

Sura 57: Al-Hadid (The Iron)

In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy

Verses 1 to 15:

1. *All that is in the heavens and the earth glorifies God; and He is the Eminent, the Wise.*
2. *To Him belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. It is He who gives life and causes death; and He has power over all things.*
3. *He is the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward; and He has full knowledge of all things.*
4. *It is He who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and then established Himself on the Throne. He knows what enters into the earth and what emerges from it, what comes down from heaven and what ascends to it. And He is with you wherever you may be. And God is All-Seeing of all what you do.*
5. *To Him belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth; and all the affairs are brought back to God.*
6. *He merges night into day, and He merges day into night; and He has full knowledge of the secrets of the hearts.*
7. *Believe in God and His Messenger, and spend out of that which He has made you its trustees; and those of you who believe and spend shall have a great reward.*
8. *Why you do not believe in God while the Messenger calls on you to believe in your Lord, and indeed He has made a covenant with you if you are believers.*
9. *It is He who sends down clear revelations to His servant that He may bring you out of darkness into light. God is the All- Pitying, the Giver of Mercy.*
10. *And why do you not spend in the cause of God? While to God belongs the inheritance of the heavens and the earth. Not equal among you are those who spent and fought, before the victory, (with those who did so later). Those are higher in rank than those who spent and fought afterwards. But to all has God promised a goodly (reward). And God is Totally-Aware of all that you do.*
11. *Who is he who will lend God a goodly loan? God will double it for him and he shall have a generous reward.*
12. *On the day when you (Muhammad) will see the believers, men and women, their light shining forth before them and on their right hands, (and will hear it said to them), "Glad tidings for you this day: Gardens underneath which rivers flow, wherein you are immortal." That is the supreme achievement.*
13. *On the day when the hypocrite men and the hypocrite women will say to those who believed, "Look at us that we may acquire some of your light. It will be said, "Go back and seek light." Then they will be separated by a wall that has a gate, the inner side of it contains mercy, while on the outer side there will be torment.*
14. *They will call them (saying), "Were we not with you?" They will say, "Yes, but you tempted one another, and hesitated, and doubted, and vain desires beguiled you till the ordinance of God came to pass; and the deceiver deceived you concerning God.*
15. *This day no ransom will be accepted from you or from the disbelievers. Your abode is the Fire. That is your patron, and evil is the destination. (57: 1 – 15)*

This Sura presents a call to the Muslim nation to purify its faith and dedicate itself to the sake of God. The hearts, the thoughts, and the feelings should be fully dedicated to the cause of God. The Muslim nation is asked to spare neither wealth nor lives in its strive for the sake of God. This can only happen when the nation adopts the divine values and standards. This is the only way for the nation to be a Godly nation living on earth; a nation whose hearts truly recognize the truth of God so it can connect directly with Him.

It seems also that the Sura was dealing with issues related to the life of the Muslim community during the period between the fourth year after the migration from Mecca to Medina till after the time of the opening of Mecca. During this time a large number of people accepted Islam. These people did not have the understanding of Islam and the depth of faith that the early Muslims had. This group found it difficult to contribute financially to support the Muslim community as a whole.

In addition, there was also a group of opportunistic hypocrites who accepted Islam simply because they saw that Islam was gaining in strength and it was beneficial for them to adopt Islam. They wanted to enjoy the material benefits that the new *faith* may provide without being fully committed to its values.

The last group that the Sura alludes to is the Christians and Jews who were still living in the Arabian Peninsula.

The Sura starts with the opening statement that shakes the hearts, “*All that is in the heavens and the earth glorifies God; and He is the Eminent, the Wise.*” The whole universe glorifies God in unison. The praise of God is heard by each heart open to guidance. We have no way of knowing how does the universe glorify God, so we accept the statement as it is given without trying to explain its meaning because this is part of the unseen. The verses of the Quran are quite clear about the ability of God’s creation to glorify Him, “*Do you not see that God is exalted by whoever is within the heavens and the earth and by the birds with wings spread? Each of them has known its means of prayer and exalting God.*” (24: 41) “*Do not you see that to God prostrates whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on the earth and the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, the moving creatures and many people?*” (22: 18)

God is the owner of the heavens and earth, “*To Him belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. It is He who gives life and causes death; and He has power over all things.*” He is the sole controller of the universe. He gives life and causes death and He has infinite and absolute power over everything.

