

## **Sura 7: Al-A'raf (The Heights)**

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

This is a Meccan Sura, like Surat Al-An'am (Chapter 6). The main theme of this Sura, like all the other Meccan Suras, revolves around the articles of faith. The two Suras follow two completely different approaches in addressing the same issues. Each Sura in the Quran has its own characteristics, approach, features, and style. All Suras deal with the same topic and have the same objective but each one has a different way in dealing with the topic and reaching the objective.

The Quranic Suras resemble the human creation. God willed that diversity be the model of the human race. All people share the same basic physical characteristics but each one is a separate entity completely different from everyone else. Each human being has different characteristics and traits which set him apart from other people. After being in the company of the Suras of the Quran for a long time, I began to feel the same way about them. I feel that each one is different. Each one has its own features and characteristics, as if they were different members of the same species. Having lived with them for a long time, I now consider them friends. I enjoy which each Sura offers. Each Sura takes one along an enjoyable journey to discover the depths of the human souls and the secrets of the universe.

The two Suras Al-An'am and Al-A'raf deal with the same topic: the creed of Islam. They both deal with the belief in the Oneness of God. Al-An'am confronts the pre-Islamic age of ignorance with the truth that defies the entrenched myth of idolatry. But, Al-A'raf presents the truth of the Oneness of God from an historical perspective. It takes you on a journey along the history of the human race from the time of Adam (PBUH) to the time of Muhammad (PBUH). It describes the interactions between the messengers of God and their peoples and the consequences of these interactions.

### **Verses: 1 to 9**

1. *Alif. Lam. Mim. Sad.*
2. *A Book revealed to you - let there be no heaviness in your heart therefrom - that you may warn thereby, and (it is) a reminder to the believers.*
3. *Follow what has been revealed to you from your Lord, and follow no protecting guardian beside Him. How little you are mindful.*
4. *How many a town have We destroyed! Our punishment took them by night or while they were sleeping for their afternoon rest.*
5. *No plea had they, when Our terror came to them, save that they said, "We were truly wrongdoers."*
6. *Then verily We shall question those to whom (Our message) has been sent, and verily We shall question the messengers.*
7. *Then verily We shall narrate to them (the event) with knowledge, for We were not absent (when it came to pass).*
8. *The weighing on that Day will be true (weighing). As for those whose scale is heavy, they are the successful.*

9. *Those whose scale will be light are they who lost their souls because they used to wrongfully reject our revelations. (7:1-9)*

“*Alif. Lam. Mim. Sad.*” Starting the Sura with letters from the Arabic alphabet has been discussed in the beginning of Surat Al-Baqara and Surat Al-‘Imran. We have chosen the view that this is a reference to the fact that the Quran has been written using the same alphabet that the Arabs used, however, they were not able to compose a similar text. This is a proof that the Quran has not been written by a human being. Although, we consider this view to be probable, but God knows best.

“*A Book revealed to you - let there be no heaviness in your heart therefrom - that you may warn thereby, and (it is) a reminder to the believers.*” This Book serves as a warning and a reminder to people to follow God’s commands. In doing this, the Book confronts old beliefs and traditions; and establishes new systems and norms. The Book aims at replacing these old beliefs and changing the well established norms and systems. In doing this, there will be many times when the messenger will be heavy hearted and will face many adverse situations. This is not an experience unique to the early Muslims who tried to enlighten the idolatrous Arabs in the early days of Islam, but it is also the experience of every Muslim who wants to lead an Islamic way of life. This experience will continue to occur till the Day of Judgment. The Islamic morals and values will always be in confrontation with the hedonistic way of life that tends to exist in human societies in various places and at different times. Islam endeavors to replace the darkness that surrounds humankind when it indulges in carnal desires, submits to tyranny, or worships false deities with the light of guidance. It aims at replacing the darkness of oppression and injustice with the light of the truth. It endeavors to move people from the darkness of slavery to the light of serving God only. Islam came to emphasize the truth that there is no deity but God. It came to establish a society in which the dominion is God’s dominion. In this society there is no room for false deities, human or otherwise. Quran came to serve as a reminder of these facts.

“*Follow what has been revealed to you from your Lord, and follow no protecting guardian beside Him. How little you are mindful.*” At the same time God’s command was given to the Messenger (PBUH) to warn, the command was given to the believers to follow what has been revealed in the Quran. They were also commanded not to follow any one beside God. This is the crux of the matter, the issue of associating partners with God. The question is posed, do they follow God’s commands and become Muslims, or they follow commands issued by others and become idolaters? These are two distinct positions that cannot be reconciled. Following God’s command implies acknowledging God as the only Lord, and conceding all power to Him alone.

The previous verse addressed the Messenger (PBUH), “*A Book revealed to you,*” and this verse addresses the believers, “*Follow what has been revealed to you from your Lord.*” The command to the Messenger (PBUH) was to believe in the Book, to warn, and to remind; while the command to the believers is to believe in the Book and to follow this Book only. This is an endearing way for addressing the Messenger (PBUH) and the believers. It implies that the Book is a special gift from God to the Messenger (PBUH) and the believers. So, they should cherish it and be grateful to God for His gift.

The move from idolatry to monotheism is a tremendous leap of faith which requires a momentous effort. It involves a complete change of the thoughts, perspectives, morals, norms, and traditions of the society. It will result in a major upheaval of the economic, social, and political systems. It will reshape the relationship between the human being on one side and God, people, and the universe on the other. Motivating people to adopt such a momentous change requires an address that shakes the consciousness of people and moves their feelings; an address which serves as a wakeup call for those who are immersed in their well established traditions. Hence the reminder of the consequence of disregarding the warning, *“How many a town have We destroyed! Our punishment took them by night or while they were sleeping for their afternoon rest. No plea had they, when Our terror came to them, save that they said, ‘We were certainly wrongdoers.’ Then verily We shall question those to whom (Our message) has been sent, and verily We shall question the messengers. Then verily We shall narrate to them (the event) with knowledge, for We were not absent (when it came to pass). The weighing on that day will be true (weighing). As for those whose scale is heavy, they are the successful. Those whose scale will be light are they who lost their souls because they used to wrongfully reject our revelations.”* A reminder of the stories describing the destruction of people in the past, when they rejected guidance, is certainly the best warning.

Many a town was ruined when they rejected God’s revelations. Some were destroyed when they were napping during the day and some were destroyed while they were asleep at night. These are times of rest and peace when a disaster would be least expected. Their only reaction to what had befallen them was to admit their wrongdoing in associating partners with God. Associating partners with God is the highest level of wrongdoing. This scene depicts the wrongdoers taken by surprise when they faced the calamity, they realized the truth and had no recourse but to admit their guilt but it was too late and they were destroyed. Then the scene moves to another stage at a different time and place, a stage set on the theatre of the Day of Judgment. Thus, the destruction in this world is seamlessly connected with the torment in the Hereafter. The messengers will be asked so that all the details of the story would be revealed. Not only the guilty ones will admit to their guilt, but their crimes will also be made public. God will then remind them of the details which they have forgotten because God is aware of all events.

The deeds will be weighed with a true measure. Those whose deeds weigh heavily will be rewarded with success, and what better success than attaining salvation. They will be saved from Hell fire and will be admitted to paradise. But those whose deeds have no weight in God’s balance, they are the losers.

## **Verses: 10 to 25**

*10. And We have given you (humankind) power on earth, and appointed for you therein livelihoods. Little you give thanks.*

*11. And certainly We created you, then fashioned you, then told the angels, “Fall you prostrate before Adam.” And they fell prostrate, all save Iblis who was not of those who prostrated.*

*12. He (God) said, “What prevented you to prostrate when I commanded you?” (Iblis) said, “I am better than him. You created me of fire while You created him of mud.”*

*13. He (God) said, “Then go down from here. It is not for you to show pride here, so go forth. You are of the abject ones.”*

14. He said, "Give me respite till the day they are raised up."
15. He (God) said, "You are among those who are given respite."
16. He said, "Now, because You sent me astray, verily I shall lurk in ambush for them on Your straight path."
17. Then I shall come upon them from before them and from behind them and from their right sides and from their left sides. And You will not find most of them thankful."
18. He (God) said, "Get out of here, despised, banished. I will fill Hell with all of those who follow you."
19. And Adam, dwell you and your wife in the Garden and eat from wherever both of you desire, but neither one of you should come near this tree lest both of you become wrongdoers."
20. Then Satan whispered to them that he might manifest to them that which was hidden from them of their shame, and he said, "Your Lord forbade you from this tree, lest you should become angels or become of the immortals."
21. And he swore to them both, that he was their sincere adviser."
22. Thus, did he lead them on with guile. And when they tasted of the tree their shame became manifest to them and they began to heap on themselves some of the leaves of the Garden. And their Lord called them, (saying), "Did I not forbid you from that tree and tell you that Satan is your open enemy?"
23. They said, "Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves. If You do not forgive us and have mercy on us, we will certainly be lost."
24. He (God) said, "Go down (from whence), one of you is a foe to the other. There will be for you on earth a dwelling place and provision for a while."
25. He (God) said, "There you shall live, and there you shall die, and thence shall you be brought forth." (7:10-25)

This is how the great journey started. The narrative sets the stage for the beginning of the life of the human race on earth, "And We have given you (humankind) power on earth, and appointed for you therein livelihoods. Little you give thanks." God the Creator, of the earth and the humans, fashioned the earth to make it suitable for the survival of humankind and gave humankind the characteristics and the skills to be able to exploit the earth's resources to make it habitable. It is God who created the earth with its atmosphere, its composition, its size, its distance from the sun and the moon, its rotation around the sun, its tilted axis of rotation, its rotational speed, and all the necessary characteristics which made it a suitable residence for humankind. God created the resources necessary to start and sustain human life on earth. God appointed humankind as the master of all the creatures that live on earth. He gave humankind the talents, the skills, and the characteristics which enable him to dominate and domesticate these creatures. God gave humankind the ability to discover and understand the rules and laws that govern the universe; and use them to advance life on earth.

Humankind could not have been able to "conquer the nature" – a term that people, who do not understand God's role, like to use – without the power that God bestowed on him. The old Greek and Roman postulates – which form the basis of modern material western thought – imply an existing confrontation between humankind and the universe. They depict life on earth as a battle between humankind and nature. The process which humankind uses to discover, understand, and use the rules that govern the universe is called "conquering nature." These are silly and evil

postulates. Had God made nature an enemy to humankind, humankind would not have been able to exist.

