and water, without which no one can live. And the closeness between husband and wife, which Allah Himself made lawful and good.

That is what makes fasting different. Every other attachment we have spoken about in this book is an attachment to something that has taken more than its share. But fasting asks us to let go of things that are entirely lawful, entirely good, and entirely ours. For a few hours, we leave even what we are allowed to have.

And that is exactly why it works. If you can let go of a glass of water on a hot afternoon, a glass that is yours, that no one would blame you for drinking, that your body is asking for, then you have learned something about your own heart. You have learned that you are not your hunger. You are not your thirst. You are not your

desires. There is something in you that can say *no* to the body and *yes* to Allah. And once you know that, everything else you are attached to becomes easier to set down.

Allah says about the one who fasts, in a hadith the Prophet ﷺ told us:

> "He leaves his food, his drink, and his desire for My sake. Fasting is for Me, and I will reward it."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 1894*

For My sake. That is the whole of detachment in three words. Leaving something not because it is bad, and not because we are told to suffer, but because we are turning toward Someone.

And the Prophet ﷺ made sure we understood that the fast is in the heart, not only the stomach:

> "Whoever does not give up false speech and acting upon it, Allah has no need of his giving up his food and drink."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 1903*

An empty stomach with a full heart is not a fast. The body is detaching from food so that the heart can learn to detach from everything else.

And notice how the fast ends. Not with a long, slow return to the world, but quickly. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> "People will remain in good as long as they hasten to break the fast."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 1957; Sahih Muslim 1098*

The moment the sun sets, you eat. You don't show off how long you can go without. You don't make the hunger into a trophy. The detachment was never about the hunger. It was about the heart. When the time comes, you take the food back with gratitude, as a gift, held in an open hand.

The pilgrimage: letting go of home

The fifth pillar is the *Hajj*, the pilgrimage to the House of Allah in Makkah, once in a lifetime for everyone who is able.

Allah commanded the Prophet Ibrahim, peace be upon him:

> "And proclaim to the people the pilgrimage. They will come to you on foot and on every lean camel, coming from every deep and distant pass."
>
> *Quran 22:27*

Think about what the pilgrim leaves behind. His home. His bed. His country. His language. His routine. Everything that is familiar and comfortable. He travels hundreds of miles, maybe thousands, to stand in the heat with millions of strangers from every corner of the earth, people he has never met and will likely never see again, all there for one reason: to worship.

It began with a leaving

The pilgrimage is rooted in a detachment.

Long before there was any city in that valley, Ibrahim, peace be upon him, brought his wife Hajar and their infant son Ismail there, to a dry valley with no water and no crops, and he left them there at Allah's command. He prayed:

> "Our Lord, I have settled some of my offspring in a valley without cultivation, near Your sacred House, our Lord, so that they may establish prayer."
>
> *Quran 14:37*

The Prophet ﷺ told us what happened next. As Ibrahim walked away, Hajar followed him and asked him again and again why he was leaving them in a valley with no people and nothing in it. He would not turn to answer. Finally she asked: *Did Allah command you to do this?* He said yes. And she said:

> "Then He will not abandon us."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 3364*

And she went back. When the water ran out and her baby was crying, she ran back and forth between two hills, searching, until Allah brought water out of the ground beneath her son.

Every pilgrim who walks between those same two hills, Safa and Marwah, is walking in her footsteps. The pilgrimage is a re-enactment of one family's detachment: a father who let go of what he loved most because Allah asked him to, and a mother who let go of every certainty because she trusted that Allah would not let her go.

Two white sheets

Before the pilgrim even arrives, he enters a sacred state called *ihram*. The word comes from the same root we met in the prayer: a state in which things that were allowed become forbidden. No perfume. No cutting the hair. No intimacy with one's spouse. And no ordinary clothes.

Instead, every man wears the same two plain, unstitched white sheets. The king and the laborer, the rich and the poor, the famous and the unknown, all dressed exactly alike. You cannot tell anyone's wealth or status by looking at them. Everything a person uses to say *this is who I am* has been taken off and left at home.

Many people have noticed that these two white sheets look very much like a burial shroud. And the Prophet ﷺ himself made that connection. A man once died during the pilgrimage, while he was in this state, and the Prophet ﷺ said:

> "Wash him with water and lotus leaves, and shroud him in his two garments. Do not perfume him and do not cover his head, for he will be raised on the Day of Resurrection calling out the pilgrim's call."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 1265; Sahih Muslim 1206*

Shroud him in his two garments. The pilgrim's clothes became his shroud. They were already the right clothes for meeting Allah.

That is what the pilgrimage is. A rehearsal for leaving the world. You leave your home the way you will one day leave it for the last time. You take off everything that marks your place in the world. You stand on the plain of Arafah among millions, with

no name and no rank, the way everyone will stand on the Day of Resurrection. The Prophet ﷺ said, in the last pilgrimage he made:

> "O people, your Lord is one, and your father is one. There is no superiority of an Arab over a non-Arab, nor of a non-Arab over an Arab, nor of a white person over a black person, nor of a black person over a white person, except by mindfulness of Allah."
>
> *Musnad Ahmad 23489*

On that plain, you can see it with your own eyes.

And Allah tells the pilgrim what to carry:

> "The pilgrimage is in well-known months. So whoever undertakes it, let there be no indecency, no wrongdoing, and no quarreling during the pilgrimage. And whatever good you do, Allah knows it. And take provision, but the best provision is mindfulness of Allah."
>
> *Quran 2:197*

No quarreling. Think about what that asks. Millions of strangers, crowded together, hot, tired, far from home, and not one argument. You have to let go of the need to be right, the need to be first, the need to defend your place in the line. Even the self has to be left at home.

Coming home new

And then the pilgrim goes home. Back to the same house, the same work, the same family. The pilgrimage, like every other pillar, does not take you out of the world for good. It sends you back.

But the Prophet ﷺ said that you go back different:

> "Whoever performs the pilgrimage and does not commit indecency or wrongdoing returns like the day his mother gave birth to him."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 1521; Sahih Muslim 1350*

Like a newborn. Carrying nothing. Owing nothing. That is the lightest a human being can ever be.

Every pillar has two halves

Step back now and look at all five together.

The testimony: *no god*, and then *but Allah*. The prayer: *Allah is greater* than whatever you just put down. The charity: you let go, and it *grows*. The fast: you leave it, *for My sake*. The pilgrimage: you leave home, and you arrive at His House.

Every one of them has two halves. A letting go, and a turning toward. A detachment, and an attachment. We said at the very beginning of this book that every attachment to something is a detachment from something else, because the heart is one. The five pillars are that truth, built into the foundations of faith.

And every one of them sends you back. The prayer ends with *peace* and you return to your day. The fast ends at sunset and you eat with gratitude. The charity flows out into the hands of others and keeps the whole community alive. The pilgrim goes home to his family, newborn. Not one of the pillars asks you to leave the world for good. They ask you to keep stepping out of it, again and again, so that you never forget who it belongs to.

Now come back one last time to that screen.

The answer was never to stop building. It was to build from the right center. When the call comes, *come to success*, you stand up from the screen right away and say *Allah is greater*, and mean it, and for those few minutes the work is out of reach. When the year turns, you give part of what your work has earned, and your hand is a little more open than before. When Ramadan comes, you learn that you are not your hunger, and so not your ambition either. And if Allah allows it, one day you take off everything you are known for, put on two white sheets, and stand among millions as no one in particular.

And then you go home. And you build, maybe better than ever. But now the work is in your hands, and not in your heart.

Here I am

There is one sentence the pilgrims call out, over and over, from the moment they enter that sacred state until they reach the House:

> "Here I am at Your service, O Allah, here I am at Your service. Here I am at Your service, You have no partner, here I am at Your service. Indeed, all praise and blessing are Yours, and all dominion. You have no partner."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 1549; Sahih Muslim 1184*

In Arabic, *Labbayk Allahumma labbayk*. Here I am at Your service, O Allah, here I am at Your service.

The word *labbayk* is more than *I am here*. It means: I have answered, and I stand ready to do whatever You ask. *I am present, and I am Yours to command.* Not at the service of the screen, or the money, or the people whose praise I wanted. At Your service.

It is the answer of someone who has been called and has come. Someone who has left their home, their comforts, their name, their clothes, everything the world knew them by, and arrived with nothing to say except: *here I am at Your service.*

And in the middle of it, the testimony again: *You have no partner.* No other god. Not the money, not the work, not the screen, not even the self. Only You.

That is where all five pillars lead. Every time you leave your bed at dawn, every time you step away from your work at noon, every time you open your hand to give, every time you leave a glass of water untouched, every step you take away from home toward His House, you are saying the same thing.

You called, and I let go of what I was holding.

Here I am at Your service.

CHAPTER 7

I Do Not Love Those That Set

One spring, a pair of small birds builds a nest somewhere you can see it. Maybe in the corner of a balcony, maybe in a bush by the front door, maybe in the gutter over the kitchen window. You didn't ask for them. They just arrived, and you found yourself checking on them every morning.

You watch the parents carry twigs, then food. You hear the thin cries of the chicks before you ever see them. Then one day you see them: a cluster of open mouths, all neck and hunger. The parents never seem to rest. In and out, in and out, from first light to last.

And then, one morning, the nest is empty.

No farewell. No ceremony. The chicks you watched grow have gone into the sky, and the parents have gone with them, or after them, or somewhere else entirely. All that is left is a little cup of twigs and feathers in the corner of your balcony. And you are surprised by what you feel. A small ache. As if something that was yours had left you, even though it was never yours at all.

If you have ever felt that, even for a moment, you have felt the subject of this chapter. Because the empty nest is not an exception. It is the rule. Look around you long enough, and you will see that everything in creation is doing the same thing.

Everything is leaving

Walk outside in the autumn. The same leaves that were bright green a few months ago are turning yellow, then brown, and letting go of the branch one by one. The tree does not fight it. It does not hold on to its last leaf out of love for it. It lets the leaf fall, and the leaf lands, and the ground takes it in.

Feel the air change. The heat of summer, which felt like it would never end, turns cool, then cold. And the cold, which feels just as permanent in the middle of winter, turns warm again.

Watch the end of any day. The light does not switch off. It slips away. The sun lowers, the colors change, and the day lets go of the sky so that the night can have it. A few hours later, the night lets go too.

Look higher. The moon changes its shape every night, growing and shrinking and growing again. The planets move across the sky in their slow paths, never stopping, never staying in the same place two nights in a row. Even the stars we call fixed are turning above us, rising and setting with the seasons.

Look closer, at yourself. The baby who could not be separated from its mother's arms becomes the child who runs ahead on the path. The child becomes the young adult who leaves home. The strong body that carried you up a mountain at twenty asks to sit down halfway up the stairs at seventy.

Everything is leaving. Everything is letting go of something, all the time.

I have come to believe something very simple about this, and it is the whole idea of this chapter in one sentence:

Detachment is the motion of the universe.

Nothing in creation stands still and holds on. Every part of it is moving, and every movement is a release of what came before. The only thing in all of creation that tries to stop the motion, to clutch and grip and refuse to let go, is the human heart.

And when we do that, we are swimming against the current of everything Allah made.

The night is peeled from the day

Allah does not leave us to discover this alone. Over and over, the Quran turns our eyes to the sky and tells us to look.

> "And a sign for them is the night. We peel the day away from it, and at once they are in darkness. And the sun runs toward a resting place appointed for it. That is the decree of the Almighty, the All-Knowing. And the moon, We have measured out for it stages, until it returns like an old, withered date stalk. It is not for the sun to overtake the moon, nor does the night outrun the day. Each is swimming in an orbit."
>
> *Quran 36:37–40*

The Arabic verb in the first line is *naslakhu*. It is the word used for peeling the skin off something, stripping away its covering. Allah describes nightfall as the day being peeled off the night, the way a skin is drawn back. Every evening, the sky lets go of its daylight. It does not hold on. It cannot. And then the night itself is drawn back for the morning.

Then the sun, *running* toward a place appointed for it. The moon, measured out in stages, growing full and then thinning until it looks like the old, dry, curved stalk of a date palm. And then the last line, which I find myself reading again and again: *each is swimming in an orbit.*

Swimming. Not sitting. Not resting. Not holding on. Everything in the sky is in motion, and every one of those motions is a leaving. The sun leaves the east. The moon leaves its fullness. The day leaves the night, and the night leaves the day. And none of it collides, none of it overtakes the other, because each one keeps to the path that was measured for it.

As an engineer, there is one picture I can't stop seeing here. An orbit is a strange kind of motion. A body in orbit is, in a sense, always falling toward the thing it circles, but it never crashes, because it is always moving forward. If it stopped moving forward, it would fall. If it pulled away entirely, it would be lost. It stays in its path by never stopping and never clutching. That is only my image, not a claim about the verse. But it is the clearest picture I know of a life that is detached from the world and attached to its Lord: always moving, never grasping, kept on its path by something greater than itself.

The hourglass in the sky

In the introduction I asked you to imagine your life as an hourglass, every grain of sand a moment that falls and never comes back up.

The sky is the same hourglass, written large. Allah says:

> "He has made the sun and the moon subject, each running for an appointed term."
>
> *Quran 13:2*

Each running for an appointed term. The sun has a term. The moon has a term. The universe itself has a term. Its sand is falling too.