Nothing came before Him and nothing will outlast Him. There is nothing above Him and there is nothing behind Him. The attributes of being the First and the Last exhaust the entire time and the attributes of being the Outward and the Inward exhaust the entire space, “*He is the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward; and He has full knowledge of all things.*” God is Omniscient, He knows everything. Once the heart recognizes and understands the implications of these realities, then that heart will not care about anything in the universe except God.

The following verse reminds us with the facts of the creation of the universe, *“It is He who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and then established Himself on the Throne. He knows what enters into the earth and what emerges from it, what comes down from heaven and what ascends to it. And He is with you wherever you may be. And God is All-Seeing of all what you do.”* These facts address the human heart and remind it that the Creator who created it also created the whole universe. Humankind is an integral part of the creation of God. God created humankind to understand the universe and to live in harmony with it. Only God knows the true meaning of the six days, the throne, and how God knows everything including what the chests harbor. God’s knowledge encompassed everything. God is with us wherever we are. This is a true and literal statement; this is not an allegory. This fact has dual consequences. It is an amazing reality that God sees and knows everything we think of or do. It is also heartwarming to feel that we are always in the company of God. These two feelings are bound to keep us always cautious not do something that displeases God.

“To Him belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth; and all the affairs are brought back to God.” The verse reminds the human being of the power of God, in addition it emphasizes that everything will ultimately be referred to God. There is no escape from God; this is another incentive for the hearts to remain sincere on the path of God.

Another cosmic phenomenon is mentioned, *“He merges night into day, and He merges day into night; and He has full knowledge of the secrets of the hearts.”* This is a perpetual phenomenon that motivates the hearts to reflect on the power of God. The phenomenon occurs in a subtle way, the same way that God has the full knowledge of everything including the secrets of the hearts.

“Believe in God and His Messenger, and spend out of that which He has made you its trustees; and those of you who believe and spend shall have a great reward. Why you do not believe in God while the Messenger calls on you to believe in your Lord, and indeed He has made a covenant with you if you are believers. It is He who sends down clear revelations to His servant that He may bring you out of darkness into light. God is the All-Pitying, the Giver of Mercy.” The verse calls on the believers to believe in God and His Messenger (PBUH). So, the call is for the believers to understand the true meaning and implications of the belief in God and His Messenger (PBUH) including the willingness to spend out of one’s wealth in the sake of God. The verse also reminds the believers that the wealth they have is in reality God’s wealth. God appointed people as trustees on the wealth He bestowed upon them. They should be ashamed if they decline the call to spend out of this wealth in the sake of God. And what prevented them from being true believers? These people saw the Prophet (PBUH) and talked to him. This was a great blessing. The Prophet (PBUH) was there reciting God’s verses to them and guiding them to the straight path. It has been reported by Al-Bukhari that, *“The Prophet (PBUH) asked his companions, ‘Who among the believers are worthy of your praise?’ They said, ‘The angels.’ He said, ‘But why it would be difficult for the angels to believe while they are in the presence of their Lord?’ The companions said, ‘Then the prophets.’ The Prophet (PBUH) said, ‘But why it would be difficult for the prophets to believe while they receive the revelations from their Lord?’ They said, ‘Then we are worthy of the praise.’ The Prophet (PBUH) said, ‘But why it would be difficult for you to believe while I live among you? The believers who are truly worthy of praise*

are those who will come later on and all what they will get is a Book to read and they will believe in what the Book says.”

The verses turn from the discussion of true belief to the discussion of the issue of spending in the way of God, *“And why do you not spend in the cause of God? To God belongs the inheritance of the heavens and the earth.”* To God belongs everything, the money they have belongs to God and they were only made trustees over that money. In the end, everything will go back to God.