Islam provides a holistic perspective on the creation. God created the universe, humankind, and nature. He controls all of them and it was His will to make the universe in such a way to allow human life to start and to flourish. This perspective allows humankind to live in harmony with the universe under the guidance of God; and enables humankind to lead secure and peaceful life and to fulfill the duties of God's vicegerent on earth for which he was created. But few people are grateful.

*“And certainly We created you, then fashioned you, then told the angels, ‘Fall you prostrate before Adam.’ And they fell prostrate, all save Iblis who was not of those who prostrated. He (God) said, ‘What prevented you to prostrate when I commanded you?’ (Iblis) said, ‘I am better than him. You created me of fire while You created him of mud.’ He (God) said, ‘Then go down from here. It is not for you to show pride here, so go forth. You are of the abject ones.’ He said, ‘Give me respite till the day they are raised up.’ He (God) said, ‘You are among those who are given respite.’ He said, ‘Now, because You sent me astray, verily I shall lurk in ambush for them on Your straight path. Then I shall come upon them from before them and from behind them and from their right sides and from their left sides. And You will not find most of them thankful.’ He (God) said, ‘Get out of here, despised, banished. I will fill Hell with all of those who follow you.’”* These verses describe the first scene of the story. It is an exciting and volatile scene.

However, we will delay the commentary on the story until we have finished the review of all the details of the story. In these verses the creation may mean formation of the body while fashioning may mean completion of the shape and characteristics. These are two levels in the process of creation and not two stages of development. From the linguistic point of view, the adverb “then” may indicate two concurrent events. So, these two events, the creation and fashioning, may have been two concurrent and not consecutive stages. This is similar to the verse, *“Our Lord is He who gave to each (created) thing its form and nature, then gave it guidance,”* (20:50) which indicates that God gave guidance to each created thing at the time of its creation in order that each creature would conduct the duties that he/she was created to perform. So, there is no time difference between the two levels. This is the view that we adopt in view of all the verses which deal with the creation of humankind. The conclusion that one can make from these verses is that humankind was created as a human being from the outset. We do not accept that humankind was the result of the evolution of a low level creation according to Darwin's theory. The unique biological, physiological, spiritual, and intellectual characteristics of the human being are a proof that humankind was created in a separate process and it did not evolve from another species.

The birth of the humankind was announced by God in a big celebration attended by God's high host. God commanded the angels to prostrate themselves to Adam (PBUH). The angels are a creation of God. They have their own characteristics and duties, but we only know of their characteristics that which has been mentioned earlier in the Quran. Iblis is another creation of God, different from the angels, *“Iblis. He was of the jinn, so he rebelled against his Lord's command.”* (18:50) Jinn were created from fire therefore, they are different from angels. However, Iblis was included in the command to the angels to prostrate themselves to Adam (PBUH). The angels, who were created to do what God commands them to do, prostrated

themselves to Adam (PBUH). The command illustrates the honor that God bestowed on humankind and the compliance by the angels reflects their obedient nature. However, Iblis disobeyed God and refused to prostrate himself to Adam (PBUH).

The scene depicts three types of God's creation, each has a different nature: the angels, the jinn, and humankind. The angels are a model of absolute and total obedience. Iblis is a model of stark disobedience and hateful arrogance. The characteristics of humankind will be discussed later. Iblis did not comply with the command and was disobedient to his Lord. We will know later the thoughts that he entertained and caused him to disobey, knowing well that God is his Lord and his Creator. God asked Iblis about his reasons for disobeying God's command, Iblis's response was, *"I am better than him. You created me of fire while You created him of mud."* He chose to disobey in spite of God's clear command. When the Creator issues an unequivocal command, the created has no choice but to comply. God's punishment was pronounced immediately, *"Then go down from here. It is not for you to show pride here, so go forth. You are of the abject ones."* Iblis did not benefit of his knowledge of God's existence and characteristics and chose to adopt a decision different from that which was decreed by God. Thus, he came under the general rule: whoever refuses to accept any of God's commands is considered a disbeliever. It is a premeditated rejection of faith because Iblis had full knowledge that God is the only true God. It was neither the lack of knowledge of the existence of God, nor the lack of belief in God as the Creator that made Iblis a disbeliever. It was the disobedience that made him a disbeliever. For that, he was expelled from paradise, deprived of the mercy of God, and was cursed.

Iblis did not forget that it was Adam (PBUH) who was the cause of his doom. He did not give up. He asked God to give him respite till the Day of Judgment. When he was granted the respite, he announced his plan. He will seduce humankind and sway them away from the straight path. This was an expression of the premeditated evil and deliberate intention to sway humankind off the straight path. He vowed that he will approach humankind from all directions and ways and will cause them to be ungrateful.

God granted Iblis's request so that it would be a source of trial for humankind. God created humankind with an initial natural disposition that has equal propensity to goodness and evil. Humankind was given the intellect to be able to choose and make decisions, and the divine message to guide him in making these decisions. The ways for guidance and misguidance were delineated and humankind was given the tools for making the decision to choose which one to follow. Iblis was expelled from paradise and was deprived of God's mercy. This is the destiny of those who follow him. God gave Iblis the power to seduce and gave humankind the power to choose.

*"And Adam, dwell you and your wife in the Garden and eat from wherever both of you desire, but neither one of you should come near this tree lest both of you become wrongdoers."*

The Quran does not specify which tree they were forbidden to eat from. This indicates that the prohibition was not related to the specific type of tree but it was a test in obedience. God gave Adam (PBUH) and his spouse the right to enjoy the fruits of the Garden and commanded them to observe His command which prohibited them to eat the fruits of a single specific tree. This was part of a training program to train humankind to respect the limits that God has set. It is a training to improve self-control and self-restraint. This training was required because humankind

is endowed with carnal desires. The ability to control these desires is the criterion which separates humans from animals. Humankind is the master of his desires while animals are controlled by their desires.

Iblis was looking for a way to seduce this new creature: humankind - the creature which has been honored by God, whose creation was celebrated by the higher host, to whom the angels prostrated themselves, and who was the cause of the expulsion of Iblis from paradise. This new creature has propensity for both good and evil. The carnal desires of humankind, if not controlled, are his weaknesses. This is the door, which if left unchecked, can be accessed by Iblis. Iblis realized this, *“Then Satan whispered to them that he might manifest to them that which was hidden from them of their shame, and he said, ‘Your Lord forbade you from this tree lest you should become angels or become of the immortals.’ And he swore to them both, that he was their sincere adviser.”* We do not know exactly how does Satan whisper to people, but we know from the authentic source – which is the only source that we can rely upon – that Satan is able to tempt people to sin. The strength of Satan lies in the innate natural weakness of humankind. This weakness can be remedied by enhancing the faith and the remembrance of God. Satan has no authority on the believer who often remembers God. Satan’s scheming is weak. Satan’s objective was to reveal to them their private parts. However, he chose to appeal to the two deeply hidden desires that are part of the innate nature of all humans: being immortal and having an everlasting kingdom. This meaning can be gleaned from other verses. He swore to them that he is their sincere advisor. Adam and his spouse forgot God’s warning that Satan is their avowed enemy and fell under his spell. They forgot the prohibition and ate from the tree, *“Thus did he lead them on with guile. And when they tasted of the tree their shame was manifest to them and they began to heap on themselves some of the leaves of the Garden. And their Lord called them, (saying), ‘Did I not forbid you from that tree and tell you that Satan is your open enemy?’”* Satan tightened his noose and they fell in the trap. They discovered that they were naked and they were able to see their private parts for the first time. They heard words of blame from their Lord. How did God talk to them? How did He talk to the angels and to Iblis? These are all matters of the unseen. We believe that it happened but we do not know how it happened?

One of the characteristics of humankind becomes apparent, humankind forgets and makes mistakes. Humankind has a weak point that can be used by Satan to tempt him. Humankind may not be able to stay continuously committed to the straight path but he has the virtue that he realizes his mistakes and he seeks God’s forgiveness. He does not persist in his mistakes like Satan. *“They said, ‘Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves. If You do not forgive us and have mercy on us, we will certainly be lost.’”* This is the unique characteristic of humankind which connects him to his Lord. Human beings are able to repent and seek God’s forgiveness. They are able to recognize their weaknesses and they know that salvation can only be achieved through God’s power and mercy. This completes the first experience that Adam and his spouse went through in preparation for their mission on earth as vicegerents of God. This was also the beginning of the never ending battle with their enemy, *“He (God) said, ‘Go down (from hence), one of you is a foe to the other. There will be for you on earth a dwelling place and provision for a while. There you shall live, and there you shall die, and thence shall you be brought forth.’”*

They all came down to earth, but where was the Garden? This is part of the unseen which we are unable to fathom. God only knows the unseen. Any attempt to discover the unseen, after the cessation of God’s revelation, is doomed to failure. The tools available to us for acquiring

knowledge are not appropriate for dealing with the unseen. However, the unseen is all around us. What we don't know in this universe is more than what we know. The fact that we are unable to tap into the unseen does not mean that it does not exist.

They all came down to earth to live, Adam, his spouse, and Iblis and his host to start the eternal battle. It is a battle between two groups: a group who is bent on evil and another group who has propensity for both good and evil. The children of Adam have been destined to lead a life of work and enjoyment and eventually return to their Lord who will decide whether they are admitted to the Garden or to Hell fire. This is the conclusion of the first round in a long series of rounds between humankind and Iblis and his host. Humankind can only win these rounds if he sought refuge with his Lord otherwise he is doomed to failure.