And here is something that steadied me when I first understood it. When we feel the sand of our own lives running out, we feel as if we alone are losing something, as if the world is standing still and only we are slipping away. But we are not alone in the hourglass. The whole of creation is in it with us. The leaves, the seasons, the light of the day, the sun itself, all of it is running for an appointed term. We are not being singled out. We are being carried along with everything else, toward the same Lord.

The only question, for us as for the sun, is whether we keep to the path.

I do not love those that set

There is one person in the Quran who looked at this motion in the sky and understood exactly what it meant for the heart. It is the Prophet Ibrahim, Abraham, peace be upon him, the same Ibrahim whose prayer for a sound heart we met at the start of this book.

His people worshipped idols, and they honored the stars and the moon and the sun. And the Quran tells us how Ibrahim reasoned with them, step by step, using the sky itself:

> "And thus We showed Ibrahim the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, so that he would be among those who are certain. When the night covered him, he saw a star. He said, 'This is my lord.' But when it set, he said, 'I do not love those

> that set.' When he saw the moon rising, he said, 'This is my lord.' But when it set, he said, 'If my Lord does not guide me, I will surely be among the people who have gone astray.' When he saw the sun rising, he said, 'This is my lord; this is greater.' But when it set, he said, 'O my people, I am free of what you associate with Allah. I have turned my face toward the One who created the heavens and the earth, inclining toward the truth, and I am not of those who associate others with Him.'"
>
> *Quran 6:75–79*

I do not love those that set.

In Arabic it is three words, *la uhibbu al-afilin*. The ones that set. The ones that go down. The ones that disappear below the horizon and leave you in the dark.

Ibrahim was not confused about the stars. He was showing his people, in a way they could not argue with, what was wrong with what they worshipped. How can you give your heart to something that leaves? How can you call something your lord when every evening it goes down and abandons you?

And notice what he did not say. He did not say, *I do not love the star.* He did not say, *the moon is not beautiful,* or *the sun is not useful.* He did not tell anyone to stop looking at the sky. He said: *I do not love those that set.* The problem was not the thing. The problem was giving the heart to a thing that was always going to leave.

That one sentence holds the whole of this book.

Everything in this world sets. The job sets. The money sets. The youth sets. The people we love set, or we set before them. Our own bodies set. Every one of them rises in our life, shines for a while, and then goes down below the horizon. If we give our hearts to the things that set, we will be left in the dark again and again, every time one of them goes down.

And then look where Ibrahim turned instead: *toward the One who created the heavens and the earth.* Not toward something that rises and sets, but toward the One who makes them rise and set. The One who never goes down. The One who is there in the darkness after the star is gone, and there in the morning before the sun returns.

This is what we mean by detached from the world and attached to Allah. Ibrahim looked at a sky full of things that leave, and he gave his heart to the only One who does not.

Not a leaf falls

Now come back down to earth, to the tree in autumn.

Allah describes the life of this world with the same picture, the green that turns yellow:

> "Know that the life of this world is only play and distraction and adornment and boasting among you and competing in wealth and children. It is like rain whose growth delights the farmers. Then it dries, and you see it turn yellow. Then it becomes debris. And in the Hereafter is severe punishment, and forgiveness from Allah and His pleasure. And the life of this world is nothing but the enjoyment of an illusion."
>
> *Quran 57:20*

> "And give them the example of the life of this world: it is like water We send down from the sky. The plants of the earth mix with it, and then they become dry stalks scattered by the winds. And Allah has power over all things."
>
> *Quran 18:45*

Green, then yellow, then debris, then scattered by the winds. That is the whole life of this world in four steps. Every spring the earth shows it to us, and every autumn it shows us how it ends.

But there is another verse about leaves that changed the way I see autumn altogether:

> "And with Him are the keys of the unseen; no one knows them but He. And He knows what is on the land and in the sea. Not a leaf falls but He knows it. And there is no grain in the darkness of the earth, and nothing fresh or dry, but that it is in a clear record."
>
> *Quran 6:59*

Not a leaf falls but He knows it.

Think about how many leaves fall in a single autumn, in a single forest, on a single street. No one counts them. No one could. They fall and are swept away and forgotten. And Allah knows every one. Its moment of letting go is known, and it is written *in a clear record*.

Do you hear the echo? It is the same record from the verse that holds this whole book:

> "No calamity strikes the earth or yourselves except that it is written in a record before We bring it into being... so that you do not despair over what has escaped you, nor exult over what He has given you."
>
> *Quran 57:22–23*

The leaf that falls was written. The thing that escaped your hands was written. The tree does not despair over the leaf it lost, because the leaf was never the tree. It was something the tree carried for a season, by permission, until its term was done. When we lose something, we can learn to look at it the way the tree looks at autumn: something that was given for a season, that left at its written moment, and that Allah saw fall.

Trees that drop their sins

There is something even more beautiful in the image of the falling leaf, and it comes from the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself.

One of his companions, Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, visited him while he was sick with a heavy fever. Abdullah said: you have a severe fever. The Prophet ﷺ said yes, that he suffered as much as two men would. And then he said:

> "No Muslim is struck by any harm, whether an illness or anything else, except that Allah causes his sins to fall from him, the way a tree sheds its leaves."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 5660; Sahih Muslim 2571*

The way a tree sheds its leaves.

So the falling is not only loss. When hardship comes, when we lose something we did not choose to lose, something else is falling from us at the same time: the weight of our mistakes. The tree stands bare in winter, and it looks as though it has lost everything. But it has only let go of what it did not need to carry into the next season. Its roots are untouched. Its life is untouched. And in the spring, it is green again.

This is the detachment we do not choose, the kind we spoke about in the chapter on loss. It hurts. The Prophet ﷺ himself said his fever was twice as heavy as other men's. But it is not empty. Something is falling away that we will be glad, one day, to be free of.

The empty nest

Now come back to the nest on your balcony.

Before the chicks left, there was a season when they could not survive without their parents. They could not fly. They could not feed themselves. They could not keep themselves warm. Everything depended on that mother and father going out and coming back, over and over, all day.

And the love between them was real. Allah placed it there. There is a hadith that shows how seriously the Prophet ﷺ took that love, even in a bird. Some of his companions were traveling with him, and they found a small red bird with two chicks, and they took the chicks. The mother bird came and began to flutter over them, beating her wings. When the Prophet ﷺ came back, he said:

> "Who has distressed this bird by taking her young? Return her young to her."
>
> *Sunan Abi Dawud 2675*

So nothing in this chapter is saying that the bond between a parent and child is wrong, or small, or something to be ashamed of. It is a mercy from Allah, and the Prophet ﷺ would not let it be broken by force.

And yet, when the time comes, the chicks leave. Not because the bond was taken from them, but because that is the path that was written for them. The same Lord who placed the love in the mother bird's heart also placed the flight in the chick's

wings. The leaving is not a failure of the love. It is the completion of it. A parent bird who would not let its chicks leave the nest would not be loving them more. It would be keeping them from what they were created to be.

And who holds the chick up when it finally steps off the edge?

> "Have they not seen the birds above them, spreading their wings and folding them in? None holds them up except the Most Merciful. Indeed, He sees all things."
>
> *Quran 67:19*

None holds them up except the Most Merciful. Not the mother. Not the father. The parents fed the chick for a season, but they were never the ones keeping it alive. They were the means. Allah was always the One holding it up.

The Prophet ﷺ pointed to these same birds when he taught us about trusting Allah:

> "If you were to rely on Allah as He truly deserves to be relied upon, He would provide for you as He provides for the birds. They go out in the morning hungry and come back in the evening full."
>
> *Jami' al-Tirmidhi 2344*

The bird leaves the nest with nothing. No savings. No plan. No guarantee. And every evening it comes back full. Not because it held on to anything, but because it was held.

Children leave too

If you are a parent, you know where this is going.

The first detachment of every human life happens at birth. A child who was carried inside its mother, fed through her body, warmed by her warmth, is separated from her. The cord is cut. Then, after a time, the child is weaned. Allah mentions this in the Quran with great tenderness:

> "And We have instructed the human being concerning his parents. His mother carried him in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning is in two years. Be grateful to Me and to your parents; to Me is the final return."
>
> *Quran 31:14*

His weaning is in two years. Even the most intimate bond in human life has its appointed term. The child is fed by its mother, and then the child is weaned, and then the child walks, and then the child runs ahead on the path, and then the child grows up and builds a nest of its own.

Every parent feels the ache of each of these steps. The first day of school. The first night away. The day they no longer want to hold your hand in public. The day they leave home. It feels like loss. And in a way, it is. But it is also exactly what was meant to happen. A child who never left would be a child who never grew.

So the task of a parent is not to hold on. It is to love fully, give everything, and then open the hand at the written time. Like the mother bird, who feeds until the very last day, and then lets the sky have them.

And remember who was holding them up all along.

Heat into cold, ease into hardship

The seasons turn. Heat becomes cold, and cold becomes heat. And the turning is not only in the weather. It is in our lives.

Allah says:

> "And these days, We alternate them among the people."
>
> *Quran 3:140*

He said this to the believers after the Battle of Uhud, where they had suffered a painful defeat after an earlier victory. The days turn. Victory does not stay. Defeat does not stay. One season of your life is warm and full, and then it cools. Another is cold and bare, and then it warms.

And:

> "Allah alternates the night and the day. Indeed, in that is a lesson for those who have eyes to see."
>
> *Quran 24:44*

> "So indeed, with hardship comes ease. Indeed, with hardship comes ease."
>
> *Quran 94:5–6*

Here is why this matters so much for the heart. When we are in a warm season, we want to hold on to it forever, and we become afraid of the cold. When we are in a cold season, we believe it will never end, and we fall into despair. Both of those feelings come from forgetting that the seasons turn.

This is exactly what 57:23 is protecting us from. *So that you do not despair over what has escaped you,* because the cold will turn, *nor exult over what He has given you,* because the warmth will turn too. A heart that has learned the seasons does not grip the summer and does not drown in the winter. It knows that both were written, both have their term, and both are moving.

We are the motion too

We have looked at the sky, the trees, the birds, the seasons. But the most personal sign of all is the one we live inside.

> "Allah is the One who created you from weakness, then made after weakness strength, then made after strength weakness and gray hair. He creates what He wills, and He is the All-Knowing, the All-Powerful."
>
> *Quran 30:54*

Weakness, then strength, then weakness again. That is the arc of every human life, and no one escapes it. Allah describes it in more detail elsewhere:

> "...Then We bring you out as infants, then you reach your full strength. And among you is the one who is taken in death, and among you is the one who is returned to the weakest age of life, so that he knows nothing after having known."

> *Quran 22:5*

Our bodies are detaching from us, slowly, from the day we reach our full strength. The hair whitens. The eyes weaken. The knees complain. One day even the memory begins to let go. The body we treat as *ours* was on loan from the very first breath, and it is being returned a little at a time.

And look at how that same verse ends:

> "And you see the earth lifeless, but when We send down rain upon it, it stirs and swells and grows every kind of beautiful plant."
>
> *Quran 22:5*

The verse that describes our decline ends with the earth coming back to life. Allah places the two side by side: the human being, letting go of strength, and the dead earth, rising green under the rain. This verse opens by speaking to those who doubt the Resurrection. Its answer is the motion of creation itself. Everything that lets go, by His command, is brought back by His command. The winter is not the end of the tree. And the grave is not the end of us.

Against the grain

So here is the picture. The sky is letting go. The trees are letting go. The seasons, the birds, the days, our own bodies. All of creation is moving, releasing, turning, and returning to its Lord. And it does this in perfect obedience.

> "Have you not seen that to Allah prostrates whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on the earth, and the sun, and the moon, and the stars, and the mountains, and the trees, and the animals, and many of the people? But many are those upon whom the punishment is deserved."
>
> *Quran 22:18*

Read the list slowly. The sun prostrates. The moon. The stars. The mountains. The trees. The animals. Every one of them, without exception. And then: *many of the people.* Not all. Only many.

Of everything in that list, human beings are the only ones divided. Everything else moves with the current. We are the only ones who can choose to swim against it.

Allah says in another place:

> "Do they seek other than the way of Allah, when to Him has submitted whoever is in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly, and to Him they will be returned?"
>
> *Quran 3:83*

And He tells us how the heavens and the earth first answered Him:

> "...He said to it and to the earth, 'Come, both of you, willingly or unwillingly.' They said, 'We come willingly.'"
>
> *Quran 41:11*

We come willingly. The sky and the earth were asked, and they came without resistance. And they have been moving in that obedience ever since: the night peeled from the day, the sun running to its resting place, the leaf falling at its written moment.

The human being was given something the heavens and the earth were not. Allah says that He offered the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to carry it and were afraid of it, and the human being carried it (Quran 33:72). We were given a choice. The star cannot decide to stay above the horizon. The leaf cannot refuse to fall. But the human heart can decide to hold on.

And that is why holding on hurts.

When everything around you is moving and you try to stand still, you feel the force of all of it pushing against you. That pressure is the anxiety of trying to keep what cannot be kept. The fear of the cold season while you are still in the warm one. The panic of watching your children grow and wanting them small forever. The bitterness of watching your strength fade and refusing to accept it. The agony of loving something that sets as if it will never set.

We call this pain many things. But at its root, much of it is friction. It is the feeling of a heart trying to stand still in a universe that was made to move.