Those who spent and fought when the Muslims were only a persecuted few, offered great sacrifices. They were only motivated by their true faith. They did not expect a worldly gain at that time because none was even probable, *“Not equal among you are those who spent and fought, before the victory, (with those who did so later). Those are higher in rank than those who spent and fought afterwards. But to all has God promised a goodly (reward). And God is Totally-Aware of all that you do.”* However, God promised to reward each one of them a generous reward. They all did good deeds and God is Totally-Aware of what everyone did.

The verses then offer another incentive for spending in the way of God, *“Who is he who will lend God a goodly loan? God will double it for him and he shall have a generous reward.”* This is very emotive call. Imagine yourself giving God a loan. Not only the repayment of the loan is guaranteed but also a generous reward is promised.

“On the Day when you (Muhammad) will see the believers, men and women, their light shining forth before them and on their right hands, (and will hear it said to them), ‘Glad tidings for you this Day: Gardens underneath which rivers flow, wherein you are immortal.’ That is the supreme achievement.” This is a scene that depicts each and every believer, man or woman, walking with a light preceding them and they will be greeted with welcoming remarks. Juxtaposed with this scene is the scene of the hypocrites, men and women, who will be walking in the dark, confused. They will feel neglected and humiliated, *“On the Day when the hypocrite men and the hypocrite women will say to those who believed, ‘Look at us that we may acquire some of your light.’ It will be said, ‘Go back and seek light.’ Then they will be separated by a wall that has a gate, the inner side of it contains mercy, while on the outer side there will be torment.”* They will want a light similar to the light given to the believers but they will be told in a sarcastic way, *“Go back and seek light.”* This statement may have meant the following: the believers gained this light through their work in the worldly life; so, if you want similar light you should go back to the worldly life, if you can, and do the work through which you can earn similar light. A wall then separates the two groups; the believers are on one side, while the hypocrites are on the other side of the wall.

From behind the wall, the hypocrites will call upon the believers, *“They will call them (saying), ‘Were we not with you?’”* The believers will respond to the hypocrites explaining what happened, *“They will say, ‘Yes, but you tempted one another, and hesitated, and doubted, and vain desires beguiled you till the ordinance of God came to pass; and the deceiver deceived you concerning God; this day no ransom will be accepted from you or from the disbelievers. Your abode is the Fire.’ That is your patron, and evil is the destination.”*

Verses 16 to 29:

16. *Has not the time arrived for the believers to humble their hearts to the remembrance of God and the Truth which has been revealed, and that they should not become like those who were given the Scripture before, but long ages passed over them and their hearts grew hard? Many among them were transgressors.*
17. *Know that God gives life to the earth after its death. We have made clear Our revelations for you, that haply you may understand.*
18. *Indeed, those who give in charity, men and women, and lend God a goodly loan, it will be doubled for them, and theirs will be a noble reward.*
19. *And those who believe in God and His Messengers, they are the truthful. And the martyrs are with their Lord; they have their reward and their light; while as for those who disbelieve and deny Our revelations, they are the owners of the Hell-fire.*
20. *Know that the life of the world is only play, and idle talk, and pageantry, and boasting among you, and rivalry in respect of wealth and children; as the likeness of vegetation after rain, whereof the growth is pleasing to the tillers, but afterward it dries up and you see it turning yellow, then it becomes straw. And in the Hereafter there is grievous torment, and (also) forgiveness from God and His good pleasure, whereas the life of this world is but a matter of illusion.*
21. *Race one with another for forgiveness from your Lord and a garden its breadth is as the breadth of the heavens and the earth, which is in store for those who believe in God and His Messengers. Such is the bounty of God, which He bestows upon whom He wills, and God is the Possessor of immense bounty.*
22. *No misfortune befalls on the earth or on your own souls, but it is in a Book before We bring it into existence; surely that is easy for God.*
23. *In order that you may not grieve for what has escaped you, nor exult over favors bestowed upon you. God does not love any vainglorious boaster;*
24. *Those who are stingy and who enjoin upon the people avarice. And whosoever turns away, God is the Self-Sufficient, the Praised.*
25. *We verily sent Our Messengers with clear proofs, and revealed with them the Scripture and the balance, that humankind may maintain (their affairs) in justice; and We brought down iron, wherein is mighty power and (many) uses for humankind, and that God may know him who supports Him and His Messengers, though unseen; God is the Strong, the Eminent.*
26. *And We sent Noah and Abraham, and established prophet-hood and the Scripture in their progeny; and among them is he who is guided, but many of them became transgressors.*
27. *Then We sent following in their footsteps Our Messengers, and followed with Jesus the son of Mary, and gave him the Gospel. And We placed in the hearts of those who followed him compassion and Mercy. But the Monasticism which they invented for themselves, We did not prescribe for them except (that they did so) seeking the good pleasure of God; but they did not observe it with due observance. So We bestowed, on those among them who believed, their (due) reward, but many of them are transgressors.*
28. *Believers, be conscious of God and believe in His Messenger. He will give you twofold of His mercy and will appoint for you a light with which you shall walk, and will forgive you; God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*