### **Verses: 26 to 34**

*26. Children of Adam, we have indeed sent down to you clothing to cover your shame, and (clothing) for beauty and the clothing of God consciousness, that is the best. This is of God's signs that they may be mindful.*

*27. Children of Adam, do not let Satan seduce you, in the same manner that he got your parents out of the Garden, stripping them of their clothing, to expose their shame. He and his tribe see you from a position where you cannot see them. We made the devils friends to those who do not believe.*

*28. And when they commit an immoral act they say, "We found our fathers doing it and God enjoined it on us." Say, "God, verily, does not enjoin immorality. Do you say things about God which you do not know?"*

*29. Say, "My Lord has commanded justice." And set your faces upright to Him at every place of prayer, and call upon Him, making your devotion sincere to Him. As He created you in the beginning, so you shall return.*

*30. A group has been guided by Him, while another group did earn misguidance justly. They choose the devils for protecting guardians instead of God and they thought they were rightly guided.*

*31. Children of Adam, wear your beautiful apparel at every place of prayer. Eat and drink, but do not be extravagant. He certainly does not love those who are extravagant.*

*32. Say, "Who has forbidden the adornment of God, which He has produced for His servants, and the things, clean and pure, (which He has provided) for sustenance?" Say, "Such, on the Day of Resurrection, will be only for those who believed during the life of the world." Thus, We detail Our revelations for people who have knowledge.*

*33. Say, "My Lord has indeed forbidden immoral conduct, whether open or secret; sins and trespasses against truth or reason; associating partners with God, for which He has given no authority; and saying things about God of which you have no knowledge."*

*34. And every nation has its term, and when their term is reached, they cannot delay it nor advance it even for an hour." (7:26-34)*

*"Children of Adam, We have indeed sent down to you clothing to cover your shame, and (clothing) for beauty and the clothing of God consciousness, that is the best. This is of the God's signs that they may be mindful."* This address comes against the background of the previous scene. It is a scene which depicts the nakedness of Adam (PBUH) and his spouse and their

attempt to cover themselves up with the Garden's leaves. This was the consequence of the sin of disobeying God. The Quran presents a different perspective for Adam's sin from that given in the Old Testament, where it is claimed that the forbidden tree was the tree of knowledge. In Islam, the tree was not forbidden to prevent Adam (PBUH) from gaining knowledge but it was forbidden as a part of Adam's (PBUH) training to obey God and to recognize his eternal enemy.

The verse refers to God's blessings in providing a cover for the children of Adam. The cover serves a dual purpose, to provide protection and ornament for the body. The Arabic word used in the verse for "cover" could also be extended to include other commodities and other household articles which make life comfortable. The verse also mentions the clothing of God consciousness and describes it as the best clothing. Abdel Al-Rahman bin Aslam said, "God covers those who are conscious of Him." There is a parallel between the two types of clothing, they go hand in hand. Regular clothing provides protection and beauty for the body and God consciousness provides protection and beauty for the soul. Physical and spiritual decency complement each other.

*"Children of Adam, do not let Satan seduce you, in the same manner that he got your parents out of the Garden, stripping them of their clothing, to expose their shame. He and his tribe see you from a position where you cannot see them. We made the devils friends to those who do not believe. And when they commit an immoral act they say, 'We found our fathers doing it and God enjoined it on us.' Say, 'God, verily, does not enjoin immorality. Do you say things about God which you do not know?' Say. 'My Lord has commanded justice.' And set your faces upright to Him at every time and place of prayer, and call upon Him, making your devotion sincere to Him. As He created you in the beginning, so shall you return. A group has been guided by Him, while another group did earn misguidance justly. They choose the devils for protecting guardians instead of God and they thought they were rightly guided."* This is the second time that God addressed the children of Adam in the course of the narrative about Adam's encounter with Satan. This discourse refers to the old pagan Arab's tradition to circumambulate naked around the Ka'ba claiming that this was God's command which came to them through their forefathers.

The first time God addressed the children of Adam during this discourse was when He reminded them of the difficult experience that Adam and his spouse went through and it was only God's blessings which guided them to covering their bodies. This time the address is a general warning to be cautious of Satan's tricks who will always be trying to tempt them to follow laws and traditions which will lead them away from God's way. They should be always on the alert so that Satan would not take them by surprise. God willed that those who reject faith befriend Satan and his tribe. This is a horrible state of affairs when they unwittingly take for friends those who are their avowed enemies. The devils will have no difficulty at all in leading those who reject faith astray. It is a fact that Satan is the friend of the disbelievers while God is the protecting friend of the believers. This has drastic consequences on people's perspective and attitudes. An example is given, *"And when they commit an immoral act they say, 'We found our fathers doing it and God enjoined it on us.'"* This is what the idolatrous Arabs used to say and do. Men and women would circumambulate around the Ka'ba in the nude claiming that they were following God's command. Even though they were associating partners with God, but they did not have the audacity to claim that faith has no role to play in people's life. Such as the claims that are being

made now and accepted by some societies, claims which aim at replacing God's law with manmade laws.

The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to respond to these claims, "*God, verily, does not enjoin immorality.*" Being nude in public is an immoral act. These acts are unacceptable. Ages of ignorance are all similar even if they come centuries apart. God did neither command nor condone immoral acts. God's commands are in the Scriptures which were revealed to His messengers. God only commanded what is moderate and just. God commanded people to follow His path, a path of decency and morality. God commanded that people believe in Him as the one true God.

Then the verses remind people of the Day of Judgment. On that day, people will be separated into two groups: those who followed God and those who followed Satan. This is the end of the journey. The journey started with two groups: Adam (PBUH) and his spouse on one side and Satan on the other. The circle has been completed. Those who were obedient to God will return in the company of Adam (PBUH) and his spouse and those who were disobedient will return in the company of Satan.

*"Children of Adam, wear your beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer. Eat and drink, but do not be extravagant. He certainly does not love those who are extravagant. Say, 'Who has forbidden the adornment of God, which He has produced for His servants, and the things, clean and pure, (which He has provided) for sustenance?' Say, 'Such, on the Day of Resurrection, will be only for those who believed during the life of the world.' Thus, We detail Our revelations for people who have knowledge. Say, 'My Lord has indeed forbidden immoral conduct, whether open or secret; sins and trespasses against truth or reason; associating partners with God, for which He has given no authority; and saying things about God of which you have no knowledge.'"* These verses reiterate once more the basic premise of the doctrine, only God has the authority to determine what is lawful and what is forbidden. Children of Adam are commanded to enjoy the things that God made lawful to them, but they should not be extravagant. Al-Quortubi mentions in his book, "The Rules of the Quran," that "The idolatrous Arabs used to abstain from eating cooked meat while they were performing pilgrimage and they only ate very little. They also used to go around the K'aba in the nude. They were then told, "*Wear your beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer. Eat and drink, but do not be extravagant.*" Extravagance means exceeding the limits set by God by decreeing that what God has made lawful is unlawful. Extravagance can work both ways: decreeing what is lawful to be unlawful or decreeing the unlawful to be lawful. Both are acts of transgression, because only God has the authority to decree what is lawful and what is unlawful. The verses then go on to objugate the fact that there are people who forbid themselves and others to enjoy what God has made lawful. "*Say, 'Who has forbidden the adornment of God, which He has produced for His servants, and the things, clean and pure, (which He has provided) for sustenance?'*" The believers have the right to enjoy the beautiful things that God blessed humankind with and in the Hereafter it will be exclusively theirs.

God only forbade immoral conduct whether practiced in the open or secretly. Immoral conduct encompasses all sins, transgression against people, committing injustice, and associating partners with God. The norms that determine whether a dress is decent or not are integral to the way of life that God wants people to lead. This is how these norms are connected to the doctrine. The

norms in the human way of life should be dictated by God's law and not decreed by a manmade law. The norms of decency differentiate between humankind and beasts. Ages of ignorance distort the human values by endorsing indecent clothing as the accepted norm. Because of the importance of this issue, which may be considered a secondary issue by some, a reminder of the temporary nature of life on earth is given, *"And every nation has its term, and when their term is reached, they cannot delay it nor advance it even for an hour."* The word "term" may mean the term of life for an individual which is reached upon the death of the individual or it may mean the term of life for a nation which is reached upon its demise.

### **Verses: 35 to 53**

*35. Children of Adam, whenever there come to you messengers from among you reciting My verses to you, then those who were conscious of God and did good deeds on them shall be no fear nor shall they grieve.*

*36. But those who denied Our revelations and treated them with arrogance, they are companions of the Fire, to abide therein forever.*

*37. Who is more unjust than he who fabricates a lie against God or denies His revelations? Those will receive their portion of the decree. Until Our messengers come to cause them to die, they will say, "Where is that which you used to call beside God?" They say, "They have left us." And they testified against themselves that they were disbelievers.*

*38. He (God) said, "Enter in the company of nations, who passed away before you of humans and jinn, into the Fire." Every time a new nation enters, it curses its sister-nation (that went before), until they follow each other, all into the Fire. The last one will say to the first one, "Our Lord, it is these who misled us; so give them double torment in the Fire." He (God) will say, "For each one there is double torment; but this you do not know."*

*39. Then the first will say to the last, "See then, you were not better than us; so taste you of the torment for what you had earned."*

*40. Certainly those who denied Our revelations and treated them with arrogance, for them the gates of heaven will not open nor they will be admitted to the Garden until the camel can pass through the eye of the needle. Thus, We recompense the guilty.*

*41. Theirs will be a bed of Hell, and over them coverings (of Hell). Thus, do We recompense the wrongdoers.*

*42. But those who believed and did good deeds, We do not overburden any soul beyond its capacity. Those are the rightful owners of the Garden. They will abide therein forever.*

*43. And We shall remove whatever rancour that may be in their hearts. Beneath them will be rivers flowing, and they shall say, "Praise be to God, who has guided us to this (felicity). We could have never found guidance had it not been for the guidance of God. The Messengers of our Lord did indeed bring the truth." And they shall hear the cry, "The Garden is before you; you have been made its inheritors, for what you have done."*

*44. The dwellers of the Garden will call out to the dwellers of the Fire, "We have indeed found what our Lord promised us to be true. Have you also found what your Lord promised you to be true?" They shall say, "Yes." Then a crier will proclaim to them, "The curse of God is on the wrongdoers."*

*45. Those who hinder (people) from the path of God and seek to make it crooked, and they were those who denied the Hereafter."*

46. *Between them shall be a veil; and on the heights will be men who would know everyone by his mark. They will call out to the dwellers of the Garden, "Peace be with you." They will not have entered, but they still have hope.*

47. *When their eyes are turned towards the dwellers of the Fire, they will say, "Our Lord, do not place us with the wrongdoers."*

48. *The people on the heights will call to men whom they recognized by their marks, saying, "What did your multitude and your arrogance avail you?"*

49. *Are these whom you swore that God would not show them mercy? (Unto them it has been said), 'Enter the Garden. No fear shall come upon you nor will you grieve.'*

50. *And the dwellers of the Fire will cry out to the dwellers of the Garden, "Pour on us some water or some of what God has provided you." They will say, "God has forbidden both to those who disbelieved."*

51. *Who took their religion as a game and play; and who were deceived by the life of the world. So this day We have forgotten them as they have forgotten the meeting of this day and as they used to deny Our revelations.*

52. *Verily We have brought them a Book which We expounded with knowledge, a guidance and a mercy for a people who believe.*

53. *Are they just waiting for its fulfillment? On the day it is finally fulfilled, those who disregarded it before will say, "The messengers of our Lord did indeed bring true (tidings). Have we no intercessors now to intercede on our behalf? Or could we be sent back? So that we behave differently from our behavior in the past" In fact they will have lost their souls, and that which they used to fabricate will forsake them. (7:35-53)*

*"Children of Adam, whenever there come to you messengers from among you reciting My verses to you, then those who were conscious of God and did good deeds on them shall be no fear nor shall they grieve. But those who denied Our revelations and treated them with arrogance, they are companions of the Fire, to abide therein forever."* The verse enunciates God's promise to Adam (PBUH) and his descendants. This promise is a covenant between God and Adam (PBUH) and his children. If they fulfill the conditions of the covenant, then they deserve the status of God's vicegerents on earth. This is the role that they were created for. However, if Adam's (PBUH) descendants do not fulfill this condition then they are not eligible for the status of vicegerents, their deeds in this world will be in vain, and they will be held accountable on the Day of Judgment for their failure to fulfill God's covenant.