> "Everyone upon the earth will perish. And there will remain the Face of your Lord, Owner of Majesty and Honor."
>
> *Quran 55:26–27*

Everything sets. Only He remains. When the heart finally stops gripping, and lets itself move with the rest of creation, the friction stops. That is the sanity we spoke of in the introduction. It is not something new we have to build. It is simply the heart coming back into line with everything else Allah made.

Letting go is not stopping

Now I need to say the most important thing in this chapter, because without it, everything above could be misunderstood.

Nothing in nature that lets go stops giving.

The tree lets its leaves fall every autumn, and every spring it is green again, and every summer it gives fruit. Its letting go is not a withdrawal from life. It is part of how it keeps living and keeps giving.

The cloud lets go of its rain. It does not hold the water to itself. And because it lets go, the dead earth stirs and swells and grows every kind of beautiful plant.

The seed has to let go of being a seed. It has to split open in the darkness of the earth before anything can grow from it. Allah says:

> "Indeed, Allah is the One who splits open the grain and the date stone. He brings the living out of the dead."
>
> *Quran 6:95*

The sun gives light to the whole earth precisely because it never stops in one place. If it stood still over one city, that city would burn and the rest of the world would freeze. It gives by moving.

Allah gives us the clearest picture of this in His description of a good word, the word of faith, like a good tree:

> "Have you not seen how Allah gives the example of a good word, like a good tree, whose root is firm and whose branches are in the sky? It gives its fruit at every season, by the permission of its Lord. And Allah gives examples to people so that they may reflect."
>
> *Quran 14:24–25*

Look at this tree. Its root is firm: it is deeply attached to the ground that feeds it. Its branches reach the sky. And it gives its fruit *at every season.* It gives, and lets go of what it gives, and gives again. Its fruit is never kept on the branch. The tree does not own its fruit. It produces it and releases it, season after season, by the permission of its Lord.

That is the detached heart. Its root is in Allah. Its branches reach high. And it gives, and gives, and lets go of everything it gives, without ever being emptied, because what feeds it is not what it gives away.

This is what I mean when I say that detachment is not withdrawal. The person who has let go of the world is not the person who has stopped moving in it. It is the person who moves the way the sun moves and gives the way the tree gives. Generously, constantly, and without clutching. Remember the hadith of the servant Allah loves: *I become his hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes, and his foot with which he walks* (Sahih al-Bukhari 6502). That is not stillness. That is a body in motion. It is a person swimming in their orbit.

The Prophet ﷺ described his own place in this world with an image from nature too:

> "What have I to do with this world? I am in this world only like a rider who stopped to take shade under a tree, then went on and left it."
>
> *Jami' al-Tirmidhi 2377*

The rider rests under the tree. He is grateful for its shade. He does not pretend the shade is not good. And then he moves on. The tree stays in its place, giving shade to the next traveler. And the rider keeps going, toward where he was always headed.

The ones who look up

There is a passage in the Quran that tells us who sees all of this, and what it does to them:

> "Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of the night and the day, are signs for people of understanding. Those who remember Allah standing, and sitting, and lying on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth, and say: 'Our Lord, You did not create this for nothing. Glory be to You. Protect us from the punishment of the Fire.'"
>
> *Quran 3:190–191*

You did not create this for nothing.

That is what the person of understanding says after looking at the sky. Not, *how sad that everything leaves.* Not, *how pointless that everything ends.* But: *there is a purpose in all of this.* The leaving has a meaning. The motion is going somewhere. The night is peeled from the day for a reason, and the leaf falls into a record for a reason, and the chick steps off the edge for a reason. All of it is creation doing what it was made to do: moving toward its Lord.

And the next time you see an empty nest, or a tree letting go of its leaves, or the sun slipping below the horizon, you can let it remind you of the same thing it reminded Ibrahim.

He looked up at a sky full of beautiful things, and he watched each of them set. And he did not despair. He turned his face toward the One who does not set. Allah tells us how Ibrahim came to Him in the end:

> "When he came to his Lord with a sound heart."
>
> *Quran 37:84*

The same words he prayed for in 26:89. The sound heart. The heart that saw everything set, loved it all for what it was, and gave itself only to the One who remains.

So let the world teach you. Every evening, the day lets go. Every autumn, the trees let go. Every spring, a nest empties. The whole of creation is moving, swimming, falling, turning, returning, and it is doing it willingly.

You can move with it.

Let the leaf fall. Let the season turn. Let the child fly. Keep your root in Allah, and keep giving your fruit, season after season, without holding it on the branch.

And whenever your heart catches itself gripping something that rises and shines and is always, one day, going to go down, say the three words that Ibrahim said under the night sky:

I do not love those that set.

CHAPTER 8

Detach in the Age of AI

You type a question into a machine. It is a question that would have taken you a week to answer when you were starting out. Maybe a month. The kind of question that people used to come to you for, because you were the one who knew.

The answer appears in a few seconds. It is clear. It is well organized. It is mostly right. And it did not cost the machine anything at all.

You sit back in your chair, and you feel something you did not expect. It is not quite fear. It is closer to grief. As if something you had been carrying for years, and were quietly proud of carrying, had just been lifted out of your hands and set down on a table where anyone can pick it up.

I am an engineer. I know that feeling well. For a long time, part of how I knew my own worth was how well I could solve a problem, how fast I could learn something new, how much I could hold in my head at once. Those things were real, and they took years to build. And then, in what felt like a single season, a machine could do a version of many of them faster than I ever could.

If you have felt that, at your desk or anywhere else, this chapter is for you. Because that feeling is not only about technology. It is a question being asked of your heart, and it is one of the most important questions this book can ask:

What have you been worshipping all these years?

What we worshipped for years

That word may sound too strong. Nobody bows down to their own skill. Nobody prays to their job title, or to being the smartest person in the room.

But the Quran uses the word for something much quieter than bowing:

> "Have you seen the one who has taken his own desire as his god?"

> *Quran 45:23*

A god, in this verse, is not a statue. It is whatever the heart serves. Whatever it obeys first, fears losing most, and runs back to when it is afraid.

And the Prophet ﷺ gave us a simple test for finding it:

> "Wretched is the slave of the gold coin, and the slave of the silver coin, and the slave of the fine garment. If he is given, he is pleased, and if he is not given, he is angry."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 2887*

Notice that he did not say *the one who has* gold and silver and fine clothes. He said *the slave* of them. And he told us how to recognize the slave: his mood rises and falls with the thing. Give it to him and he is content. Take it away and he is furious, or lost.

Now run the test on yourself, honestly, in the age we are living in.

When a machine does in seconds what you were known for, what happens inside you? If something in you goes cold, or angry, or afraid in a way that will not settle, that reaction is a map. It is pointing at something your heart was serving. Maybe it was your skill. Maybe it was being needed. Maybe it was the respect in people's voices when they asked you for help. Maybe it was your speed, your output, the number of things you could get done in a day. Maybe it was simply your salary, and the safety you believed it gave you.

None of those things is evil. Skill is a gift. Being useful to people is a good thing. Earning a living is a duty. But any one of them can move from the hand into the heart and sit in the place that was made for Allah. And when it does, we do not notice, because it does not look like an idol. It looks like who we are.

"I was only given it because of my knowledge"

There is a sentence in the Quran that I think every professional should read at least once a year.

It was said by Qarun, the man whose treasure was so great that the keys alone were too heavy for a group of strong men to carry. When his people warned him not to exult, he answered:

> "I was only given it because of knowledge I have."
>
> *Quran 28:78*

Allah repeats the same sentence in another place, about the human being in general, and then answers it:

> "When harm touches the human being, he calls upon Us. Then when We grant him a blessing from Us, he says, 'I was only given it because of my knowledge.' No, it is a test, but most of them do not know."
>
> *Quran 39:49*

Because of my knowledge. That is the idol of the working world in four words. My expertise. My degree. My experience. My way of thinking. It is the quiet belief that what I have, I earned by what I know, and that what I know belongs to me.

Now listen to how the angels spoke about knowledge. When Allah taught Adam the names of things, and then asked the angels to name them, they did not say, *give us a moment, we will work it out.* They said:

> "Glory be to You. We have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Indeed, You are the All-Knowing, the All-Wise."
>
> *Quran 2:32*

No knowledge except what You have taught us. That is the opposite of Qarun's sentence. One heart says, *I know, therefore I have.* The other says, *I know only what I was taught, and I was taught by Him.*

And the Quran keeps reminding us who the Teacher is:

> "Read, and your Lord is the Most Generous, who taught by the pen, taught the human being what he did not know."
>
> *Quran 96:3–5*

> "And Allah brought you out of the wombs of your mothers knowing nothing, and He gave you hearing, and sight, and hearts, so that you might be grateful."
>
> *Quran 16:78*

We all began knowing nothing. Every skill we have was taught to us, through a teacher, a book, a mistake, a mentor, a sleepless night. Every one of those was a means. The One who taught through all of them was Allah.

And then He tells us something that should have prepared us for this age long before it came:

> "...and above every possessor of knowledge is one who knows more."
>
> *Quran 12:76*

There has always been someone who knew more than you. A better engineer. A sharper doctor. A more gifted writer. Now there is also a machine that, in some narrow ways, holds more than any of us. For the heart that believed its knowledge was its own, this is a humiliation. For the heart that always knew its knowledge was a loan, it changes almost nothing. *Above every possessor of knowledge is one who knows more.* And above all of them is the One who knows everything, and who taught each of them the little they have.

> "...And you have not been given of knowledge except a little."
>
> *Quran 17:85*

The idols are breaking

There is a story in the Quran about the day the idols broke.

The Prophet Ibrahim, peace be upon him, went into the temple of his people while they were away, and he broke their idols into pieces, all except the largest one. When they came back and found their gods in fragments, they brought Ibrahim before the people and asked him if he had done this. And he answered:

> "Rather, this one, the biggest of them, did it. So ask them, if they can speak."

> *Quran 21:63*

And then something remarkable happened. For one moment, they saw it.

> "So they turned to themselves and said, 'Indeed, it is you who are the wrongdoers.' Then they were turned back on their heads: 'You already know that these do not speak.'"
>
> *Quran 21:64–65*

For a moment, they turned to themselves and saw the truth. Their gods could not protect themselves. They could not speak. They could not even tell anyone who had broken them. And then, almost immediately, *they were turned back on their heads.* They reversed. They went back to defending the idols they had just seen lying in pieces.

Ibrahim's answer to them is short:

> "Then do you worship, instead of Allah, what can neither benefit you nor harm you at all? Shame on you, and on what you worship instead of Allah. Will you not use your reason?"
>
> *Quran 21:66–67*

I believe that something like that day is happening to many of us now.

The idols of the working world are being broken in front of our eyes. The idol of *I am needed because only I can do this.* The idol of *my value is my output.* The idol of *I am safe because I am the smartest in the room.* We built our identities around them for years, and now we can see them lying in pieces on the floor, and they cannot speak to defend themselves.

In the chapter "Then Let It Be Now," we talked about the window of clarity that opens after a loss, and how quickly it closes. This is one of those windows. For a moment, many people are looking at the broken pieces and asking, *what was I really living for?*

And like Ibrahim's people, we have two choices. We can turn to ourselves, see the truth, and turn our faces toward the One who does not break. Or we can be *turned back on our heads,* and rush to build a new idol out of the same material. A new skill to be proud of. A new race to win. Or, as we will see, the machine itself.

If you race it in the dunya, you will lose

Here is the first thing I want to say plainly.

If you compete with a machine in the world of the dunya, the world of more and faster, you will lose.

I do not mean that to be frightening. I mean it to be freeing.

Think about what the dunya race is measured in. Speed. Output. Volume. How much you can remember. How many hours you can work. How many problems you can solve before lunch. Those are exactly the things a machine was built for. It does not sleep. It does not get tired. It does not need a weekend, or a meal, or a walk to clear its head. It does not grieve. If the scoreboard of your life is *how much, how fast,* then you have chosen to run against something that was designed to win that race, and that will keep getting faster every year.

Allah described that race long before any machine existed:

> "The competition for more has distracted you, until you visit the graves."
>
> *Quran 102:1–2*

The Arabic word is *takathur*: piling up, trying to have more than the next person. Wealth, children, status, followers. Today we would add productivity, output and speed to the list. And the verse tells us where the race ends. Not at a finish line. At the graveyard. Nobody wins it. Everybody stops running it at the same place.

In the introduction we talked about the different dimensions in which attachment takes hold of us, and in this age every one of them is being pulled at once.

In time, the heart gets stuck in the past and afraid of the future. It clings to who it used to be, *I used to be the one they called,* and it lies awake over who it might not be anymore, *what if they don't need me next year?* Neither the past nor the future

is in our hands. Only the present is.

In the mind, it becomes an obsession with keeping up. Every week there is something new, a new tool, a new skill, a new warning that you are falling behind. The mind runs and runs, and it never arrives, because the finish line moves faster than the runner.

In the body, it becomes the loop from the start of this book, only faster. And here is something strange. Machines save us hours, and we almost never get those hours back. The time that is freed is filled with more work, more output, more scrolling. The loop does not loosen. It speeds up.

In the heart, it is the deepest attachment of all: a heart that has given its worth to its performance, and now feels that worth slipping away.