29. *So that the People of the Book may know that they have no power whatsoever over the Grace of God and that (His) Grace is (entirely) in His hand, to bestow it on whomsoever He wills. For God is the Possessor of immense grace. (57: 16 – 29)*

“Has not the time arrived for the believers to humble their hearts to the remembrance of God and the Truth which has been revealed, and that they should not become like those were given the Scripture before, but long ages passed over them and their hearts grew hard? Many among them were transgressors. Know that God gives life to the earth after its death. We have made clear Our revelations for you, that haply you may understand.” This is a mild reproach for the believers’ hesitation in responding favorably to the call that they were chosen by the grace of God to receive. It is made clear that the reproach originated in God’s love of the believers and its objective is to motivate them to the full submission worthy of God. The reproach is then followed by an outline of the consequences of the procrastination in responding favorably to God’s call. The example of peoples who received scriptures before and procrastinated is given. Procrastination and hesitation generate a layer of rust that covers the heart and isolates it from connecting to God. The believers should be always cautious of this ailment. However, the door to God is always open. God revives the hearts as He revives the barren soil.

The narrative goes back to the reward awaiting those who spend in the way of God, *“Indeed, those who give in charity, men and women, and lend God a goodly loan, it will be doubled for them, and theirs will be a noble reward.”* The verse outlines the basis of the relationship between the poor and the rich. The rich are not doing the poor a favor by giving them charity. They are actually doing themselves a favor because they are given the status of those who are lending God money. This in itself is a status that many aspire to. In addition, not only the payment of their loan is guaranteed but they will also get a generous reward.

Another high status, that is achievable for those who work for it, is the status of the truthful, *“And those who believe in God and His Messengers, they are the truthful.”* It is a high ranking status but easy to attain. The way to earn this status is to believe in God and His Messengers. A third high ranking status is awarded to the martyrs who sacrifice their lives in God’s cause, *“And the martyrs are with their Lord; they have their reward and their light.”* They will be given a status that brings them closer to God. The Quran and Sunnah talked great deal about the high ranks of the martyrs. Establishing Islam requires sacrifices: lives, wealth, and effort. Those who sacrifice their lives in the sake of God will be greatly rewarded by Him. The reward is so great that they would wish to be sent back to life so that they would fight and earn martyrdom again.

On the other side of these high ranking places we find the abasement which is waiting for the disbelievers, *“as for those who disbelieve and deny Our revelations, they are the owners of Hell-fire.”*

The following verses show how little is the sacrifice that the believers are asked to perform in the way of God, *“Know that the life of the world is only play, and idle talk, and pageantry, and boasting among you, and rivalry in respect of wealth and children; as the likeness of vegetation*

after rain, whereof the growth is pleasing to the tillers, but afterward it dries up and you see it turning yellow, then it becomes straw. And in the Hereafter there is grievous torment, and (also) forgiveness from God and His good pleasure, whereas the life of this world is but a matter of illusion.” The life of this world is a fleeting opportunity; what one gets out of it is worthless in comparison with what one can get in the Hereafter. This life is only play, idle talk, pageantry, boasting, and rivalry. These are all fleeting pleasures. It is like a seed that is sown and grows into a beautiful plant, the plant gets old, turns yellow then it withers and becomes dust. The Hereafter, on the other hand is permanent. That is why the life of this world is merely an illusion.