Those who are God conscious and do good deeds shall have no fear because God consciousness will provide protection against sins and immoral acts. It will protect them especially of the worst of sins: associating partners with God. God consciousness will guide them to do good deeds and to be obedient to God. They will then enjoy a deep sense of security and peace having been assured of their destiny. On the other hand, those who reject God's revelations will be led to Hell fire together with their friend Iblis.

*"Who is more unjust than he who fabricates a lie against God or denies His revelations? Those will receive their portion of the decree. And when Our messengers come to cause them to die, they say, 'Where is that which you used to call beside God?' They will say, 'They have left us.' And they testified against themselves that they were disbelievers."* Here we are watching the scene of those who fabricated lies about God and those who rejected His revelations as the

angels come to capture their souls and put them to death. The angels will ask them, *“Where is that which you used to call beside God?”* The only answer they will have, is *“They have left us.”* They let us down and we cannot find them. What a loss is it to lose one’s deity in a time of need? What kind of deity is this who lets his servants down in such a critical moment? They confessed that they were disbelievers.

*“He said, ‘Enter in the company of nations, who passed away before you of humans and jinn, into the Fire.’ Every time a new nation enters, it curses its sister-nation (that went before), until they follow each other, all into the Fire. The last one will say to the first one, ‘Our Lord, it is these who misled us; so give them double torment in the Fire.’ He will say, ‘For each one there is double torment; but this you do not know.’ Then the first will say to the last, ‘See then, you were not better than us; so taste you of the torment for what you had earned.’”* They will be told to join their colleagues and friends from among humans and jinn in Hell fire. Was not Iblis the one who disobeyed his Lord? Was not he who tricked Adam (PBUH) and his spouse and caused them to be expelled from paradise? Was not he who seduced Adam’s (PBUH) children? Did not God promise to admit him and his followers to Hell fire as a result of their disobedience? Now is the time to fulfill that promise. All those who followed Iblis will be admitted to Hell fire. Different groups who had been friends in the worldly life will now be fighting together and laying the blame on each other for this end. Each group will be asking God to inflict double the punishment on those whom they blame for this destiny. The final statement about the disbelievers is enunciated, *“Certainly those who denied Our revelations and treated them with arrogance, for them the gates of heaven will not open nor they will be admitted to the Garden until the camel can pass through the eye of the needle. Thus, We recompense the guilty.”* This is an amazing scene. Imagine a camel trying to pass through the eye of a needle. Those who rejected God’s revelations can only be admitted to paradise if this impossible act is performed. Hell fire is then their abode. In it, *“Theirs will be a bed of Hell, and over them coverings (of Hell). Thus, do We recompense the wrongdoers.”* Not only they will have beds of fire but they will also have fire covers. This is the reward for the wrongdoers. The wrongdoers are the criminals who associated partners with God and who fabricated lies about Him.

We now look at another scene, *“But those who believed and did good deeds, We do not overburden any soul beyond its capacity. Those are the rightful owners of the Garden. They will abide therein forever. And We shall remove whatever rancour that may be in their hearts. Beneath them will be rivers flowing, and they shall say, ‘Praise be to God, who has guided us to this (felicity). We could have never found guidance had it not been for the guidance of God. The Messengers of our Lord did indeed bring the truth.’ And they shall hear the cry, ‘The Garden is before you; you have been made its inheritors, for what you have done.’”* Those who believed and did their best in performing good deeds, God does not overburden a soul beyond its capacity, are the companions of paradise. By God’s leave and grace, they inherit paradise because they believed and did good deeds. They followed God’s messengers and disobeyed Iblis. Because of this, they received God’s mercy which landed them in paradise. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *“No one will be admitted to paradise on the basis of their deeds alone.”* The companions asked him, *“Even you, Messenger of God?”* He said, *“Even I, unless God bestows His mercy and grace on me.”* The scene of the disbelievers in Hell fire is juxtaposed against the scene of the believers in paradise. The groups in Hell fire are fighting while the believers live in peace and felicity together. The disbelievers are having beds of fire while the believers will enjoy

rivers flowing underneath them. The disbelievers are busy laying the blame on each other while the believers are busy praising God. The disbelievers will be treated with contempt while the believers will be treated with dignity and honor. Rancour has been removed from the hearts of the believers. Their hearts will be cleansed of any traces of anger or bad feelings towards each other.

The verses continue to describe the scene after each group found its place: the believers comfortable in paradise, and the disbelievers suffering in Hell fire. The believers will call upon the disbelievers saying, *“We have indeed found what our Lord promised us to be true. Have you also found what your Lord promised you to be true?”* It is a rhetorical question which carries a tone of mockery. The answer comes back in one word, *“Yes.”* The dialogue is then interrupted, *“Then a crier will proclaim to them, ‘The curse of God is on the wrongdoers. Those who hinder (people) from the path of God and seek to make it crooked, and they were those who denied the Hereafter.’”* This clarifies the meaning of the term “wrongdoers.” A disbeliever is a wrongdoer. The wrongdoers hinder people from God’s path; they follow a crooked path; and they deny the Hereafter. This description underlines their real objective. They are not interested in the straight path they want to follow a crooked way. The straight path is the path delineated by God’s law, all other paths are crooked. It is obvious that these people do not believe in the Hereafter, because had they believed in the Hereafter they would have certainly followed the straight path.

*“Between them shall be a veil; and on the heights will be men who would know everyone by his mark. They will call out to the dwellers of the Garden, ‘Peace be with you.’ They will not have entered, but they still have hope. When their eyes are turned towards the dwellers of the Fire, they will say, ‘Our Lord, do not place us with the wrongdoers.’ The people on the heights will call to men whom they recognized by their marks, saying, ‘What did your multitude and your arrogance avail you? Are these whom you swore that God would not show them mercy?’ (To them it has been said), ‘Enter the Garden. No fear shall come upon you nor will you grieve.’”* It has been narrated that those men standing on the heights – the barrier between paradise and Hell fire- are people whose sins are exactly balanced by their good deeds. They are neither admitted to paradise nor destined to Hell fire. They are waiting for God’s grace and hope to receive His mercy. They will spot, among the people in Hell fire, people they used to know in life, people who were arrogant criminals. They will mock them saying, *“What did your multitude and your arrogance avail you?”* Here you are in Hell fire. They will remind them of what they used to say in their worldly life about the believers, *“Are these whom you swore that God would not show them mercy?”* Look where did they end? They are now happy in paradise; they will suffer no fear nor shall they grieve.

*“And the dwellers of the Fire will cry out to the dwellers of the Garden, ‘Pour on us some water or some of what God has provided you.’ They will say, ‘God has forbidden both to those who disbelieved.’”* The hopes of those in Hell fire are dashed and they are reminded with God’s final verdict, *“This day We have forgotten them as they have forgotten the meeting of this day and as they used to deny Our revelations. Verily We have brought them a Book which We expounded with knowledge, a guidance and a mercy for a people who believe. Are they just waiting for its fulfillment? On the day it is finally fulfilled, those who disregarded it before will say, ‘The messengers of our Lord did indeed bring true (tidings). Have we no intercessors now to intercede on our behalf? Or could we be sent back? So that we behave differently from our behavior in the past.’ In fact, they will have lost their souls, and that which they used to*

*fabricate will forsake them.”*

### **Verses: 54 to 58**

*54. Your Lord is God, who created the heavens and the earth in six days, then established Himself on the throne. He covers the night with the day, which is in haste to follow it, and has made the sun and the moon and the stars subservient by His command. His verily is all the creation and the commandment. Blessed be God, the Lord of the Worlds.*

*55. Call upon your Lord humbly and in secret. Certainly, He does not love the aggressors.*

*56. Do no mischief on the earth, after it has been set in order, but call on Him with fear and longing (in your hearts). Certainly the Mercy of God is (always) near to those who do good.*

*57. It is He who sends the winds as tidings heralding His mercy, till they have carried clouds heavy with rain, We derive them to a dead land, and then cause water to descend thereon and thereby bring forth fruits of every kind. Thus, We bring forth the dead. Haply you may be mindful.*

*58. From the land that is pure and good springs up produce, by the will of its Lord; while bad land only produces scanty harvest. Thus do we explain the revelations to those who are grateful. (7:54-58)*

*“Your Lord is God, who created the heavens and the earth in six days, then established Himself on the throne. He covers the night with the day, which is in haste to follow it, and has made the sun and the moon and the stars subservient by His command. His verily is all creation and commandment. Blessed be God, the Lord of the Worlds.”* It is God who created this huge universe and it is He who controls and manages it. He causes the night to follow the day in a perpetual cycle. It is He who controls the sun and the moon. This is your Lord. He deserves to be worshiped as your sole Lord. He raises you according to His program, He teaches you according to His discipline, He enacts the laws that you should follow according to His commands, and He judges among you according to His rules. He is the sovereign power that owns and commands. Since He is the sole Creator, then no one else should have the right to command except Him. This is the objective of this discourse, the issue of who is the Lord, who is the God, and who has the right to rule. This issue has been raised in connection with what to eat and how to be dressed as it has been raised in connection with cattle, plantations, and rituals in the previous Sura.