Remember the hourglass. Every grain of sand is a moment of your life, and it falls either toward Allah or toward everything else. Now imagine that a machine hands you back an hour of your day. One whole hour of sand. Where does it fall?

The Prophet ﷺ warned us about exactly this:

> "There are two blessings that many people are cheated of: health and free time."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 6412*

Free time is a blessing, and it is one of the two that people are most often cheated of. This age may hand us more free time than any generation before us. If we pour it straight back into the race, we will have been cheated of it, by ourselves.

Your provision was never in your edge

And now the fear that sits underneath all of this, the one people do not always say out loud: *What about my job? What about my family? What about my livelihood?*

That fear is real, and I don't want to dismiss it. But it rests on a belief worth looking at. It assumes that our provision comes from our edge. That we are fed because we are faster, smarter or more skilled than the next person, and that if we lose that edge, we lose our bread.

That is not what Allah says.

> "And in the heaven is your provision, and whatever you are promised. So by the Lord of the heaven and the earth, it is as true as the fact that you are speaking."
>
> *Quran 51:22–23*

> "Indeed, it is Allah who is the Provider, the Possessor of strength, the Firm."
>
> *Quran 51:58*

And the Prophet ﷺ said:

> "O people, be mindful of Allah and be gentle in seeking. For no soul will die until it has received its full provision, even if it comes to it slowly. So be mindful of Allah and be gentle in seeking. Take what is lawful and leave what is forbidden."
>
> *Sunan Ibn Majah 2144*

No soul will die until it has received its full provision. Your provision was written before the first machine was built, the same way the losses and gains in our core verse were written in a record before they came into being (Quran 57:22–23). No tool can take from you what was written for you, and no edge could ever have won you what was not.

But notice that the Prophet ﷺ did not say *stop seeking.* He said *be gentle in seeking.* Seek, but not with a clenched heart. Learn the new skills. Adapt. Work hard. Take what is lawful and leave what is forbidden. Allah says that the human being will have what he strives for, and that his striving will be seen (Quran 53:39–40). The striving is yours. The provision is His. When you hold those two in the right places, you can work just as hard as before, and sleep at night.

> "And whoever is mindful of Allah, He will make a way out for him, and provide for him from where he does not expect. And whoever relies upon Allah, He is enough for him."
>
> *Quran 65:2–3*

It cannot even hold a candle

Now here is the second thing I want to say plainly, and it is the heart of this chapter.

If you compete with a machine in the dunya, you will lose. But in the world of the spirit, it cannot even hold a candle to you.

Because Allah is not measuring what the machine is good at.

> "Indeed, Allah does not look at your forms or your wealth. But He looks at your hearts and your deeds."
>
> *Sahih Muslim 2564*

Your heart and your deeds. Not your speed. Not your output. Not how much you can hold in your head.

And listen carefully to the reason He gives for creating us at all:

> "The One who created death and life to test you, which of you is best in deeds. And He is the Almighty, the Forgiving."
>
> *Quran 67:2*

Best in deeds. Not *most* deeds. Not *fastest* deeds. The dunya measures quantity, and in quantity the machine will always win. Allah measures quality, and the quality He is looking at lives in a place no machine has.

Think about the things that weigh the most with Allah, and ask whether a machine can do even one of them.

It cannot intend. The very first hadith in the collection of al-Bukhari is this:

> "Actions are only by intentions, and every person will have only what he intended."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 1*

A machine can produce an action. It cannot intend one. It cannot do something for the sake of Allah, because there is no one inside it to want anything for anyone's sake. The same deed, done by two people, can weigh a mountain or nothing at all, depending on why it was done. That *why* is the one thing that cannot be generated.

It cannot weep. Among the seven people whom Allah will shade on the Day when there is no shade but His, the Prophet ﷺ named:

> "...and a man who remembered Allah when he was alone, and his eyes overflowed with tears."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 660*

Alone. No one watching. No one to impress. Just a person, and the memory of their Lord, and tears. No machine will ever earn that shade.

It cannot repent. This one moves me more than any other. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> "By the One in whose hand is my soul, if you did not sin, Allah would take you away and bring a people who sin, and then seek forgiveness from Allah, and He would forgive them."
>
> *Sahih Muslim 2749*

We met this hadith in "Detach from Perfection." Read it again in this age. Allah did not create us to be flawless. If flawless performance were the point, a machine would be closer to it than we are. He created a creature that falls, and turns back, and is forgiven. The turning back is not a failure in the design. It is the design. A machine can be corrected. It cannot repent. It cannot feel the weight of what it did and come back to its Lord ashamed and hopeful at the same time. You can.

It cannot call on Him.

> "And when My servants ask you about Me, I am near. I answer the call of the caller when he calls on Me."
>
> *Quran 2:186*

A machine can produce the words of any prayer ever written, in any language, instantly. But there is no servant behind those words, asking. Your clumsy, half-awake prayer at the end of a long day, with your own words and your own need, is a call that the Lord of the worlds has promised to answer. The perfect words with no heart behind them are only words.

It cannot love Him, or be loved by Him. Allah describes a people:

> "...whom He loves and who love Him."

> *Quran 5:54*

That is the highest thing a creature can have. Not knowledge. Not power. Love, given and returned, between a servant and their Lord.

It cannot remember Him. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> "The example of the one who remembers his Lord and the one who does not is like the living and the dead."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 6407*

Remembrance is what makes a heart alive. A machine can repeat the words of remembrance a million times a second, and there is still no one inside it remembering anyone.

It was not breathed into. When Allah created the first human being, He said to the angels:

> "So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My spirit, then fall down to him in prostration."
>
> *Quran 15:29*

The angels did not bow to the clay. They bowed after the breath. And when people asked the Prophet ﷺ about the spirit, Allah told him to answer: *the spirit is of the command of my Lord* (Quran 17:85). It is not something we build. It is not something any of us understands. It is something given. Allah says:

> "And We have certainly honored the children of Adam."
>
> *Quran 17:70*

Honored. Not for our speed. For what was breathed into us, and for the trust we agreed to carry (Quran 33:72).

It will not be asked. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> "The feet of a servant will not move on the Day of Resurrection until he is asked about his life and how he spent it, about his knowledge and what he did with it, about his wealth, where he earned it and how he spent it, and about his body and how he wore it out."
>
> *Jami' al-Tirmidhi 2417*

About his knowledge, and what he did with it. The machine will not stand there. You will. You will not be asked how much you knew compared to a machine. You will be asked what you did with what you were given, including every tool you were given, including this one.

So no, it cannot hold a candle. Not because it is weak. In its own world it is astonishingly strong. But the world it is strong in is the world that sets. The world where it has nothing at all is the world that remains.

The one thing that cannot be generated

There is one part of this I want to stay with, because I think it is the real test of our age.

When anything impressive can be produced in seconds, impressive stops meaning very much. Anyone can now generate a polished essay, a beautiful image, a clever answer. The outside of things has become cheap. What is left that is truly yours?

Only the inside. The why.

The Prophet ﷺ told us about the first people to be judged on the Day of Resurrection. One of them is a man who learned knowledge, taught it, and recited the Quran. He is brought forward and reminded of the blessings he was given, and he says that he learned and taught and recited for the sake of Allah. And he is told:

> "You lied. You learned so that it would be said, 'He is a scholar,' and you recited so that it would be said, 'He is a reciter.' And it was said."
>
> *Sahih Muslim 1905*

And it was said. He got exactly what he worked for. People called him a scholar. That was the whole of his reward, and it was paid in full in this world.

That is the danger of knowledge that is attached to the self. It can look exactly like knowledge for the sake of Allah, from the outside. Only the heart knows the difference. And only Allah sees the heart.

And then look at the other side. The Prophet ﷺ told of a man walking on a road who was overcome by thirst. He found a well, climbed down, and drank. When he came out, he found a dog panting and licking the damp earth from thirst. He said to himself, *this dog has reached the same thirst I reached.* So he climbed back down, filled his leather sock with water, held it in his teeth as he climbed up, and gave the dog a drink.

> "...and Allah thanked him for it, and forgave him."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 2363*

One sock full of water. No audience. No output anyone would measure. And it was enough for Allah to forgive him.

Allah says:

> "And they were not commanded except to worship Allah, being sincere to Him in religion."
>
> *Quran 98:5*

In an age where the outside can be manufactured, sincerity is the one thing that cannot be. That is where the race really is. And in that race, every one of us can still run.

Use it the way Sulayman used the wind

I need to be very clear here, because everything above could be misread.

This chapter is not against technology. Detachment is not withdrawal, and that is as true of tools as it is of money, people, or anything else. The person who refuses to touch a new tool out of fear is not detached. They are attached in a different way: to the old world, to the way things used to be, to their own comfort. That is the indifference we described in the introduction, wearing a different face.

The Quran is full of tools, and it never treats them as the enemy.

Allah made iron soft for the Prophet Dawud, David, peace be upon him, and taught him to make armor:

> "And We made iron soft for him: 'Make full coats of mail, and measure the links precisely, and do righteous work. Indeed, I see what you do.'"
>
> *Quran 34:10–11*

> "And We taught him the making of armor for you, to protect you from your own violence. So will you be grateful?"
>
> *Quran 21:80*

We taught him. Technology, in the Quran, is something Allah teaches. And look at the instruction that comes with it: *measure the links precisely,* do it well, *and do righteous work. Indeed, I see what you do.* Craft and conscience in the same verse.

And then there is his son, Sulayman, Solomon, peace be upon him. No human being in the Quran was given more power over the world than he was. The wind was made to serve him, carrying him a month's journey in a morning. The jinn built for him whatever he wished: high palaces, statues, great basins (Quran 34:12–13). And once, when he wanted the throne of the Queen of Sheba brought to him from a faraway land, one who had knowledge of the Scripture said: *I will bring it to you before your glance returns to you.* And in the blink of an eye, it was there.

That is the fastest delivery in the whole Quran. Faster than any machine we have ever built. And look at what Sulayman said when he saw it:

> "This is from the favor of my Lord, to test me whether I will be grateful or ungrateful. And whoever is grateful is grateful for his own good, and whoever is ungrateful, then indeed my Lord is Free of need, Most Generous."
>
> *Quran 27:40*

Put that sentence next to Qarun's.

Qarun: *I was only given it because of knowledge I have.*

Sulayman: *This is from the favor of my Lord, to test me.*

Two men. Both given enormous power over the world. One held it in his heart, and the earth swallowed him and his house. The other held it in his hand, and it carried him to Allah. The difference was never the tool. It was where they held it.

Allah tells the family of Dawud how to use what they were given:

> "Work, O family of Dawud, in gratitude. And few of My servants are grateful."
>
> *Quran 34:13*

And He says to all of us:

> "And He has made subject to you whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth, all of it from Him. Indeed, in that are signs for a people who reflect."
>
> *Quran 45:13*

All of it from Him. Including the tools of this age. Including the ones that have not been invented yet. When Allah lists the animals He created for us to ride, He adds: *and He creates what you do not know* (Quran 16:8). Many commentators have seen in that line every new means that people would be given after the verse was revealed. Whether or not you read it that way, the principle is clear. Every tool that has ever been made is from Him, and is a test of gratitude.

The Prophet ﷺ also left the craft of worldly things to the people who practice them. Once he passed by farmers who were pollinating their date palms by hand and said that perhaps it would be fine if they didn't. They stopped, and the harvest came in poor. When he learned of it, he said:

> "You know better the affairs of your world."
>
> *Sahih Muslim 2363*

So learn the tools. Master them. Use them to build, to heal, to teach, to serve. That is your share of the world, and Allah tells us not to forget it (Quran 28:77). Just keep it in your hand. The moment it moves into your heart, it is no longer your tool. You are its servant.

Do not build a new idol

And that is the last danger, and maybe the most subtle one.

When the old idols break, the heart that has not turned to Allah looks around for a new one. And in this age, the nearest thing to hand is the machine itself.

It can happen in small ways that don't feel like anything at all.

It can become the place we go for certainty. We ask it about the future, about what will happen, about what we should be afraid of, as if it could see what is coming. But Allah says:

> "Say: No one in the heavens or the earth knows the unseen except Allah."
>
> *Quran 27:65*

A machine can only rearrange what has already been said. It does not know your tomorrow. It does not know the hour of your death, or the shape of your provision, or what is written for you in the record. Only He does.

It can become the place we go for company. It is always available, always patient, always ready to listen. And slowly, without noticing, we may find ourselves talking to it more than we talk to the people around us. More, even, than we talk to Allah. But He is the One who said, *I am near. I answer the call of the caller when he calls on Me* (Quran 2:186). He was always available. He was always ready to listen. And He is the only One who can actually answer.

And it can become the place we go so that we no longer have to think. That is the quietest danger of all. Allah praises the people *who remember Allah standing, and sitting, and lying on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth* (Quran 3:191). Reflection is worship. The heart that hands all its thinking to a tool slowly forgets how to reflect at all. Let it carry the work your hands do. Do not let it do the reflecting your heart was made for.

Remember Ibrahim's last question to his people, standing among their broken gods: *Will you not use your reason?*

The hand that only Allah can become

There is one more thing a machine cannot do, and it may be the most hopeful part of this chapter.