Therefore, the believers should race in the true field, the field which leads to the Hereafter, *“Race one with another for forgiveness from your Lord and a garden its breadth is as the breadth of the heavens and the earth, which is in store for those who believe in God and His Messengers. Such is the bounty of God, which He bestows upon whom He wills, and God is the Possessor of immense bounty.”* The prize of this race is a paradise the width of which is as long as the heavens and earth. This is God’s bounty which He bestows on whomsoever He wills.

The true believers should recognize that the field of activities that they should be concerned with is far wider than the life of this world.

“No misfortune befalls on the earth nor in your own souls, but it is in a Book before We bring it into existence; surely that is easy for God. In order that you may not grieve for what has escaped you, nor exult over favors bestowed upon you. God does not love any vainglorious boaster. Everything that happens in this universe is meticulously planned, nothing happens accidentally. All events that occurred since the beginning of the creation till the end of time have been recorded before the creation started. God’s knowledge is comprehensive and it is not bound by time or space. The real benefit of understanding this reality is the security and serenity that this understanding brings to the human heart. One should accept whatever happens whether good or bad, *“In order that you may not grieve for what has escaped you, nor exult over favors bestowed upon you.”* People grieve when they are afflicted and exult when they have good fortune. The verse tempers these extreme feelings. It is neither possible nor desirable for people to completely suppress their feelings but we are required to be moderate in expressing these feelings and to make these events a reason for becoming closer to God. Ekrimah (RA) has been quoted to have said, *“Everyone experiences happiness and sadness but one should express happiness by being grateful to God and express sadness by being perseverant.”* People who do not realize that the wealth they have is a bounty from God do not recognize the benefit of spending in the way of God, they become stingy and they motivate others to be stingy, *“Who are stingy and who enjoin upon the people avarice. And whosoever turns away, God is the Self-Sufficient, the Praised.”*

The following verses conclude the Sura by exploring the history of guidance which was brought to humankind by a number of God’s Messengers, *“We verily sent Our Messengers with clear proofs, and revealed with them the Scripture and the balance, that humankind may maintain (their affairs) in justice; and We brought down iron, wherein is mighty power and (many) uses for humankind, and that God may know him who supports Him and His Messengers, though*

unseen; God is the Strong, the Eminent. And We sent Noah and Abraham, and established prophet-hood and the Scripture in their progeny; and among them is he who is guided, but many of them became transgressors. Then We sent following in their footsteps Our Messengers, and followed with Jesus the son of Mary, and gave him the Gospel. And We placed in the hearts of those who followed him compassion and Mercy. But the monasticism which they invented for themselves, We did not prescribe for them except (that they did so) seeking the good pleasure of God; but they did not observe it with due observance. So We bestowed, on those among them who believed, their (due) reward, but many of them are transgressors.” God sent humankind one Message. It came down through many messengers. The Message included the balance that maintains people’s life. The balance provides the standards, the norms, and the values that guarantee a balanced way of life for all people. It establishes justice and fairness. God sent down iron for humankind’s use. The word “sent down” used here points to the power of God in creating whatever He wills. The verses also point to the family of prophets which started with Noah (PBUH) and included many other prophets from the progeny of Noah (PBUH) and Abraham (PBUH). However, there were others in the progeny of these prophets who were transgressors. Then God sent Jesus (PBUH). Those who followed him were given a remarkable gift, *“And We placed in the hearts of those who followed him compassion and Mercy.”* Some of them chose voluntarily to espouse monasticism, *“We did not prescribe for them except (that they did so) seeking the good pleasure of God; but that they did not observe it with due observance.”* As time progressed they were not able to fulfill its traditions sincerely and became transgressors.

A final call was issued to the believers, *“Believers, be conscious of God and believe in His Messenger. He will give you twofold of His mercy and will appoint for you a light with which you shall walk, and will forgive you; God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. So that the People of the Book may know that they have no power whatsoever over the Grace of God and that (His) Grace is (entirely) in His hand, to bestow it on whomsoever He wills. For God is of the Possessor of immense grace.”* This is a reminder to the believers to pursue the true meaning of faith to receive double the mercy from God, to earn the light that will illuminate their way, and to gain God’s forgiveness. God’s bounty is immense and it is not exclusive for a group over others. God bestows His grace on whosoever He wills.