*“Call upon your Lord humbly and in secret. Certainly, He does not love the aggressors. Do no mischief on the earth, after it has been set in order, but call on Him with fear and longing (in your hearts). Certainly the Mercy of God is (always) near to those who do good.”* The verse directs believers to call upon their Lord when they are in the best mood for prayer. Those who call upon their Lord should do it humbly and in secret. Calling upon the Lord in private reinforces the relationship between the person and God. Muslim narrates on the authority of Abi Musa (RA), he said, “We were traveling with the Prophet (PBUH) when people started to say Allahu Akbar in a very loud voice. The Prophet (PBUH) said, ‘People, take it easy. God is not deaf nor is He far. God is near you, He hears you when you call, and He is with you.’” The Quran inculcates in the believers the feeling of God’s nearness to them. Those who feel that God is near realize that there is no need to raise one’s voice when calling upon God. They should also call upon Him fearing His punishment and hoping for His grace and reward. God’s mercy is

always close to those who do good, who serve God as if they were able to see Him because He sees them even though they do not see Him.

*“It is He who sends the winds as tidings heralding His mercy, till they have carried clouds heavy with rain, We derive them to a dead land, and then cause water to descend thereon and thereby bring forth fruits of every kind. Thus, We bring forth the dead. Haply you may be mindful.”*

These are God’s signs in the universe, the signs of His power, dominion, management, and will. These signs are created by God, the only deity that deserves to be worshipped. He created these signs, out of His mercy, to provide for His servants. Each moment winds blow, they move the clouds and the clouds bring rain to a piece of land. The verse ties this physical phenomenon to God’s will. God sends the winds as a sign of His mercy. Winds blow according to God’s laws which control the universe. The believer perspective is that even though God created rules and allowed them to govern the universe and the physical phenomena around us, He is still in control of these phenomena. He allows them to happen. There is no contradiction between allowing the phenomena to be controlled by rules which God created in the first place and the fact that God is still in control of every single event.

The verse also highlights the connection between the ability of God to create humankind in the first place and His ability to raise the dead on the Day of Judgment. The miracle which produced humankind in the first instant is the same miracle that can be used to raise the dead at the end of the journey. God who produces fruits from a dead land is able to raise the dead on the Day of Judgment.

*“From the land that is pure and good springs up produce, by the will of its Lord; while bad land only produces scanty harvest. Thus do we explain the revelations to those who are grateful.”* The Quran and the Prophet’s (PBUH) traditions draw the similitude between a good heart and a good land, and the similitude between an evil heart and a barren land. Both the land and the heart embrace the seeds and produce fruits. The heart bears fruits in the form of feelings, intentions, emotions, responses, attitudes, and will. The land bears the fruits that people eat and enjoy. Guidance and good advice to the heart are like water to the land. The good heart opens up for guidance and benefit from the good advice. The good heart becomes pure and produces good deeds. The hardness of the bad heart does not allow guidance to penetrate and cleanse it. The heart becomes impure and produces evil deeds. Only those who have good hearts will be grateful. The concept of gratitude to God is one of the themes of this Sura. It is repeated often together with the concepts of remembrance and warning.

## **Verses: 59 to 93**

*59. We sent Noah to his people. He said, “My people worship God. You have no other deity but Him. I fear for you the torment of a grievous day.”*

*60. The chieftains of his people said, “We see you in plain error.”*

*61. He said, “My people, there is no error in my mind, on the contrary I am a messenger from the Lord of the worlds.*

*62. I only convey to you the messages of my Lord and give you good counsel, and I know from God that which you do not know.*

63. *Do you wonder that there has come to you a message from your Lord, through a man of your own people, to warn you, so that you may be conscious of God and haply receive His Mercy?"*

64. *But they denied him, and We saved him, and those with him, in the ship. We drowned in the flood those who denied Our revelations. They were indeed a blind people.*

65. *To the (tribe of) 'Ad, (We sent) Hud, one of their (own) brethren. He said, "My people worship God. You have no other deity but Him, will you not be conscious of God?"*

66. *The chiefs who disbelieved from among his people said, "Most surely we see that you are an imbecile, and we think that you are a liar."*

67. *He said, "My people, I am no imbecile, but (I am) a messenger from the Lord of the worlds.*

68. *I convey to you the messages of my Lord and I am for you a sincere adviser.*

69. *Do you wonder that there has come to you a message from your Lord through a man of your own people, to warn you? Remember when He made you heirs after the people of Noah, and gave you a stature tall among the nations. Remember the bounties (you have received) from God, that so you may succeed."*

70. *They said, "Did you come to us so that we worship God alone, and forsake what our fathers used to worship? Bring us what you are threatening us with, if you are telling the truth."*

71. *He said, "Terror and wrath have already fallen upon you from your Lord. Do you dispute with me over names which you have named, you and your fathers, without authority from God? Then wait, I will be also waiting."*

72. *We saved him and those who were with him, by Our mercy; and We cut off the roots of those who denied Our revelations and did not believe.*

73. *To the (tribe of) Thamud, (We sent) Salih, one of their own brethren. He said, "My people worship God. You have no other deity but Him. Now has come to you a clear sign from your Lord. This she-camel of God is a sign for you. So leave her to graze in God's land, and do not harm her, or you shall be seized with a painful torment.*

74. *And remember how He made you heirs after the 'Ad people and gave you habitations in the land. You build for yourselves palaces and castles in the plains and carve out homes in the mountains. So remember the bounties of God and do not spread mischief in the land."*

75. *The chiefs who were arrogant among his people said to those who believed from among the powerless, "Do you know indeed that Salih is a messenger from his Lord?" They said, "We do indeed believe in the revelation which he has been sent with."*

76. *Those who were arrogant said, "We disbelieve in that which you believe in."*

77. *Then they ham-strung the she-camel, and insolently defied the order of their Lord, saying, "Salih, bring about what you are threatening us with, if you are a messenger (of God)."*

78. *So the earthquake seized them, and they lay dead in their homes.*

79. *Salih turned away from them, saying, "My people, I did indeed deliver my Lord's message to you and I gave you good counsel, but you do not love good counselors."*

80. *We also (sent) Lut. He said to his people, "Do you commit such immorality, which no people before you in world, ever committed?"*

81. *You approach males with lust instead of women. You are indeed people given to excesses."*

82. *The answer of his people was only to say (one to another), "Drive them out of your township. They are a people who want to keep themselves pure."*

83. *So We saved him and his household, except his wife she was of those who stayed behind.*

84. *And we showered them with rain. Then see what was the end of those who indulged in sin and crime.*

85. *To the (tribe of) Madyan, (We sent) Shu'ayb one of their (own) brethren. He said, "My people worship God. You have no other god but Him. Now has come to you a clear sign from your Lord. Give just measure and weight and do not withhold from people the things that are their due; and do no mischief in the land after it has been set in order. That will be best for you, if you are believers.*

86. *Do not lurk on every road to threaten (wayfarers), and to turn away from God's path him who believes in Him, seeking to make it crooked. And remember, when you were but few, how He did multiply you. And consider the end of the mischief-makers.*

87. *And if there is a party among you who believed in the message with which I have been sent, and a party which did not believe, then be patience until God judges between us. He is the Best of Judges."*

88. *The arrogant chieftains of his people said, "Shu'ayb, we will certainly drive you out from our township, you and those who believed with you, unless you return back to our religion." He said, "Even though we hate it?*

89. *We would indeed have fabricated a lie against God, if we returned to your ways after God has rescued us therefrom; nor could we by any means return thereto unless it is the will of God, Our Lord. Our Lord's knowledge encompassed everything. In God we trust. Our Lord, expose the truth (and judge) between us and our people, for You are the best to judge."*

90. *The chieftains of his people, who disbelieved, said, "If you follow Shu'ayb, then truly you shall be the losers."*

91. *So the earthquake seized them, and they lay dead in their homes.*

92. *Those who denied Shu'ayb became as though they had not dwelt therein. Those who denied Shu'ayb, they were the losers.*

93. *Shu'ayb turned away from them, saying, "My people, I did indeed deliver my Lord's message to you and I gave you good counsel. So why should I lament over a people who refuse to believe." (7:59-93)*

*"We sent Noah to his people. He said, 'My people worship God. You have no other deity but Him. I fear for you the torment of a grievous day.' The chieftains of his people said, 'We see you in plain error.' He said, 'My people, there is no error in my mind, on the contrary I am a messenger from the Lord of the worlds. I only convey to you the messages of my Lord and give you good counsel, and I know from God that which you do not know. Do you wonder that there has come to you a message from your Lord, through a man of your own people, to warn you, so that you may be conscious of God and haply receive His Mercy?' But they denied him, and We saved him, and those with him, in the ship. We drowned in the flood those who denied Our revelations. They were indeed a blind people."* This is a brief review of Noah's (PBUH) story.

The story has been mentioned in details in other Suras. The focus of the narrative is on the themes we have mentioned earlier: the doctrine, the way the message was delivered, the way the message was received, the feelings that the messengers experienced, and the actualization of the warning for those who rejected the message. That is why only the features that touch upon these themes are mentioned. God sent Noah (PBUH) to his people according to the divine convention in delivering the message to people. Noah simply said to his people, *"My people worship God. You have no other deity but Him."* It is the same statement which forms the basis of the doctrine. It is the foundation on which human life rests. It brings people together to march in the same direction and to reach the same objective. It guarantees the freeing of humankind of all forms of bondage: bondage to vain desires and bondage to other human beings. Noah then delivered a

warning, *“I fear for you the torment of a grievous day.”* One notices that the concepts of the Hereafter and the accountability of humankind were mentioned in God’s message as far back as Noah’s (PBUH) time. Those who had a twisted mind responded, *“We see you in plain error.”* It is the same response that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) received when he called upon his people to embrace Islam. It is a twisted logic that confuses between guidance and error. Noah (PBUH) continued with his argument, *“My people, there is no error in my mind, on the contrary I am a messenger from the Lord of the worlds. I only convey to you the messages of my Lord and give you good counsel, and I know from God that which you do not know.”*

One notices a jump in the dialogue, at this point, as is evident from the statement that Noah makes, *“Do you wonder that there has come to you a message from your Lord, through a man of your own people,”* This was Noah’s (PBUH) response to an objection that must have been raised by Noah’s (PBUH) people. The Quran did not mention the objection explicitly but the response was mentioned instead. There is no wonder, God chooses whomsoever to be His messenger. Noah (PBUH) continues to explain the objective of the message, *“to warn you, so that you may be conscious of God and haply receive His Mercy?”* The warning aimed at evoking the feelings that come with God consciousness. The warning fell on deaf ears and hard hearts. So, *“They denied him, and We saved him, and those with him, in the ship. We drowned in the flood those who denied Our revelations. They were indeed a blind people.”*

The verses carry us on a journey through history, and here we are witnessing what happened to the tribe of ‘Ad the people of Hud, *“To the (tribe of) ‘Ad, (We sent) Hud, one of their (own) brethren. He said, ‘My people worship God. You have no other deity but Him, will you not be conscious of God?’ The chiefs who disbelieved from among his people said, ‘Most surely we see that you are an imbecile, and we think that you are a liar.’ He said, ‘My people, I am no imbecile, but (I am) a messenger from the Lord of the worlds. I convey to you the messages of my Lord and I am for you a sincere adviser. Do you wonder that there has come to you a message from your Lord through a man of your own people, to warn you? Remember when He made you heirs after the people of Noah, and gave you a stature tall among the nations. Remember the bounties (you have received) from God, that so you may succeed.’ They said, ‘Did you come to us so that we worship God alone, and forsake what our fathers used to worship? Bring us what you are threatening us with, if you are telling the truth.’ He said, ‘Terror and wrath have already fallen upon you from your Lord. Do you dispute with me over names which you have named, you and your fathers, without authority from God? Then wait, I will be also waiting.’ We saved him and those who were with him, by Our mercy; and We cut off the roots of those who denied Our revelations and did not believe.”* It is the same message, the same dialogue, and the same ending. It is the course of divine justice.

