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**See also:** ARABIC; AVARICE AND GREED; BOUNDARIES OF ALLAH; CITY; DECEIT AND DELUSION; DOUBT; HIJRA; HYPOCRISY AND HYPOCRITES; ISMĀ‘ĪL, UPON HIM PEACE; UNBELIEF; UNLETTERED; YA‘QŪB, UPON HIM PEACE; YŪSUF, UPON HIM PEACE.

GIBRIL FOUAD HADDAD

**Bees: see Animals**

## BEGUILEMENT

### ISTIDRĀJ, IMHĀL

This article comprises the following sections: i. Definitions; ii. *Istidrāj*: Gradual Leading On; iii. False Miracles; iv. *Imlā’*, *Imhāl*, *Ṭūl al-Amal*: Prolongation, Respite, and Overlong Hope; v. *Kayd* and *Makr*: Divine Scheming and Plotting; vi. *Ghurūr*: Delusion; vii. Bibliography.

### Definitions

The Divine beguilement of the unbelievers is a major theme of the Qur’ān that deals with the terms *istidrāj* (gradual leading on), the synonyms *imlā’* and *imhāl* (prolongation, giving respite) and *ṭūl al-amal* (overlong hope), the synonyms *kayd* and *makr* (scheming, planning, entrapment, plotting, machination, conspiracy), and *ghurūr* (delusion). The etymology of each term is discussed in the appropriate section. This theme contrasts Allah’s self-disclosure through His creations and revelations with His blinding of those of His creatures whom He leads down the path of perdition and loss while allowing them to bask in God-given material enjoyments and the trappings of power and prosperity, heedless of Him and mindful only of the lower world and their own delusions (see UNBELIEF). Thus, beguilement underlies the following additional Qur’ānic themes:

- The doctrine of the Divine Decree (*q.v.*) and Apportionment (*q.v.*) (*al-Qaḍā’ wal-Qadar*), in which sense Ibn Mas‘ūd commented on the verse *None but the lost feel safe from the makr of Allah* (Q 7:99) by saying that feeling safe and secure from the *makr* of Allah ranked with polytheism and despair of Divine mercy as the greatest of enormities (‘Abd al-Razzāq, 10:459-460 §19701);
- Stories of the Prophets (*q.v.*) with their respective peoples including tyrants such as Namrūd/Numrūd and Fir‘awn, wherein beguilement entraps not only individuals but nations: *And how many a community of greater power than yours which*

*has driven you out have We destroyed, with none to rescue them!* (Q 47:13);

- The Qur’ānic call to be conscious of death, remember Allah (see REMEMBRANCE OF ALLAH), abstain from the world (see ABSTINENCE), and turn to the Creator, as the ways of safety from *istidrāj*.

Al-Zajjāj (241-311/855-923) discusses beguilement in his commentary on the Divine Name “The Empowerer” (al-Mu’izz):

He—exalted is He!—empowers whomever He wants among His friends (*awliyā’ih*, see FRIENDS OF ALLAH). Empowerment is of several types: (i) from both the perspectives of sacred law and material fact (*min jihat al-ḥukm wal-fī’l*); (ii) from the perspective of sacred law alone; (iii) from the perspective of materiality alone. The first case is what Allah Most High does with many of His friends in the world by granting them material ease and eminence: this is empowerment from both perspectives of sacred law and material fact. The second case is what He does—exalted is He!—with His friends when He straitens their material conditions in the world, while you can see that those that are not even following His religion are above them in state. This is a test from Allah Most High for His friend, and He shall reward him, if He wills, for his steadfastness over it. The third case is what Allah Most High does with many of His enemies by granting them affluence, power, influence, and vast worldly wealth: this is material empowerment but not empowerment from the perspective of sacred law; such have perpetual punishment from Allah in the Hereafter (*q.v.*). This is only prolonged free rein (*imlā’*) for and beguilement (*istidrāj*) of them on the part of Allah Most High, Who said *We only give them ample time* (innamā numli lahum) *to let them grow in sinfulness; and shameful suffering awaits them* (Q 3:178).

Zajjāj, *Asmā’*, p. 41

### ***Istidrāj*: Gradual Leading On**

*Istidrāj* (see etymology below) is mentioned in two verses:

*But those who deny Our signs We shall progressively lead on* (sa-nastadrijuhum) *from where they do not know* (Q 7:182). The next verse also mentions *imlā’* and *kayd*, two more key terms of beguilement: *And I shall give them ample time* (wa-umli lahum). *Indeed, My scheme* (kaydī) *is firm!* (Q 7:183)

*So leave Me to deal with whoever denies this Speech.*

*We shall progressively lead them on from where they do not know* (Q 68:44). The next verse again mentions *imlā’* and *kayd* (Q 68:45).

The phrase *from where they do not know* (*min ḥaythu lā ya’lamūn*) has also been translated *without their perceiving how it came about* (Asad, *Message*, sub Q 7:182, 68:44). The Qur’ānic sense comprises not only their nescience of the modality of their outcome, but also the suddenness of their demise. Al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273) comments:

*Istidrāj* is gradual seizing, stage by stage. *Darj* is the act of enveloping (*laff*) something. One says *adrajtuh* and *darajtuh*, whence the dead is wrapped up (*udrija*) in his shroud. It is also said to stem from *daraja* (step), so that *istidrāj* means that one is brought low step by step to the end. Al-Ḍaḥḥāk (d. 102/721) glossed it: “Every time they disobeyed Us with something new, We lavished a new favor on them.” Dhūl-Nūn (d. 245/859) was asked: “What is the utmost that a servant can be deceived [by]?” He replied: “Through kindnesses and miraculous gifts (*karāmāt*). This is why Allah Most High said, *We shall progressively lead them on from where they do not know*—lavish favors on them and cause them to forget gratitude. As [people] recite:

*You thought the best of the days that were best,  
not fearing the evil that fate might bring.  
And the nights made you feel safe, which deluded you;  
it is when nights are clear that trouble befalls.”*

sub Q 7:182

The above verses are popular in Sufi literature and have been variously attributed, in order of frequency, to al-Shāfi’ī (150-204/767-820), ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/660), Sa’īd b. Wahb (d. 208/823), and the poet Sa’īd b. Ḥumayd (d. 26/647). They were engraved over the grave of the dynastic ruler Ya’qūb b. Layth al-Ṣaffār (d. 265/879) and are abundantly cited in the *Risāla Qushayriyya*, *Ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*, *Sirāj al-mulūk*, *Ṭabaqāt al-awliyā’*, etc. (*Taḥqīq Dīwān al-Shāfi’ī*, p. 327).

Al-Qurṭubī elaborates:

*Wa-umli lahum*: That is: I give them more time, I give them respite (*umhilihūm*), and I defer their punishment. *Inna kaydī*: that is, My plotting (*makrī*). *Matīn*: that is, brutal and strong.... It has been said that the verse was revealed in reference to the mockers (*mustahzi’in*) of Quraysh: Allah killed them in a single night after He had given them respite for a while. Equivalent to this is *until, when they rejoiced in*