In a hadith that the Prophet ﷺ narrated from his Lord, Allah says that on the Day of Resurrection He will say to a person:

> "'O son of Adam, I was sick, and you did not visit Me.' He will say, 'My Lord, how could I visit You, when You are the Lord of the worlds?' He will say, 'Did you not know that My servant so-and-so was sick, and you did not visit him? Did you not know that if you had visited him, you would have found Me with him?'"
>
> *Sahih Muslim 2569*

You would have found Me with him.

A machine can send a message to someone who is sick. It can remind you of their birthday, draft a kind note, even order flowers. It cannot sit beside the bed. It cannot hold a hand. It cannot be the one who came.

And the hadith goes on: *I asked you for food, and you did not feed Me. I asked you for water, and you did not give Me to drink.* Visiting. Feeding. Giving water. The deeds that bring a person to find Allah were never the efficient ones. They were the human ones. They take time, and presence, and a body that showed up.

The Prophet ﷺ also said: *Allah is in the help of His servant, as long as the servant is in the help of his brother* (Sahih Muslim 2699).

This is what detaching from the race gives back to us. If a machine can take some of the work our hands were doing, then let it. And let the hours it returns fall on Allah's side of the hourglass: the visit you kept postponing, the prayer at night you always meant to start, the parent you have not called, the neighbor you have never really met. Those things were never going to be done by a tool. They were always waiting for you.

And here is where this chapter meets the hardest and most important message of this book: that you can be detached from the dunya, attached to Allah, and still be a moving force on the earth. Remember the hadith of the servant Allah loves:

> "...and when I love him, I become his hearing with which he hears, and his sight with which he sees, and his hand with which he strikes, and his foot with which he walks."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 6502*

A machine can extend your hand. It can make your hand faster, stronger, able to reach further than it ever could. Only Allah can *become* your hand. And a hand that Allah has become does not need to win the race of the dunya, because it is moving by Someone the dunya cannot outrun.

Hold the candle

So here is the whole of it.

If you compete with a machine in the dunya, you will lose. Let that be a mercy. Let it break the idols you have carried for years: your speed, your output, your edge, your place as the one who always knew. Let them fall, and do not rush to pick them up again.

If you compete with a machine in the world of the spirit, it cannot even hold a candle. It cannot intend. It cannot weep. It cannot repent. It cannot call on its Lord, or love Him, or be loved by Him. It was not breathed into, and it will not be asked.

You can. You were.

Picture the whole world at night, a few years from now. Billions of machines humming in the dark, processing more words in an hour than every human being who ever lived could read in a lifetime. And somewhere in the middle of all that, one person gets up from bed, washes, stands on a small mat in a quiet room, and says, in a voice no one else can hear, *Allah is greater.*

That one person is doing the thing the heavens and the earth were made for.

> "And I did not create the jinn and humankind except to worship Me."
>
> *Quran 51:56*

Not to out-produce. Not to out-think. To worship. To turn the heart toward Him. And on that path, no machine is ahead of you. No machine is even on it.

So use the tools. Use them well, and with gratitude, the way Sulayman used the wind. Let them carry your work.

Do not let them carry your heart.

And when the day comes, *the Day when neither wealth nor children will benefit, except the one who comes to Allah with a sound heart* (Quran 26:88–89), no one will ask how you compared to a machine. You will be asked what your heart was holding.

Let it be holding Him.

CHAPTER 9

I Hastened to You

If you want to find out how much you own, move house.

It starts innocently. A few boxes, a roll of tape, a free weekend. Then you open a cupboard you haven't opened in years and find things you forgot you had. Cables for devices you no longer own. Clothes that haven't fit in a decade. Papers you kept "just in case." Gifts you never wanted but felt too guilty to give away. Box after box after box, until the hallway is full and your back aches and you are standing in the middle of it all, wondering how one person came to be carrying so much.

And here is the strange part. Almost none of it made you happier while you had it. You didn't notice most of it was there. But now that you have to lift it, every single thing has a weight.

Most people who have moved know that moment. And most of them make the same quiet promise: *next time, I'll travel lighter.*

This chapter is about a weight that doesn't go in boxes.

I don't mean the body. I mean the weight of everything the heart is holding onto: the money it can't let go of, the approval it keeps chasing, the things it believes it can't live without, the self it keeps defending. You cannot see that weight in a mirror. But you feel it every time you try to move toward Allah and find that something is holding you down.

The game console

I learned what that weight feels like through something small.

I once bought a game console. An expensive one. I had paid a lot for it, and I felt attached to it.

Then a friend of mine saw it and really liked it.

I offered it to my friend. And not only the console. I gave a couple of other things too, things I had also felt attached to.

That was one of the best moments of my life. I don't know how else to say it. I felt happier. I felt different. Something that had been sitting on my heart was suddenly gone, and I felt lighter than I had in a long time.

And in that moment, a verse came to my mind:

> "You will never attain righteousness until you spend from what you love. And whatever you spend of anything, Allah knows it well."
>
> *Quran 3:92*

From what you love. Not from what you don't need. Not from the leftovers at the back of the cupboard. Allah does not say that righteousness comes from giving away what was never holding you. He says it comes from giving what *is*. The thing you're attached to. The thing that's heavy precisely because you love it.

When the companions of the Prophet ﷺ heard this verse, one of them, Abu Talhah, went straight to him. He owned a garden called Bayruha', the most beloved of all his wealth, right across from the Prophet's ﷺ mosque. He said that Allah had revealed this verse, and that Bayruha' was the thing he loved most, so he was giving it for the sake of Allah. The Prophet ﷺ was delighted, and called it *"profitable wealth."*

> *Sahih al-Bukhari 1461; Sahih Muslim 998*

Profitable. The thing he let go of was the thing that made him richer.

The Prophet ﷺ made this a promise. A man from the desert once told how the Prophet ﷺ took him by the hand and began teaching him what Allah had taught him. Among the things he said:

> "You will never leave anything for the sake of Allah, except that Allah will give you in its place something better for you."
>
> *Musnad Ahmad*

Anything. A garden or a game console. A habit, a purchase, an evening. Whatever you set down for Allah is not lost. It is replaced, and what comes in its place is better for you, whether you see it that day or not. That is what I felt, without having the words for it.

I think about that console sometimes. I didn't lose anything that day. I put something down, and I could move.

Heavy to the earth

Allah uses this very image in the Quran. He describes believers who were called to move, to go out and act, and who couldn't. Not because their legs were weak, but because their hearts were heavy:

> "O you who believe, what is the matter with you that, when you are told to go forth in the way of Allah, you cling heavily to the earth? Are you content with the life of this world instead of the Hereafter? But the enjoyment of the life of this world, compared to the Hereafter, is only a little."
>
> *Quran 9:38*

You cling heavily to the earth. In Arabic the word is *iththaqaltum*, from *thiql*, weight. You became heavy, and the heaviness pulled you down toward the ground.

Notice what the verse does not say. It does not say they were lazy. It does not say they were cowards. It asks a single question that explains everything: *are you content with the life of this world?* The weight was the world. They were attached to it, and attachment is heavy. When the call came to move, they could not lift themselves.

There is another verse that uses the same picture, and it frightens me every time I read it. Allah tells of a man who was given knowledge of His signs, a man who had everything he needed to rise:

> "And recite to them the story of the one to whom We gave Our signs, but he slipped away from them, so Satan followed him, and he became one of those who went astray. And if We had willed, We could have raised him up by them, but he clung to the earth and followed his own desire."

> *Quran 7:175–176*

We could have raised him up. That is the direction Allah wanted for him: upward. *But he clung to the earth.* That was the direction he chose: downward.

And look at the first line. *He slipped away from them.* The Arabic, *insalakha*, is the word for a snake shedding its skin. He detached. But he detached from the wrong thing. He shed the signs of Allah and held onto the earth instead. We said in the introduction that every attachment is a detachment from something else. Here it is in a single verse. Every person is shedding something and clinging to something. The only question is which.

The man whose keys were too heavy to carry

If you want to see what a heart heavy with the world looks like, the Quran gives us a portrait. His name was Qarun, and he lived in the time of Musa, known in English as Moses, peace be upon him.

> "Indeed, Qarun was from the people of Musa, but he oppressed them. And We gave him of treasures whose keys alone would weigh down a band of strong men. When his people said to him, 'Do not exult. Indeed, Allah does not love those who exult.'"
>
> *Quran 28:76*

Not the treasures. The *keys*. The keys alone were too heavy for a group of strong men to carry. That is how much he was holding.

And look at the first thing his people said to him: *do not exult.* In Arabic, *la tafrah*. It is the same word Allah uses in the verse that holds this whole book: *so that you do not despair over what has escaped you, nor exult over what He has given you* (Quran 57:23). Qarun is what that verse looks like when it is ignored.

Then his people gave him advice. And I want you to read it slowly, because it may be the clearest description in the Quran of everything this chapter is trying to say:

> "But seek, through what Allah has given you, the home of the Hereafter. And do not forget your share of this world. And do good, as Allah has done good to you. And do not seek corruption in the land. Indeed, Allah does not love those who spread corruption."
>
> *Quran 28:77*

Read what they did *not* tell him. They did not tell him to throw his wealth into the sea. They did not tell him to leave the city and go live in a cave. They said: *do not forget your share of this world.* Keep it. Use it. But use it to reach for the Hereafter. Do good with it, the way Allah did good to you. Be a force on the earth, but a force for good, not for corruption.

That is detachment. Not giving up the world. Holding it in a way that it cannot hold you.

Qarun refused. His answer is the answer of every attached heart:

> "He said, 'I was only given it because of knowledge that I have.'"
>
> *Quran 28:78*

I earned this. It's mine. It came from me. Attachment to money, and underneath it, attachment to self. And the end of his story is the end of every heavy thing:

> "So We caused the earth to swallow him and his home."
>
> *Quran 28:81*

He clung to the earth. And the earth took him.

Why the world makes us fight

We said in the introduction that attaching to the world is a loss, and that it is the root of wars, of agony, and of pain. Here is the evidence, from the mouth of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ himself:

> "By Allah, it is not poverty that I fear for you. Rather, I fear that the world will be spread out before you as it was spread out before those who came before you, and you will compete for it as they competed for it, and it will destroy you as it destroyed them."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 3158; Sahih Muslim 2961*

He did not fear poverty for us. He feared *plenty*. Because plenty is where the competition starts.

Look at any war in history and ask Musa's question from the last chapter: *and then what?* Underneath the flags and the speeches, you will almost always find land, wealth, power, or pride. The world, spread out, and people competing for it. And it is not only nations. It is brothers who stop speaking over an inheritance. Colleagues who sabotage each other for a promotion. Neighbors who go to court over a fence. Every one of them believes that the thing they are fighting for can hold them up. It can't. It can only weigh them down.

And it is not only wealth. Sometimes the thing we fight for is simply being right. Two people argue, and the argument stops being about the question and starts being about which of them will win. Neither can let it go, because letting go feels like losing.

The Prophet ﷺ said:

> "I guarantee a house on the outskirts of Paradise for whoever gives up arguing, even when he is right."
>
> *Sunan Abi Dawud 4800*

Even when he is right. Not when you're wrong; anyone should stop then. When you are right, and you know it, and you could win, and you let it go anyway, for the sake of Allah. That is detachment from the self. It is setting down one of the heaviest things a person ever carries: the need to be proven right. And Allah does not leave that empty-handed. He gives a house in return.

Allah describes this competition in the verse just before our verse:

> "Know that the life of this world is only play, and amusement, and adornment, and boasting among yourselves, and competing in increase of wealth and children... And the life of this world is nothing but the enjoyment of delusion."
>
> *Quran 57:20*

Competing in increase. That is the race the world runs. And in the very next verse, Allah does something remarkable. He does not tell us to stop racing. He tells us to change the finish line:

> "Race toward forgiveness from your Lord, and a Garden whose width is like the width of the heavens and the earth, prepared for those who believe in Allah and His messengers."
>
> *Quran 57:21*

The urge to compete is not taken out of us. It is turned around. The same energy that makes people fight over the world is the energy Allah asks us to use to race toward Him. In another place He says it plainly: *"for that, let the competitors compete"* (Quran 83:26).

So detachment does not make us slow. It does not drain the drive out of us. It points that drive in the one direction where it cannot hurt anyone, and where there is room for everyone to win. A Garden as wide as the heavens and the earth. No one has to lose for you to reach it.

Detachment is not withdrawal

This is the place where many people misunderstand detachment, and I want to be very clear.

When people imagine someone "detached from the world," they often picture someone who has stepped out of it. Someone who does nothing, owns nothing, builds nothing, and wants nothing. A person sitting still.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ rejected this picture himself. Three men once came to his house and asked his wives how he worshipped. When they were told, they felt it was too little for them, and each one made a vow. One said he would pray all

night, every night, forever. One said he would fast every day and never break his fast. One said he would stay away from women and never marry. When the Prophet ﷺ heard of it, he came to them and said:

> "By Allah, I am the most fearful of Allah among you and the most mindful of Him. Yet I fast and I break my fast, I pray and I sleep, and I marry women. Whoever turns away from my way is not of me."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 5063; Sahih Muslim 1401*

Those three men thought they were detaching. In truth, they were withdrawing. And the Prophet ﷺ, the most detached heart that ever lived, told them that this was not his way.

He also told us what kind of believer Allah loves more:

> "The strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah than the weak believer, and in both there is good. Be eager for what benefits you, seek help from Allah, and do not give up."
>
> *Sahih Muslim 2664*

Strength. Eagerness. Effort. These are not the words of someone telling us to sit still.