It is narrated that the tribe of ‘Ad were actually the descendants of the people who believed in Noah’s (PBUH) message and escaped the flood by accompanying Noah (PBUH) on the ship. So the tribe of ‘Ad were the descendants of people who believed in God, but as time passed by they deviated from the path of submission to God, the Lord of the worlds. Satan seduced them by appealing to their vain desires of love of ownership and unlawful pleasures. So, when their prophet said to them, *“My people worship God. You have no other deity but Him, will you not be conscious of God?”* they rejected him. It is the same statement that Noah (PBUH) made to his people before, they refused and were punished. ‘Ad came after them. The verses did not mention

where they resided, but we know from another Sura that they lived in an area called Al-Ahqaf. These were the sandy hills on the boundaries of Yemen. They followed in the footsteps of the people of Noah (PBUH). They never reflected on what happened to the people of Noah (PBUH) before. This is why Hud (PBUH) said to them, *“Will you not be conscious of God?”* The chiefs of his people were arrogant and felt slighted that Hud (PBUH) was asking them to worship God alone. They said to him, *“Most surely we see that you are an imbecile, and we think that you are a liar.”* They did not even bother to reflect or consider the seriousness of his call. He quietly refuted their claims of being imbecile or a liar and explained again that he is a messenger of God. They must have also doubted that a man from among them would become a messenger of God, because Hud (PBUH) gave them the same answer that Noah (PBUH) gave before, *“Do you wonder that there has come to you a message from your Lord through a man of your own people, to warn you?”* He also continued to remind them of God’s blessings which He bestowed on them, *“Remember when He made you heirs after the people of Noah, and gave you a stature tall among the nations. Remember the bounties (you have received) from God, that so you may succeed.”* They should have been grateful to God for the legacy and blessings He bestowed on them. Instead, they mocked him and challenged him to bring about the punishment that he threatened them with. The response of the Messenger was forthcoming, *“Terror and wrath have already fallen upon you from your Lord. Do you dispute with me over names which you have named, you and your fathers, without authority from God? Then wait, I will be also waiting.”* He tried to clarify that they only worship false deities. They made it up themselves and their forefathers. The true God never gave you authority to declare these false deities as gods. This statement is often repeated in the Quran. It is an evocative statement which emphasizes the fundamental truth that every word, every law, every tradition, and every norm has to be authorized by God. Anything that has not been authorized by God is in vain and will readily disappear. Many wonderful words, bright theories, and attractive views had no leg to stand on and quickly vanished because they were not authorized by God. The end is declared, *“We saved him and those who were with him, by Our mercy; and We cut off the roots of those who denied Our revelations and did not believe.”*

Another page of the history of those who rejected the truth has been folded and we come to a new episode in the history of humankind, *“To the (tribe of) Thamud, (We sent) Salih, one of their own brethren. He said, ‘My people worship God. You have no other deity but Him. Now has come to you a clear sign from your Lord. This she-camel of God is a sign for you. So leave her to graze in God’s land, and do not harm her, or you shall be seized with a painful torment. And remember how He made you heirs after the ‘Ad people and gave you habitations in the land. You build for yourselves palaces and castles in the plains and carve out homes in the mountains. So remember the bounties of God and do not spread mischief in the land.’ The chiefs who were arrogant among his people said to those who believed from among the powerless, “Do you know indeed that Salih is a messenger from his Lord?” They said, “We do indeed believe in the revelation which he has been sent with.” Those who were arrogant said, ‘We disbelieve in that which you believe in.’ Then they ham-strung the she-camel, and insolently defied the order of their Lord, saying, ‘Salih, bring about what you are threatening us with, if you are a messenger (of God).’ So the earthquake seized them, and they lay dead in their homes. Salih turned away from them, saying, ‘My people, I did indeed deliver my Lord’s message to you and I gave you good counsel, but you do not love good counselors.’”* The same story has been repeated again, the verses depict a new episode in the series of the confrontations between the truth and

falsehood, *“To the (tribe of) Thamud, (We sent) Salih, one of their own brethren. He said, ‘My people worship God. You have no other god but Him.’”* It the same story but with a new dimension added. When the people of Salih (PBUH) requested a proof to support his claim, he challenged them with a sign from God, *“This she-camel of God is a sign for you.”* Many of the details of the story were omitted because the quick pace of the narrative focused only on the message and the consequences of rejecting the message. The she-camel was referred to as a sign of God, so it must have been a special animal. There may have been extraordinary circumstances around the animal which made it a sign of God and a proof for the prophet-hood of Salih (PBUH). The challenge Salih (PBUH) posed was, *“Leave her to graze in God's land, and do not harm her, or you shall be seized with a painful torment.”* She is God's camel so let her graze wherever she wants and do not touch her, and if you do, you will suffer the consequences. Having posed the challenge, Salih (PBUH) turned to his people with an advice to contemplate and reflect about what happened to the people before them. He urged them to consider the bounties of God which they have been blessed with, *“And remember how He made you heirs after the 'Ad people and gave you habitations in the land. You build for yourselves palaces and castles in the plains and carve out homes in the mountains. So remember the bounties of God and do not spread mischief in the land.”* The geographical site on which the tribe of Thamud lived is not mentioned in these verses, but it has been mentioned in another Sura that they lived in an area called the Hijr, a place between Arabia and Syria. The dialogue between Salih (PBUH) and his people indicates that they were well off. It also indicates that they lived in a valley surrounded by mountains. They used to build palaces in the valley and carve out houses in the mountains. The brief dialogue indicates that they had some advanced building technology. Although they did not live exactly at the same place as the tribe of 'Ad but they were made heirs to the civilization that was established by them. The legacy here must be a reference to the civilization that they were able to establish after the destruction of the tribe of 'Ad.

One can detect a jump in the narrative from the statement which alluded to the fact that some of the Thamud people believed in Salih (PBUH). The chiefs did not like that and they tried to sway the believers and bring them back to the fold of the old religion of their forefathers. The belief in God liberated the weak and strengthened them in the face of oppression. They said, *“We do indeed believe in the revelation which he has been sent with.”* The chiefs voiced their dissatisfaction, *“We disbelieve in that which you believe in.”* They not only voiced their dissatisfaction, but they followed that by assaulting the she-camel, *“Then they ham-strung the she-camel, and insolently defied the order of their Lord, saying, ‘Salih, bring about what you are threatening us with, if you are a messenger (of God).’”* They had the audacity to challenge the messenger, *“So the earthquake seized them, and they lay dead in their homes.”* The verses juxtaposed the conditions of the disbelievers before and after the punishment. Their condition changed from a state of insolence and defiance to a state in which they were first shaken to the core then they lay dead.

Thus, another page of the history of those who rejected the truth has been folded and we come to a new episode in the history of humankind, *“We also (sent) Lut. He said to his people, ‘Do you commit such immorality, which no people before you in world, ever committed? You approach males with lust instead of women. You are indeed people given to excesses.’ The answer of his people was only to say (one to another), ‘Drive them out of your township. They are a people who want to keep themselves pure.’ So We saved him and his household, except his wife she was*

*of those who stayed behind. And we showered them with rain. Then see what the end of those who indulged in sin and crime was.*” The story of people of Lut (PBUH) is a story about deviation from the initial natural human disposition. This may seem a digression from the issues of the doctrine and the belief in the Oneness of God, but in reality the two issues are closely related. The belief in the Oneness of God leads the individual to the complete submission to God and to following His rules and laws. It is the will of God that the human race is created as males and females. They are two manifestations of the same soul. They were created to complement each other. The growth and survival of the human race is contingent on the procreation between the male and female. The male and female were created to perform this function and they were prepared biologically and psychologically for it. God instilled in their psyche the natural attraction to each other and rewarded this attraction with a deep pleasure which is received as a result of their mating. This was the guarantee for the continuation of the human race. This unique relationship between the two partners also provides the will to overcome the problems that every human family faces during the course of its life. This is the divine plan. Those who believe in God trust His wisdom and follow His plan.

The people of Lut (PBUH) were the first humans to deviate from the divine procreation plan, *“Do you commit such immorality, which no people before you in world, ever committed? You approach males with lust instead of women. You are indeed people given to excesses.”* Lut (PBUH) used the word “excesses” here to refer to the transgression against the divine project. The objective of procreation is to guarantee the continuation of the human race and to provide an incentive for the maintenance of strong family units. Sexual pleasure is part of the process. It is an incentive for the male and female to be attracted to each other. This pleasure is part of the divine project to create an environment of peace and tranquility between males and females. The response of the people of Lut (PBUH) was, *“Drive them out of your township. They are a people who want to keep themselves pure.”* See how twisted their logic was? Those who want to keep themselves pure became the criminals, so they should be driven out. The end followed quickly, *“So We saved him and his household, except his wife she was of those who stayed behind. And we showered them with rain. Then see what the end of those who indulged in sin and crime was.”*

Another page of those who rejected the truth was folded, and we come to the last episode of this series of stories.

