



ANSWER

وَالْقَلَمِ

...by the pen... [68:1]

COMMENTARY

Pen and its Significance

In the phrase *wal-qalami*, the *waw* is the particle of oath [translated here as 'by the pen']. 'Qalam' refers to 'pen', and there are three types of pen: [1] the pen of destinies; [2] the pen of angels; and [3] the pen of human beings. It could refer to any or all of these types of pen. A pen is an object that is used for writing anything [as is the view of Abū Hātim Al-Bustī]. According to Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās *radī'allāhu 'anhu*, it specifically refers to the pen of destinies. Sayyidnā 'Ubādah Ibn Sāmit *radī'allāhu 'anhu* narrates regarding the pen of destinies that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: *"The first thing Allah created was the pen, and He told it to write, and when it asked Him what it should write, He told it to write what was predestined, so it wrote what would take place to all eternity."* [Transmitted by At-Tirmidhī, saying that this is a Tradition whose chain of narrators is *gharīb*]. Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh Ibn 'Umar *radī'allāhu 'anhu* narrated that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: *"Allah recorded the destiny of all creatures 50000 years before creating the heavens and the earth."* [Sahīh Muslim]. Qatādah *rahimahullāh* says that pen is a great gift of Allah that He has endowed upon His servants. Some scholars say that Allah first created the pen, and that was the pen of decrees which recorded the destinies of the entire universe and all the creatures. Then He created the second pen that is used by the inhabitants of the earth. The second pen is referred to in Sūrah Iqra' in verse [96:4], thus: **'{He who) taught by the pen'**. And Allah knows best!

If *qalam* 'pen' in the verse under comment refers to the pen of destinies, its greatness and its superiority over everything is quite obvious and swearing by it is quite understandable. If it is taken to refer to all pens in general, including the pen of destinies, the pen of angels, and also the pen of human beings, swearing an oath by it is apt because all great tasks are accomplished by pen. In the conquests of territories, pen play a mighty role: "The pen is mightier than the sword" goes the famous saying. Abū Hātim Al-Bustī has encapsulated this idea in two short verses:

*When the brave people swear by their sword some day,
And count it among things that give honour and veneration to men,
The writers' pen is sufficient for their honour and superiority
For all times to come, because Allah has sworn oath by the pen*

In any case, it is immaterial whether the pen in the verse refers to the pen of destinies or it refers to the pen of creation in general.

And Allah Ta'ālā knows best.