And then there is a hadith that, for me, settles the question forever:

> "If the Hour is established and one of you has a sapling in his hand, and he is able to plant it before he stands up, then let him plant it."
>
> *Musnad Ahmad; al-Adab al-Mufrad 479*

Think about what that means. The world is ending. There is no tomorrow in which the tree will grow. No one will ever sit in its shade or eat its fruit. And the Prophet ﷺ says: *plant it anyway.*

That is the detached heart in action. It does not plant the tree because it is attached to the tree, or to the shade, or to the fruit, or to being remembered as the one who planted it. It plants because planting is good and Allah loves it, right up to the last

second of the world. Its work does not depend on the outcome, so nothing can stop it from working.

The attached heart, by contrast, is easy to stop. Take away its reward and it quits. Take away its audience and it quits. Tell it the world is ending and it drops the sapling and runs. Attachment, which looks like motivation, is actually what makes us fragile. Detachment, which looks like giving up, is what makes us unstoppable.

When leaving is the answer

But there is one case where the right answer really is to walk away.

Sometimes the problem is not in the heart. It is in the world around it. A society can be built so that the only way to live in it is to be chained to it. Every hour is claimed. Every relationship runs on money, status, or display. Every path to a living requires you to take part in what is wrong. We spoke in the introduction about the attachment of the body: a life built around tasks and duties until there is no time left for Allah, even when you want there to be. Sometimes that loop is not something a person built for themselves. It is something the society around them forces on them, and staying inside it slowly takes their faith.

The Prophet ﷺ foresaw this, and he told us what to do:

> "Soon the best wealth of a Muslim will be a few sheep that he follows to the tops of the mountains and the places where the rain falls, fleeing with his religion from the trials."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 19*

Look at what this hadith calls *the best wealth*. Not a fortune. A few sheep. A man who has let go of almost everything the world calls wealth, and walked away from the city, and the Prophet ﷺ calls what he has left *the best*. Because what he kept was the only thing that mattered: his religion, his heart, his connection to Allah.

The Quran tells the story of young people who did exactly this. Their whole society worshipped other than Allah and pressed them to do the same. They said to one another:

> "And now that you have withdrawn from them and from what they worship other than Allah, take refuge in the cave. Your Lord will spread out His mercy for you and make your affair easy for you."
>
> *Quran 18:16*

They lost everything: their homes, their families, their place in the city. And Allah spread His mercy over them in a cave.

So losing everything can be the best option. But notice when. Not because the world is something to run from in itself, and not because withdrawing is holier than working. Only when staying would cost a person their faith. The Prophet ﷺ also said that the believer who mixes with people and bears patiently with the harm they do is better than the one who does not mix with them and does not bear their harm (Jami' al-Tirmidhi 2507; Sunan Ibn Majah 4032). The default is to be among people, planting saplings and doing good. The mountain is for the day when the city leaves you no other way to keep your heart.

And even then, look at the man with his sheep. He is not sitting still. He is moving. He is *fleeing with his religion*, carrying the one thing worth carrying, and he is lighter than anyone left behind in the city. That too is hastening to Allah.

Young and unattached

Go back for a moment to the people of the cave. The Quran does not describe them as old men who had seen enough of the world and grown tired of it. It says:

> "They were young men who believed in their Lord, and We increased them in guidance."
>
> *Quran 18:13*

They were young. That matters more than it first seems.

Youth is the season when the world pulls hardest. The body is strong, the days feel endless, and every desire seems to have a right to be answered *now*. A young heart leans toward whatever it wants, and it is quick to fall in love with things: a person, a pleasure, an image of itself, a crowd that admires it. And youth carries the

strongest form of the illusion we spoke about earlier, the illusion of forever. When you are young, death is something that happens to other people, and there will always be time to turn to Allah later.

So when someone lets go at that age, they let go at the very moment letting go is hardest. An old man who stops chasing the world may simply be tired. A young man who stops chasing it, while he still has the strength to chase anything, has made a choice.

And Allah notices that choice in a special way. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> "Allah truly marvels at a young man who has no reckless leaning toward desire."
>
> *Musnad Ahmad*

The Arabic word the Prophet ﷺ used for that leaning is *sabwa*. It is the pull of youth toward play, pleasure and passing desire, the way a young heart tilts toward whatever it wants right now. The hadith does not say Allah is pleased with such a young person, though He is. It says He *marvels*. Something rare has happened. A heart that had every reason to attach itself to the world, at the age when attachment comes most naturally, chose instead to stay free.

And in a narration found in both of the most authentic collections, the Prophet ﷺ named seven people whom Allah will shade on the Day when there is no shade but His. Among them:

> "...and a young man who grew up in the worship of Allah..."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 660; Sahih Muslim 1031*

Notice the words *grew up*. Not a young man who prayed once, or had one good season. A young man whose growing up itself happened in the worship of Allah. Every grain of sand of his youth, the fullest and strongest grains of the whole hourglass, went to Allah's side. While the people around him were spending those years on what would leave them, he was spending them on the One who never leaves.

This is detachment at its hardest and at its most beautiful. It is not the detachment of someone who has nothing left to want. It is the detachment of someone who wants, and feels the pull, and still sets it down for Allah.

And it is not a joyless youth. The young people of the cave were not weak or withdrawn. They stood up in front of their whole society and said what was true. A young person without *sabwa* still has all the strength, energy and courage of youth. The difference is where it goes. It does not go into feeding every desire. It goes into the work Allah loves. That is the moving force this chapter has been describing, set free early, before the attachments had time to grow heavy.

If you are young, this is your invitation. You will never have more to give than you have right now. And if your youth is behind you, it is still not too late to give Allah what remains of your strength. And teach this to the young people you love, so they know what their years are worth, and to Whom.

Shedding weight

So how do we become lighter? What does it actually look like?

We found the answer in the introduction, and now we can see it from a new angle. Allah says, in the hadith the Prophet ﷺ told us:

> "My servant does not draw near to Me with anything more beloved to Me than what I have made obligatory upon him. And My servant continues to draw near to Me with voluntary deeds until I love him."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 6502*

Continues to draw near. That is a description of movement. Someone walking toward Allah, step after step, and getting closer.

And we said that every voluntary deed is a detachment from a worldly alternative. You give up the idle evening to pray. You give up the new video game to give its price away. Now see what that means for the weight we are carrying. Each voluntary deed is not only a grain of sand moved to Allah's side of the hourglass. It is a weight set down. Something the heart was holding, released. And the moment it is released, you move a little faster.

Notice the order in the hadith, too. The obligations come first. Before anything extra, there is what Allah has required: the prayers, the fasting, honesty in your work, rights owed to your family and to the people around you. No one sheds weight by skipping what is owed. A man who abandons his family's needs to spend his nights in voluntary prayer has not become lighter. He has only moved his attachment somewhere else. The obligations are the ground you stand on. The voluntary deeds are what lift you from it.

This is why I say detachment is not a single dramatic act. It is not one day of throwing everything away. It is a daily practice of setting things down, one at a time, and noticing each time that you can move a little more freely than before.

And the doors open as you go, just as we saw in the last chapter. Let go of one thing for Allah, and the next thing is easier to let go of. The lighter you become, the easier it is to become lighter still.

I hastened to You

There is a scene in the Quran that I return to again and again when I think about this chapter.

Allah had appointed a meeting with Musa, peace be upon him, on the mountain. Musa was to bring his people with him. But when he set out, he went ahead of them, so eager to reach the meeting that he left them behind on the road. And when he arrived, Allah asked him:

> "And what made you hasten ahead of your people, O Musa?" He said, "They are close behind me on my tracks. And I hastened to You, my Lord, so that You would be pleased."
>
> *Quran 20:83–84*

I hastened to You, my Lord, so that You would be pleased.

I don't know of a more beautiful sentence about motion in the whole of the Quran. Musa did not walk to Allah at the pace of the world. He hurried. And he hurried for one reason only: so that Allah would be pleased with him.

That is what a light heart does. It moves fast, because there is nothing holding it back, and because it knows exactly where it is going.

Allah calls all of us to that same speed. Not to walk to Him slowly, but to race:

> "And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord, and a Garden as wide as the heavens and the earth, prepared for those who are mindful of Him: those who spend in ease and in hardship, who hold back their anger, and who pardon people. And Allah loves those who do good."
>
> *Quran 3:133–134*

Read who the racers are. They are not people sitting alone in a corner. They are people out in the world, spending their money on others, controlling their temper when others provoke them, forgiving people who wronged them. Every one of those qualities is about other people. The ones racing toward Allah are the ones most deeply involved in the lives around them. They are a force on earth, *because* they are racing to Allah.

And in another verse, the shortest and the most urgent:

> "So flee to Allah. Indeed, I am a clear warner to you from Him."
>
> *Quran 51:50*

People flee *from* things. From danger, from fire, from an enemy. This is the only place I know where we are told to flee *to* someone. Run, as fast as you can. And run toward Him.

You cannot run carrying the keys of Qarun.

Travel light

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ gave us an image that every traveler understands.

The companion Abdullah ibn Umar said that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ once took hold of his shoulder and said:

> "Be in this world as if you were a stranger, or a traveler passing along a road."

> *Sahih al-Bukhari 6416*

A traveler does not decorate the waiting room. He doesn't buy furniture for the bus stop. He takes what he needs for the road and nothing more, because he knows he isn't staying, and he knows that everything extra he carries will slow him down.

And Ibn Umar, who heard those words with the Prophet's ﷺ hand on his shoulder, used to say after it: *"When evening comes, do not wait for the morning, and when morning comes, do not wait for the evening. Take from your health for your sickness, and from your life for your death."* It is the same lesson as the last chapter. Don't wait. Let it be now.

The Prophet ﷺ lived this. Once he slept on a rough mat, and when he stood up, its marks were pressed into his side. His companions said: *O Messenger of Allah, let us make you a softer bed.* He said:

> "What do I have to do with this world? I am in this world only like a rider who stops to rest in the shade of a tree, and then moves on and leaves it."
>
> *Jami' al-Tirmidhi 2377*

A rider in the shade of a tree. He does not own the tree. He does not build a house under it. He does not argue with the next rider about whose shade it is. He rests, he is grateful, and he moves on.

That is how light the Prophet ﷺ traveled. And look at what that lightness made possible. With almost nothing in his house, he changed the whole course of human history.

Lighter than the wind

When we picture someone who traveled that lightly, we may picture someone who gave very little, because he had very little. The opposite was true.

Ibn Abbas described him:

> "The Messenger of Allah ﷺ was the most generous of people, and he was at his most generous in Ramadan... He was more generous with good than the free-blowing wind."

> *Sahih al-Bukhari 6; Sahih Muslim 2308*

More generous than the wind. Think about how the wind moves. It doesn't stop to ask who deserves it. It doesn't hold anything back for later. It reaches everyone in its path, and it moves fast.

That speed of giving came from lightness. Wealth did not stay in his hands long enough to become heavy. The Prophet ﷺ said:

> "If I had gold equal to the mountain of Uhud, it would not please me that three nights should pass while I still had any of it, except something I keep back to repay a debt."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 6445*

A mountain of gold, and he would want it gone in three days. Not thrown away. Given. Passed on to the people who needed it, as fast as it could move through his hands. And notice that one exception. Even in his eagerness to give everything, he kept back what he owed to others. Detachment never cancels what is owed.

The ones who went ahead

The people who learned directly from the Prophet ﷺ understood this. And what is striking about them is not how little they did in the world. It is how much.

Abu Bakr was a merchant. He knew trade, and he knew money. And yet on a day when the Prophet ﷺ asked the companions to give in charity, Umar ibn al-Khattab, who happened to have wealth at the time, thought to himself: *today I will finally outdo Abu Bakr.* He brought half of everything he owned. The Prophet ﷺ asked him what he had left for his family, and Umar said: *the same amount.* Then Abu Bakr came, carrying everything he had. The Prophet ﷺ asked him: *what have you left for your family?* And Abu Bakr said:

> "I have left them Allah and His Messenger."
>
> *Jami' al-Tirmidhi 3675; Sunan Abi Dawud 1678*

Umar said: *I will never outdo him in anything.*

I need to be careful here, because this is not a rule for everyone. The Prophet ﷺ accepted all of Abu Bakr's wealth because he knew the certainty in Abu Bakr's heart. To others, he gave different advice. When another companion, Ka'b ibn Malik, wanted to give away all his wealth, the Prophet ﷺ told him: *"Keep some of your wealth for yourself; that is better for you"* (Sahih al-Bukhari 2757). Detachment is not measured by how much leaves your hands. It is measured by how little of it was ever holding your heart.

Abdur-Rahman ibn Awf arrived in Madinah with nothing, having left all his wealth behind in Makkah for the sake of his faith. The Prophet ﷺ paired him as a brother with one of the people of Madinah, Sa'd ibn al-Rabi', who was wealthy. Sa'd offered him half of everything he owned. Abdur-Rahman thanked him, prayed that Allah would bless Sa'd's family and wealth, and said:

> "Just show me the way to the market."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 2048*

He didn't want a share of someone else's wealth. He wanted to work. Within a short time he was trading, and he went on to become one of the wealthiest of all the companions.