*“To the (tribe of) Madyan, (We sent) Shu’ayb one of their (own) brethren. He said, ‘My people worship God. You have no other deity but Him. Now has come to you a clear sign from your Lord. Give just measure and weight and do not withhold from people the things that are their due; and do no mischief in the land after it has been set in order. That will be best for you, if you are believers. Do not lurk on every road to threaten (wayfarers), and to turn away from God’s path him who believes in Him, seeking to make it crooked. And remember, when you were but few, how He did multiply you. And consider the end of the mischief-makers. And if there is a party among you who believed in the message with which I have been sent, and a party which did not believe, then be patient until God judges between us. He is the Best of Judges.’ The arrogant chieftains of his people said, ‘Shu’ayb, we will certainly drive you out from our township, you and those who believed with you, unless you return back to our religion.’ He said, ‘Even though we hate it? We would indeed have fabricated a lie against God, if we returned to*

*your ways after God has rescued us therefrom; nor could we by any means return thereto unless it is the will of God, Our Lord. Our Lord's knowledge encompassed everything. In God we trust. Our Lord, expose the truth (and judge) between us and our people, for You are the best to judge.'* The chieftains of his people, who disbelieved, said, *'If you follow Shu'ayb, then truly you shall be the losers.'* So the earthquake seized them, and they lay dead in their homes. Those who denied Shu'ayb became as though they had not dwelt therein. Those who denied Shu'ayb, they were the losers. Shu'ayb turned away from them, saying, *'My people, I did indeed deliver my Lord's message to you and I gave you good counsel. So why should I lament over a people who refused to believe.'*” This story has more details than the previous ones because it deals with business issues as well as doctrine issues. The story started with the same statement made by each messenger, *“My people worship God. You have no other god but Him.”* The details of the story followed, *“Now has come to you a clear sign from your Lord.”* However, there are no details mentioned here, nor elsewhere in the Quran, about the sign that God gave them. The statement is brief. They must have been given a sign which supported Prophet Shu'ayb (PBUH) claim that he was truly a messenger of God.

Shu'ayb (PBUH) started by reiterating God's commands, *“Give just measure and weight and do not withhold from people the things that are their due; and do no mischief in the land after it has been set in order. That will be best for you, if you are believers. Do not lurk on every road to threaten (wayfarers), and to turn away from God's path him who believes in Him, seeking to make it crooked. And remember, when you were but few, how He did multiply you. And consider the end of the mischief-makers.”* One deduces from Shu'ayb's (PBUH) argument that his people were idolaters. They also did not follow God's law in their dealings with each other. They had their own business code which they used. This business code promoted unfair dealings. They were also thugs who were terrorizing people. They wanted to sway the believers away from worshiping God alone and to prevent them from following the straight path. So, Shu'ayb (PBUH) started with the fundamentals, he urged them to believe in the One True God alone. This is the basis of the straight way of life and the source of sound business dealings as well as good characters and high morals. He reminded them of God's blessings and warned them of God's wrath, *“And remember, when you were but few, how He did multiply you. And consider the end of the mischief-makers.”*

Then he asked them to come to a fair agreement, *“And if there is a party among you who believed in the message with which I have been sent, and a party which did not believe, then have patience until God judges between us. He is the Best of Judges.”* If you do not agree with me, then do not hurt the believers but wait until God judges between us. However, the tyrants would not be happy leaving the believers alone. The tyrants wanted to overpower the people and to maintain a monopoly over their loyalty. The existence of a group of believers presented a threat to the rule of the tyrants. Thus, their response was a blunt confrontation that did not leave room for negotiation, *“Shu'ayb, we will certainly drive you out from our township, you and those who believed with you, unless you return back to our religion.”* Shu'ayb (PBUH) offered them a fair compromise: leave us alone until God judges between us. However, the tyrants did not accept this. They would not stop unless the believers reject their faith and go back to the tyrants' beliefs. This is where Shu'ayb (PBUH) drew the line. He was not willing to offer this concession. Believers find strength in their faith. They condemn the efforts that aim at depriving them of the light of faith, the light that showed them the straight path and freed them from the

slavery to the tyrants. How can they relinquish the blessings of God which guided them to the truth, *“Even though we hate it? We would indeed have fabricated a lie against God, if we returned to your ways after God has rescued us therefrom; nor could we by any means return thereto unless it is the will of God, Our Lord. Our Lord’s knowledge encompassed everything. In God we trust. Our Lord, expose the truth (and judge) between us and our people, for You are the best to judge.”* This statement showed the source of strength and security for the believers. They knew that it is God alone who judges between truth and falsehood and it is He alone who supports the believers in their fight against the tyrants.

The chiefs persisted in their rejection. They tried another trick. They thought that they can scare the believers off by threats, *“If you follow Shu’ayb, then truly you shall be the losers.”* It is the same strategy that all tyrants adopt. They start with the leader first to coerce him and stop him from delivering his message. If they are unsuccessful with the leader, then they turn to the followers. Threats and persecution are leveled against the followers. The tyrants have no valid argument against the morals and the values but they have the power to torture and persecute. However, the eternal divine project which supports the truth in its battle with falsehood always prevail, *“So the earthquake seized them, and they lay dead in their homes. Those who denied Shu’ayb became as though they had not dwelt therein. Those who denied Shu’ayb, they were the losers.”* In a split second everything was destroyed, as if the tyrants never existed. Shu’ayb (PBUH) made a last statement summarizing his experience, *“My people, I did indeed deliver my Lord’s message to you and I gave you good counsel. So why should I lament over a people who refuse to believe.”*

## **Verses: 94 to 102**

*94. Whenever We sent a prophet to a town, We did afflict its people with tribulation and adversity, in order that they might learn humility.*

*95. Then We changed their adversity into prosperity, until they grew affluent, and began to say, “Our fathers (too) were touched by adversity and affluence.” We seized them suddenly while they were unaware.*

*96. Had the people of the towns believed and were conscious of God, We would have indeed opened for them (All kinds of) blessings from heaven and earth; but they denied (the truth), and We seized them on account of what they had earned.*

*97. Can the people of the towns ever feel secure that Our wrath will not come upon them by night, while they are asleep?*

*98. Or can they ever feel secure that Our wrath will not come upon them in broad daylight, while they are playing.*

*99. Can they ever feel secure against God’s scheme? No one can feel secure against God’s scheme except the losers.*

*100. Is it not an indication to those who inherit the land after its people (who thus reaped the consequence of their evil-doing) that, if We will, We can smite them for their sins and seal upon their hearts so that they would not hear?*

*101. Such were the towns whose tidings We relate to you. Their messengers came to them with clear signs. But they would not believe in what they had denied before. Thus does God seal up the hearts of the disbelievers.*

102. *We found that most of them do not honor their covenants, and We certainly found most of them transgressors. (7:94-102)*

*“Whenever We sent a prophet to a town, We did afflict its people with tribulation and adversity, in order that they might learn humility. Then We changed their adversity into prosperity, until they grew affluent, and began to say, ‘Our fathers (too) were touched by adversity and affluence.’ We seized them suddenly while they were unaware. Had the people of the towns believed and were conscious of God, We would have indeed opened for them (All kinds of) blessings from heaven and earth; but they denied (the truth), and We seized them on account of what they had earned.”* The narrative in these verses does not tell a story but it uncovers a part of the divine project. The verses do not narrate the history of a people but it shows the steps of a divine plan. The verses show that events in the lives of people do not happen haphazardly but they occur according to a system of rules. God’s message itself is a part of this system. God revealed His Message to contribute to the actualization of this system. Humankind is not alone in this world. God controls all the affairs of the universe with wisdom and knowledge.

The verses reveal a glimpse of the system of rules, *“Whenever We sent a prophet to a town, We did afflict its people with tribulation and adversity, in order that they might learn humility.”* Tests and tribulation are not meant to be an act of vengeance; they are tools to teach people humility and to awaken the initial natural human disposition which longs to find God. People can then reach to God with their prayers seeking His mercy and forgiveness and proclaiming His dominion and power. Then, *“We changed their adversity into prosperity, until they grew affluent,”* God replaces adversity with prosperity, difficulty with ease, fear with security, and illness with health. This is the other face of the coin of tests and trials. Many people persevere in face of adversity. Adversity sharpens the person’s ability for survival and perseverance. It might also bring a person closer to God through prayers. Many people find refuge in their relationship with God during difficult times. They pray asking for His help and hoping for His mercy. But affluence may prove to be a more severe test for humankind. Affluence causes people to forget everything, worldly pleasures take people away from their duties, and wealth promotes arrogance.

Hedonistic societies are formed when people become accustomed to a life of affluence thinking that it will last forever. In such a society, people care only about themselves and their pleasures. Morals and values in a hedonistic society are shaped by material and physical pleasures. These societies suffer from a lack of collective responsibility towards the unfortunate and the vulnerable. They only realize the consequence of their way life when a calamity befalls them, *“We seized them suddenly while they were unaware.”* Their indulgence in material pleasures swept them away from the path of God. They forgot the meaning of God consciousness, so God called them to account. God’s plan has been fulfilled.

Thus, history of humankind continues to evolve according to the divine plan and God’s will. The Quran explains the divine plan and warns people of the trials that they will face. Trials do not come only in the form of adversity but also in the form of affluence. Human beings should always be vigilant not to fail the test in any form. Quran promised a great reward for those who are able to pass the test, *“Had the people of the towns believed and were conscious of God, We would have indeed opened for them (All kinds of) blessings from heaven and earth; but they*

*denied (the truth), and We seized them on account of what they had earned.*” Had the people of the town accepted the truth instead of denying it, they would have received blessings and bounties from heaven and earth as they have never seen before. Although the verse did not leave any doubt about the certainty of the realization of the blessings promised to those who are God conscious but there are no details mentioned about the type or the amount of these blessings. This indicates a flood of blessings of different types, shapes, and forms coming from all directions. This verse opens the question about the relationship between faith and people’s daily lives. Those who think that faith is merely rituals that have no bearing on people’s everyday lives do not understand the meaning of faith nor do they know what life is about. People sometime wonder about Muslim nations living in poverty while other non-Muslim nations live in abundance. This is a superficial look. Those who call themselves Muslims are neither believers nor are they God conscious. They did not dedicate their service to God alone. They do not live the true meaning of “there is no deity but God.” They worship human beings like themselves and allow them to control their lives according to manmade laws and traditions. When Muslims adopted a way of life congruent with the true teachings of Islam they were on the top of the world and they were flooded with the blessings of God.

Those who revel in abundance of provision are being tested by affluence. This may be a more difficult test than being tested by adversity. There is a difference between God’s blessings and affluence. The blessings that God promised His believing servants provide happiness even when the provision is not abundant. God’s blessings enable the believers to use their resources efficiently and effectively and provide a comfortable and friendly environment. Affluence may provide material commodities but does not provide happiness and contentment. Many people who live in material affluence are impoverished spiritually. They lead insecure and unhappy life.