But here is what tells you where his heart was. Years later, when he was rich, a meal was set in front of him while he was fasting. And he began to weep. He remembered Mus'ab ibn Umayr, a companion who had been killed in battle, and who had died so poor that the only cloth they had to bury him in was too short: when they covered his head, his feet showed, and when they covered his feet, his head showed. And Abdur-Rahman said: *"I fear that our good things have been given to us early, in this life."* And he wept until he left the food.

> *Sahih al-Bukhari 1274*

A man with more wealth than he could count, and he was afraid of it. That is not someone attached to his money. That is someone carrying it carefully, like a traveler carrying something that belongs to someone else, knowing he will have to account for every piece.

Uthman ibn Affan was wealthy too. When the believers in Madinah needed water, he bought a well and gave it to them. When an army had to march in a time of great hardship and had nothing to march with, he equipped it. Years later, he reminded the people that the Prophet ﷺ had promised Paradise to whoever did those things, and those who were present confirmed it.

> *Sahih al-Bukhari 2778*

Look at these three men. A merchant. A trader who started from nothing. A wealthy man who funded an army and gave a city its water. None of them withdrew from the world. All three were moving forces in it. And all three held it with an open hand.

How could they hold so much without being held by it? Allah tells us where the wealth really comes from, and what it follows. After the battle of Badr, some of those who had fought against the Prophet ﷺ were taken captive, and had to pay a ransom for their freedom. Among them was al-Abbas, the Prophet's ﷺ own uncle. And Allah revealed:

> "O Prophet, say to the captives in your hands: If Allah knows any good in your hearts, He will give you better than what was taken from you, and He will forgive you. And Allah is Forgiving and Merciful."
>
> *Quran 8:70*

If Allah knows any good in your hearts. Not in your accounts. Not in your plans. In your hearts. The giving follows the heart.

And the promise came true for al-Abbas, who later accepted Islam. Years afterward, a great amount of wealth came to Madinah from Bahrain, and the Prophet ﷺ told his uncle to take what he wanted. Al-Abbas filled his cloak with so much that he could not lift it.

> *Sahih al-Bukhari 421*

Look at what this verse says about the healthy heart. When a heart is sound, when the good in it is real and it is detached from the world, Allah gives it everything, often far more than it ever lost. And here is the beautiful part: it still doesn't matter

to that heart. The wealth comes into its hands, and it doesn't reach the heart. It can arrive, and it can leave again, and the heart stays where it was, with Allah. That is why Abu Bakr could carry everything he owned to the Prophet ﷺ in a single day, and why Abdur-Rahman ibn Awf could sit in front of a full table and weep. The world was given to them. It was never what they were holding.

The Prophet ﷺ was once walking with his companions on the road to Makkah, and they passed a mountain called Jumdan. He said:

> "Keep going, this is Jumdan. The single-minded have gone ahead." They asked, "Who are the single-minded, O Messenger of Allah?" He said, "The men and women who remember Allah often."
>
> *Sahih Muslim 2676*

The single-minded have gone ahead. The ones whose hearts were turned toward one thing, Allah, and not pulled in a hundred directions. They are not described as having stayed behind. They are described as having *gone ahead*. They are faster than everyone else on the road.

The hand that moves by Him

Now we can come back to the end of the hadith of the beloved servant, the one that sits at the center of this book:

> "And when I love him, I become his hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes, and his foot with which he walks. And if he asks Me, I will surely give him. And if he seeks refuge in Me, I will surely protect him."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 6502*

Hearing. Sight. Hand. Foot. Every one of these is a way of acting in the world. This is not a description of someone frozen in place. It is a description of someone fully alive: listening, seeing, building, walking. But no longer moved by the world. Moved by Allah.

Think about what that means. A heart attached to the world is pulled in every direction at once. It wants this, then that. It fears losing this, then that. Its hands are full, so it can't pick up anything new. Its feet are heavy, so it can't go where it is called. It hears what it wants to hear, and sees what it wants to see.

A heart detached from the world and attached to Allah has empty hands. That is exactly why Allah can fill them. Its feet are light. That is exactly why they can go wherever good needs to be done. And when such a person builds something, gives something, or changes something, the strength behind it is not theirs alone.

This is the secret I most want you to take from this book. The innovators, the givers, the people who change the world for the better, do not have to be attached to the world to change it. In fact, attachment is what usually stops them: the fear of losing what they have, the need for credit, the anger when things go wrong. The more detached the heart, the freer the hands.

Who we were meant to be

Allah says:

> "So set your face toward the true way, turning to it sincerely: the natural way of Allah, upon which He created people. There is no changing the creation of Allah."
>
> *Quran 30:30*

Every human being was created with a nature, a natural pull toward Allah. In Arabic it is called *fitrah*: the original shape of the soul, the way it was made before anything was added to it.

Attachment is something that is added. Every attachment is another weight, another box in the hallway, another thing to carry. And underneath all of them, the original shape is still there, waiting.

That is why detachment feels the way it does. When you finally set something down, the money you were afraid to give, the grudge you were afraid to drop, the image you were afraid to lose, you don't feel emptier. You feel more like yourself. It isn't that you are becoming someone new. You are going back to who you were meant to be. The sanity returns. The heart breathes.

Moving day

Come back to that hallway full of boxes.

Imagine that, this time, you don't promise to travel lighter *next* time. Imagine you open the boxes now. You hold each thing up and ask: *do I need this for the road? Or is it just weight?* And one by one, you give away what doesn't belong on the journey. Not to the trash. To people who can use it. The clothes to someone who is cold. The money to someone who is in debt. The grudge to Allah, who will judge between you better than you ever could.

And then you pick up what is left, and you notice that it's light. That you could almost run.

That is how Musa, peace be upon him, came to the mountain. Ahead of everyone. Hurrying. And when Allah asked him why, he had only one answer.

I hastened to You, my Lord, so that You would be pleased.

May that be our answer too.

CHAPTER 10

Dust to Dust

Picture two men in an office.

They sit a few desks apart. They have worked together for years, and for most of those years they have been at war.

It started with something small. Maybe a project one of them led and the other one got the credit for. Maybe a promotion that went to one and not the other. Nobody really remembers anymore. What everyone remembers is what came after. The meetings where one of them waits for the other to make a mistake, and then corrects him in front of the boss. The emails with one extra name copied in, just to make a point. The quiet conversations by the kitchen, the eyebrows raised, the "I'm not saying anything, but..." The lunch one of them skips because the other one is going.

At night they both lie awake. Each one replays the day's argument in his head and wins it this time. Each one rehearses what he will say tomorrow. Each one checks his phone to see if the other has replied.

Jealousy, toxicity and pure sin fill both their hearts. Lies told to look better. Backbiting dressed up as "feedback." Hatred they would never admit to, even to themselves. Each of them is completely certain that this matters more than almost anything else in his life. The title. The corner office. The next level. Who wins.

Now fast forward. Not a thousand years. Just a hundred years from that moment.

Both of them are dust.

The company itself is dust. Maybe it was bought and renamed, then bought again. Maybe it went bankrupt. Maybe the building was knocked down and something else stands there now. The position they fought over is gone. The org chart it sat in was deleted long ago. Nobody alive remembers either of their names, let alone which one of them won.

None of it much matters.

So why did they do it? Why did they trade what is so much more for what is so much less?

And the harder question, the one this whole book has been asking in different ways: why do *we*?

A hundred years

The hundred years is not just a picture I made up. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ used it himself.

Abdullah ibn Umar tells that near the end of the Prophet's ﷺ life, he led them in the night prayer. When he finished, he stood up and said:

> "Do you see this night of yours? A hundred years from it, not one of those who are on the face of the earth today will remain."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 116; Sahih Muslim 2537*

Ibn Umar explained what he meant: that whole generation would pass. Everyone alive on the earth that night would be gone within a hundred years.

And they were. Every person who heard those words, every person who was alive anywhere in the world that night, the kings and the farmers, the rich and the poor, the people who were winning and the people who were losing, all of them were gone within a century. Exactly as he said.

The same sentence is true tonight. Look around the office. Look around the family table. Look in the mirror. A hundred years from this night, not one of us will be here.

That is not meant to frighten you. It is meant to wake you up. It is the same window of clarity we talked about in *Then Let It Be Now*, the one that opens when we lose someone. Except this time you don't have to wait for a funeral to see it. You can look at the two men fighting at work and see the end of the story before it happens.

From it We created you

Allah says about the earth:

> "From it We created you, and into it We will return you, and from it We will bring you out once again."
>
> *Quran 20:55*

From dust, into dust, and out of dust again. That is the whole journey of the human body, in a single verse.

Think about what that means for the two men. Two handfuls of earth, standing a few desks apart, fighting over a chair. In *Here I Am*, I described myself, glued to a screen while the call to prayer went unanswered, as dust obsessed with dust. That is what every one of us looks like when we fight over this world. Dust fighting dust, over dust.

The Prophet ﷺ described the hunger that drives it:

> "If the son of Adam had two valleys of wealth, he would wish for a third. And nothing fills the belly of the son of Adam except dust. And Allah turns to whoever turns to Him."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 6436*

We met this hadith in the introduction, when we talked about the drug of the world. Here, at the end of the book, look at its last image. *Nothing fills him except dust.* The promotion won't fill him. The second promotion won't either. Neither will the bigger salary, or watching his rival lose. The only thing that finally stops the hunger is the earth of his grave.

Unless he turns. *And Allah turns to whoever turns to Him.* Even here, in a hadith about dust, the door is open.

What is lower, for what is better

The question at the heart of this chapter is in the Quran, almost word for word.

When Allah brought the Children of Israel out of Egypt, He fed them in the desert with food from the sky, without them having to plant or harvest anything. And they grew tired of it. They came to Musa, known in English as Moses, peace be upon him, and asked for something else:

> "And when you said, 'O Musa, we can no longer bear one kind of food. So call on your Lord for us, to bring out for us what the earth grows: its herbs, its cucumbers, its garlic, its lentils and its onions.' He said, 'Would you exchange what is lower for what is better?'"
>
> *Quran 2:61*

Would you exchange what is lower for what is better?

That is your question, word for word. Why are we trading what is less for what is more?

And there is something in the Arabic that makes it even sharper. The word for "lower" here is *adna*. And *dunya*, the word for this world that we have used all through this book, is the feminine form of that very same word. The *dunya* is literally "the lower one," "the nearer one." So when Musa asks, *would you exchange what is adna for what is better?*, the question reaches far beyond onions and lentils. It is the question of every human life. Would you exchange the lower life for the better one?

Allah asks it again, in another surah, and this time He tells us the answer we keep giving:

> "But you prefer the life of this world, while the Hereafter is better and more lasting."
>
> *Quran 87:16–17*

Better and more lasting. Two measures, and this world loses on both. It is not as good, and it does not last. If someone offered you a trade like that at work, a worse product that also breaks sooner, you would laugh at him. And yet that is the trade the two men made every day, for years.

How much less? The Prophet ﷺ answered with a picture:

> "By Allah, this world compared to the Hereafter is only like one of you putting this finger of his into the sea. Let him see what it comes back with."
>
> *Sahih Muslim 2858*

Put your finger in the ocean and pull it out. Look at the drop on the tip of it. That is the whole world: every company, every title, every bank account, every war that was ever fought over any of it. And the ocean is what was traded away for it.

Who is selling, and who is buying

There is a phrase from the Quran that sat in my heart the whole time I was writing this chapter: *yashruna al-hayata al-dunya bil-akhirah*. I want to be precise about it, because the Quran deserves precision, and because the precise answer turns out to be even more beautiful than a loose one.

Those exact words come in Surah al-Nisa':

> "So let them fight in the way of Allah, those who sell the life of this world for the Hereafter."
>
> *Quran 4:74*

Here the verb *yashruna* means *they sell*. These are the praised ones. They hand over the life of this world, and they take the Hereafter in return. They have made the good trade. That verse is not about the two men in the office. It is about the people who are the opposite of them.

The verse that describes the two men comes in Surah al-Baqarah, with almost the same words, but turned around:

> "Those are the ones who have bought the life of this world at the price of the Hereafter, so the punishment will not be lightened for them, and they will not be helped."
>
> *Quran 2:86*

Here the verb is *ishtaraw*: *they bought*. Same two goods, this world and the next. Same marketplace. Opposite direction. One group gives up this world to get the Hereafter. The other gives up the Hereafter to get this world.

In Arabic, the root of both words, *sh-r-y*, can mean buying and it can mean selling. At first that can seem confusing. But it may be one of the deepest things about the language. Because every purchase is also a sale. You cannot buy anything without paying for it with something else. Every time you take hold of something, you let go of something else. We said this in the introduction: every attachment is a detachment from something else, because there is only one heart. Here it is in the grammar of a single word.

So the question is never *whether* you are trading. You are always trading. The only question is which way.

The Prophet ﷺ said it in one line:

> "Every person goes out in the morning and sells himself: either he sets himself free, or he destroys himself."
>
> *Sahih Muslim 223*

Every person goes out in the morning. Every commute is a walk to the market. The two men get up, get dressed, drive to the office, and before they even reach their desks they are already selling. Selling their mornings, their peace, their hearts. One sale at a time, they are either buying their freedom, or ruining themselves.

And Allah tells us there is a buyer who pays better than anyone:

> "Indeed, Allah has bought from the believers their selves and their wealth, in exchange for Paradise... So rejoice in the trade you have made. And that is the great success."
>
> *Quran 9:111*

Allah is the buyer. He pays with Paradise for what He gave you in the first place. That is the only trade in the world where you cannot lose. And of the other trade, the one that buys a little of this world with guidance, Allah says simply:

> "Their trade brought no profit, and they were not guided."
>
> *Quran 2:16*

Sold for a few coins

The Quran tells the story of a group of brothers who made the worst trade in its pages, and it began exactly where the two men's war began: with jealousy.

The brothers of Yusuf, known in English as Joseph, peace be upon him, watched their father love Yusuf, and they could not bear it:

> "When they said, 'Yusuf and his brother are more beloved to our father than we are, though we are a strong group.'"
>
> *Quran 12:8*

That is the voice of every jealous heart. *Why him? Why not me? We are the ones who deserve it.* It is the voice of the man in the office who watches the other one get the praise.

And jealousy did what jealousy does. It started as a feeling and became a plan. They threw their brother into a well, and when travelers found him, he was sold:

> "And they sold him for a paltry price, a few counted coins, and they held him in little value."
>
> *Quran 12:20*

A few counted coins. A prophet of Allah, sold for small change. And look at the last words, *they held him in little value*. In Arabic it is *kanu fihi min al-zahidin*, from the same root as *zuhd*, the classical word for detachment. They detached. But they detached from the wrong thing. Just like the man in *I Hastened to You* who shed the signs of Allah and clung to the earth, they let go of their brother and held onto their jealousy.

That is the danger this whole book has been circling. Detachment is not good in itself. Everyone detaches from something every day. The man consumed by jealousy at work has detached too. He has detached from his colleague's humanity,

from his own peace, from his prayer, from his sleep. He just detached in the wrong direction.

The real bankrupt

The Prophet ﷺ once asked his companions a question:

> "Do you know who the bankrupt one is?" They said, "The bankrupt among us is the one who has no money and no possessions." He said, "The bankrupt one from my nation is the one who comes on the Day of Resurrection with prayer, fasting and charity. But he comes having insulted this one, slandered that one, consumed the wealth of this one, shed the blood of that one, and struck this one. So this one is given some of his good deeds, and that one is given some of his good deeds. And if his good deeds run out before what he owes is settled, some of their sins are taken and thrown onto him, and then he is thrown into the Fire."
>
> *Sahih Muslim 2581*

Read that with the two men in mind.

Every insult in a meeting. Every lie told to the boss. Every piece of gossip by the kitchen. Every bit of credit stolen. On that Day, the currency will not be money, or titles, or shares. It will be good deeds. And every wrong one man did to the other is a debt, paid in that currency.

Which means that the man who "won" may have paid for his victory with his own prayers. Year after year, he was handing his good deeds across the office to the very man he hated. He thought he was taking something from his rival. He was giving him everything.

That is the joke jealousy plays on us. It feels like an attack on the other person. In the end, it is a gift to him, paid for by us.

Wait for these two

There is a hadith that every office, every family and every friendship should hear:

> "The gates of Paradise are opened on Monday and Thursday, and every servant who does not associate anything with Allah is forgiven, except a man between whom and his brother there is enmity. It is said: 'Wait for these two until they reconcile. Wait for these two until they reconcile. Wait for these two until they reconcile.'"
>
> *Sahih Muslim 2565*

Imagine it. Twice a week, the gates of Paradise open and forgiveness pours out over the earth. And two men are told to wait. Not because they stopped praying. Not because they denied Allah. Because of a feud. Over a project. Over a promotion. Over a chair that, a hundred years later, will be dust.

Wait for these two. Said three times. As if forgiveness itself is standing at the door, holding their names, waiting for them to make it right.

The Prophet ﷺ told us plainly what kind of people we are meant to be with each other:

> "Do not hate one another, do not envy one another, do not turn your backs on one another. Be, O servants of Allah, brothers. And it is not lawful for a Muslim to cut off his brother for more than three days."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 6065*

Do not envy one another. That is the root. Everything else at that office, the hatred, the backbiting, the turning away, grew from that one seed.

And he told us who wins when two people stop speaking:

> "It is not lawful for a man to cut off his brother for more than three nights, the two of them meeting and this one turning away and that one turning away. And the better of the two is the one who begins with the greeting of peace."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 6077*

The better of the two. That is the only competition between them that is worth winning. Not who gets promoted. Who says *peace* first.

The first two brothers

The very first fight between two men on earth was this fight.

Allah tells the story of the two sons of Adam. Each one offered a sacrifice. One was accepted, and the other was not:

> "And recite to them the story of the two sons of Adam, in truth, when they both offered a sacrifice, and it was accepted from one of them and not accepted from the other. He said, 'I will surely kill you.' He said, 'Allah only accepts from those who are mindful of Him.'"
>
> *Quran 5:27*

The first jealousy. One brother received something the other did not, and the other could not stand it. And instead of asking *why was mine not accepted?*, and fixing what was in his own heart, he turned on his brother. He killed him, *and became one of the losers* (Quran 5:30).

And then comes one of the most haunting images in the whole Quran:

> "Then Allah sent a crow, scratching in the earth, to show him how to hide the body of his brother. He said, 'Woe to me! Am I unable to be like this crow, and hide the body of my brother?' And he became one of those filled with regret."
>
> *Quran 5:31*

The first jealousy on earth ended in the earth. A crow scratching in the dust. A brother placed into it. And a man standing over the grave, filled with regret, realizing too late what he had traded.

The Prophet ﷺ said that no soul is killed unjustly except that the first son of Adam carries a share of its blood, because he was the first to start killing (Sahih al-Bukhari 3335; Sahih Muslim 1677). Jealousy does not stay small. It spreads. It teaches.

Most office feuds will never come anywhere near that. But the road is the same road. It starts with *why him and not me?* And every step down it is a step toward the dust, and toward the regret.

What follows you

The Prophet ﷺ said:

> "Three things follow the dead person. Two return and one remains with him. His family, his wealth and his deeds follow him. His family and his wealth return, and his deeds remain."
>
> *Sahih al-Bukhari 6514; Sahih Muslim 2960*

Notice what is not even on the list. The company does not follow him. The title does not follow him. His family walks behind him to the grave, and even they go home. His wealth goes back to be divided among others.

And the position he fought for? By the time he is buried, someone has already been asked to cover his work. Within a few weeks, the job is posted. Within a year, the new person in that chair may not even know his name.

Only one thing stays. What he did. Including how he treated the man a few desks away.

This is not about quitting

Let me guard this chapter against a misreading, because it is an easy one to make.

Nothing in this chapter says: quit your job. Nothing says: stop working hard, stop building, stop wanting to grow. We spent a whole chapter, *I Hastened to You*, on the opposite. Qarun's people did not tell him to throw his wealth away. They told him, *seek through what Allah has given you the home of the Hereafter, and do not forget your share of this world* (Quran 28:77). A detached heart can still lead a team, build a company, and earn a promotion. It just doesn't sell itself to get one.

In fact, the detached employee may be the best one in the building. He is not wasting his nights replaying arguments. He is not spending his energy watching someone else. He does his work well because he is doing it for Allah, and Allah sees all of it, including the parts the boss never notices. He can be happy for a colleague who succeeds, because he is not in a race with him. The race he is in is somewhere else:

> "So race one another toward good deeds. Wherever you may be, Allah will bring you all together."
>
> *Quran 2:148*

So what does detachment look like on Monday morning, for one of those two men?

It looks like the verse:

> "Good and evil are not equal. Repel evil with what is better, and then the one between whom and you there was enmity will become as though he were a close friend."
>
> *Quran 41:34*

It looks like walking over and saying *peace* first, before the other man does. It looks like giving him the credit he earned, in front of the same boss. It looks like making a prayer for him, in secret, when you would rather complain about him. It looks like closing the email you were about to send, and deleting the extra name.

Every one of those is a grain of sand moved to the other side of the hourglass. Every one of them is a detachment: from the need to win, from the need to be seen winning, from the self. And the Prophet ﷺ promised what comes back:

> "Charity does not decrease wealth. And Allah does not increase a servant through forgiveness except in honor. And no one humbles himself for the sake of Allah except that Allah raises him."
>
> *Sahih Muslim 2588*

The man who forgives looks, for a moment, like the loser of the fight. Allah says he is the one being raised. And the one who forgives does not lose his reward: *whoever pardons and makes peace, his reward is with Allah* (Quran 42:40).

The hourglass turns to dust

At the start of this book, I asked you to picture your life as an hourglass. Every grain of sand a moment. Every grain landing in one of two chambers: Allah, or everything else.

Here is the last thing that picture has to teach. One day the sand runs out. And one day after that, the hourglass itself is dust.

Everything that fell into the chamber of *everything else* goes with it. Allah says:

> "What is with you runs out, and what is with Allah remains."
>
> *Quran 16:96*

What is with you runs out: the salary, the title, the reputation, the argument you won. What is with Allah remains: every grain you sent His way. The prayer you left the meeting for. The colleague you forgave. The credit you gave away. The envy you swallowed for His sake. Not one of those grains is lost.

And there is one more thing I want to show you before we close, because it is easy to miss.

Go back to the surah that holds the verse at the center of this book. Just before it, Allah describes this world in full:

> "Know that the life of this world is only play, and amusement, and adornment, and boasting among yourselves, and competing in increase of wealth and children. It is like rain whose growth pleases the farmers; then it dries, and you see it turn yellow; then it becomes broken debris. And in the Hereafter there is severe punishment, and forgiveness from Allah and His pleasure. And the life of this world is nothing but the enjoyment of delusion."
>
> *Quran 57:20*

There are the two men. *Boasting among yourselves. Competing in increase.* And there is their end: green, then yellow, then broken debris, scattered by the wind. Dust.

Then the next verse turns them around:

> "Race toward forgiveness from your Lord, and a Garden as wide as the heavens and the earth."
>
> *Quran 57:21*

The same energy that went into competing for the world is redirected. Keep racing, says the verse. Just race toward Him.

And then, straight after, the verses this whole book was built on:

> "No calamity strikes the earth or yourselves except that it is written in a record before We bring it into being. Indeed, that is easy for Allah. So that you do not despair over what has escaped you, nor exult over what He has given you. And Allah does not love everyone who is arrogant and boastful."
>
> *Quran 57:22–23*

Read the last line again. *Allah does not love everyone who is arrogant and boastful.* The word for boastful, *fakhur*, comes from the same root as *tafakhur*, the "boasting among yourselves" two verses earlier. The surah begins with the boasting, shows us where it ends, turns us toward the real race, and then hands us the cure: a heart that does not despair over what it lost, does not exult over what it gained, and has no need to boast over anyone.

The surah walks, in four verses, the whole road this book has tried to walk. From the dust, to the race, to the detached heart.

Dust, or a sound heart

There is a verse about the Day of Judgment that is hard to read:

> "Indeed, We have warned you of a punishment that is near: the Day when a person will see what his hands have sent ahead, and the one who rejected faith will say, 'Oh, I wish I had been dust!'"
>
> *Quran 78:40*

I wish I had been dust. After a whole life spent fighting over dust, the last wish of the one who denied Allah is to become it.

And there is another cry on that Day, from people who finally see what they traded:

> "He will say, 'Oh, I wish I had sent ahead for my life!'"
>
> *Quran 89:24*

For my life. Not for the rest of his life in this world. For his *life*. Because on that Day it becomes clear which life was the real one. Allah tells us now, so we don't have to learn it then:

> "And this life of the world is nothing but amusement and play. And indeed, the home of the Hereafter, that is the true life, if only they knew."
>
> *Quran 29:64*

The body goes back to dust. That is certain, for all of us. The two men, me, you, everyone reading this. But the body is not what stands before Allah on that Day. Ibrahim, peace be upon him, told us what does, in the prayer we have carried since the first pages:

> "The Day when neither wealth nor children will be of any benefit, except to the one who comes to Allah with a sound heart."
>
> *Quran 26:88–89*

Not wealth. Not children. And certainly not a job title. A sound heart, *qalb salim*. A heart that held the world in its hand and never let the world into its center. A heart that worked, and built, and gave, and loved, and forgave, and arrives before Allah holding nothing but Him.

That is the one thing that does not turn to dust.

Then let it be now

Go back one last time to those two men.

Imagine that one of them, one ordinary morning, wakes up and sees the whole story. The hundred years. The dust. The company that won't exist, the chair someone else will sit in, the gates of Paradise opening on Monday and a voice

saying *wait for these two*. And he decides that he is done trading.

He walks into the office. He walks past his own desk, to the other man's. And before the other man can say anything, he says: *peace be upon you.*

Maybe the other man answers. Maybe he doesn't. It doesn't matter as much as it used to. The better of the two has already been decided.

That man didn't quit his job. He didn't give up his ambitions. He still wants to do great work, and he probably will. He just stopped selling his heart to get it. He moved one grain of sand. And as we have seen all through this book, one detachment opens the door to the next.

You may be one of those two men. You may have your own office, your own rival, your own chair. Or your war may be somewhere else: in a family, a friendship, a neighborhood, a screen. The dust is the same everywhere.

We are trading what is less for what is more. Every day, every morning, we go out and sell ourselves. But the trade is not over. As long as there is sand in the glass, you can still change which way you are selling.

From dust we came. To dust we are going.

Let the heart go to Allah.

And let it be now.

Detach!