*“Can the people of the towns ever feel secure that Our wrath will not come upon them by night, while they are asleep? Or can they ever feel secure that Our wrath will not come upon them in broad daylight, while they are playing. Can they ever feel secure against God’s scheme? No one can feel secure against God’s scheme except the losers. Is it not an indication to those who inherit the land after its people (who thus reaped the consequence of their evil-doing) that, if We will, We can smite them for their sins and seal upon their hearts so that they would not hear?”* Having seen the end of others before and having experienced God’s scheme, can the people of the towns ever feel sure that they will be safe from God’s wrath? Can they be ever sure that God’s wrath would not come upon them while they are in deep sleep? One cannot stand up for God’s wrath even when one is fully awake and in full vigilance, how can one deal with God’s wrath if it comes during sleep, when the person is powerless? Can they be ever sure that God’s wrath would not come upon them when they playing in broad day light? God’s wrath is overwhelming in any condition, but the verses expose the points of weakness of the human condition hoping to evoke the feelings of the need to reach for God’s help. Those who do not feel they need God’s help will be losers.

The divine plan is always in effect and God’s will is always in force. There is no security against God’s scheme except by taking refuge with God. The Quran poses a warning that whatever happened to the previous generations can still happen to the present and future generations. The warning is not meant to make people live always in fear and insecurity. This will result in complete paralysis of human life bringing all human activities to a halt. God wants life on earth

to continue and to flourish. God wants people to be conscious of Him, to control their desires, to maintain self-discipline, to take lessons from history, and to maintain an open and uninterrupted channel of communication with God. When people declare God as their only deity and become dedicated to the implementation of His divine project, God will reward them with secure, comfortable, and happy life on earth.

The Quranic approach in dealing with the human psyche provides doses of safety, confidence, and security for those who are reaching to God in times of adversity and tribulations, and doses of warning and admonition for those who are lured away from the path of God by the material pleasures of life. God knows best His creation.

*“Such were the towns whose tidings We relate to you. Surely, their messengers came to them with clear signs. But they would not believe in what they had denied before. Thus does God seal up the hearts of those who reject faith. We found that most of them do not honor their covenants, and We certainly found most of them transgressors.”* The verses narrated stories of which the Prophet (PBUH) had no knowledge. These were God’s revelations brought down to educate the Prophet (PBUH). The Messengers came with clear signs but people did not heed the signs. They continued to reject faith as people before them rejected faith. The clear signs were not sufficient for them to become believers. Their problem was that their hearts were not open to receive the light and their initial natural disposition was not tuned to receive guidance. When they closed their hearts and blocked the path of guidance to penetrate and touch their souls, God sealed on their hearts. Never will they be able to receive guidance.

*“We found that most of them do not honour their covenants, and We certainly found most of them transgressors.”* The “covenant” that the verse refers to, may have been the covenant that God took from all human beings, which is referred to in verse 172 of this Sura, *“And when your Lord drew forth from the Children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves (saying), ‘Am I not your Lord (who cherishes and sustains you)?’ They said, ‘Yes, we do testify.’”* Another interpretation would be the covenant that God took from the ancestors of the people of these towns who believed the messengers who were sent earlier. Their descendants then strayed away from the straight path gradually as time passed until they lost their way completely and became disbelievers. Either way, the people of these towns did not honour their covenant with God. They followed their whims and desires and became transgressors.

### **Verses: 103 to 137**

*103. Then after them We sent Moses with Our signs to Pharaoh and his chiefs, but they wrongfully rejected them. So see what the end of those who make mischief was.*

*104. Moses said, “Pharaoh, I am a messenger from the Lord of the worlds.*

*105. Duty-bound not to say except the truth about God. Now I have come to you with a clear sign from your Lord. So let the Children of Israel depart along with me.”*

*106. (Pharaoh) said, “If indeed you came with a sign, then bring it, if you are telling the truth.”*

*107. Then (Moses) threw his staff, and behold, it became a serpent, plain (for all to see).*

*108. And he drew his hand out, and behold, it was white to all beholders.*

*109. The chiefs of Pharaoh's people said, “This is a knowledgeable magician.*

110. *His plan is to get you out of your land.*” Pharaoh said, “Now, what do you advise?”

111. *They said, “Keep him and his brother waiting (for a while); and send heralds into the cities;*

112. *To bring you every knowledgeable wizard.”*

113. *And the magicians came to Pharaoh, saying, “Surely there will be a reward for us if we are victors.”*

114. *He said, “Yes, and surely you shall be of those brought near (to me).”*

115. *They said, “Moses, either you throw (first) or we will throw?”*

116. *He (Moses) said, “You throw.” So when they threw, they bewitched the eyes of the people and they overawed them, and produced mighty magic.*

117. *We inspired Moses, “Throw your staff,” and behold, it swallowed up all the falsehoods which they faked.*

118. *Thus, truth was confirmed, and all what they did was in vain.*

119. *Thus, they were defeated and were subdued.*

120. *The magicians fell down prostrating.*

121. *They said, “We believe in the Lord of the worlds,*

122. *The Lord of Moses and Aaron.”*

123. *Pharaoh said, “Did you believe in him before I give you permission? Most assuredly, this is a plot which you have planned in the city to drive out its people, but you shall soon know.*

124. *I will cut off your hands and your feet on opposite sides, and I will crucify all of you.”*

125. *They said, “We will certainly return to our Lord.*

126. *You are only taking revenge on us because we believed in the signs of our Lord when they came to us. Our Lord, pour out on us perseverance, and make us die in a state of submission.”*

127. *The chiefs of Pharaoh's people said (to the king), “Are you going to leave Moses and his people to make mischief in the land, and forsake you and your gods?” He said, “We will slay their sons and spare their women, and indeed we will overpower them.”*

128. *Moses said to his people, “Seek help from God, and persevere. The earth belongs to God. He gives it as a heritage to whomever He wills from among His servants. The end is (best) for those who are God conscious.”*

129. *They said, “We have been persecuted before you came to us, and since you have come to us.” He said, “It may be that your Lord will destroy your enemy and make you viceroys of the earth, that He may see how you will behave.”*

130. *We punished the people of Pharaoh with years (of droughts) and shortness of crops; that they may be mindful.*

131. *But whenever good befell them, they said, “This is ours;” and whenever evil smote them they ascribed it to the evil omen of Moses and those with him. Indeed, their evil omen was only with God. But most of them do not know.*

132. *They said (to Moses), “Whatever sign you bring to bewitch us, we shall never believe in you.”*

133. *So We sent on them the flood, locusts, lice, frogs, and blood as detailed signs; but they were arrogant and criminal.*

134. *Every time the plague fell on them, they said, “Moses, pray for us your Lord, as He promised you, if you removed the plague from us, we shall truly believe in you, and we shall send away the Children of Israel with you.”*

135. *But every time We removed the plague from them to a fixed term which they had to fulfill, they broke their word.*

*136. Therefore, We exacted revenge on them; We drowned them in the sea because they denied Our revelations and were heedless of them.*

*137. And We made the people, considered weak (and of no account), inheritors of lands in both the east and the west, lands which We have blessed. The fair promise of your Lord was fulfilled for the Children of Israel, because they persevered. And We destroyed the great works and fine buildings which Pharaoh and his people erected. (7:103-137)*

*“Then after them We sent Moses with Our signs to Pharaoh and his chiefs, but they wrongfully rejected them. So see what the end of those who make mischief was.”* Moses (PBUH) was sent after the towns were destroyed. This group of verses narrates an episode of the encounter between Moses (PBUH) and Pharaoh and his chiefs. The first verse summarizes the whole episode. The Quran uses the words “wrongdoing” and “transgression” interchangeably with words “disbelief (rejecting faith)” and “associating partners with God,” repeatedly. The present verse is an example of this usage. Disbelief or rejecting faith and associating partners with God are indeed the worst forms of wrongdoing and transgression. Those who reject faith or associate partners with God are indeed committing a gross injustice against the greatest truth, the truth of the Oneness of God, and they wrong themselves by subjecting themselves to God’s wrath. They also commit injustice against people whom they cause to sway away from the belief in the Oneness of God to idolatry. The Quran says, *“Those who disbelieve are truly the wrongdoers.”* (2:254)

Pharaoh and his chiefs were wrongdoers, see what their end was. Details of Pharaoh’s end will be described in the following verses, but for now let us reflect on the expression, “those who make mischief.” They are mischief makers because they spread corruption in the land. Rejecting faith is the worst form of corruption and mischief making. Life on earth will be free of corruption only when the concept of the oneness of God is established and inculcated in the psyche of people. The concept of the oneness of God guarantees that people live a life free of the domination of other human beings or the control of their own whims and desires. Corruption is spread on earth when the fate of people is dominated by few human beings who play the role of god. Being the servant of God alone is the ultimate expression of freedom. All tyrants are mischief-makers, they spread corruption in the land.

This is one of the styles of story-telling in the Quran: the opening verse summarizes the whole story. This brief summary brings the conclusion to the fore front and highlights the moral of the story. The verses then continue to tell the details of the narrative. We come to the first scene, *“Moses said, ‘Pharaoh, I am a messenger from the Lord of the worlds. Duty-bound not to say except the truth about God. Now I have come to you with a clear sign from your Lord. So let the Children of Israel depart along with me.’ (Pharaoh) said, ‘If indeed you came with a sign, then bring it, if you are telling the truth.’ Then (Moses) threw his staff, and behold, it became a serpent, plain (for all to see); and he drew his hand out, and behold, it was white to all beholders. The chiefs of Pharaoh's people said, ‘This is a knowledgeable magician. His plan is to get you out of your land.’ Pharaoh said, ‘Now, what do you advise?’ They said, ‘Keep him and his brother waiting (for a while); and send heralds into the cities; to bring you every knowledgeable magician.’”*

This is the first scene of the encounter between truth and falsehood, the encounter between faith and disbelief, the encounter between he who is calling to the worship of the Lord of the worlds and the tyrant who wants to usurp the role of god. The encounter started by Moses (PBUH) addressing Pharaoh, he addressed him by his name, "Pharaoh," he did not address him as, "My Lord," as people used to address Pharaoh. This form of address was meant to articulate the difference between Pharaoh and the real Lord of the world. This form of address was certain to catch the attention of Pharaoh and his chiefs. Moses (PBUH) followed this by another statement to highlight the seriousness of his mission, he said, I am "*Duty-bound not to say except the truth about God.*" The message that Moses (PBUH) came with is the same message which each and every messenger brought before him, the message of the belief in Oneness of God.

Moses (PBUH) emphasized the truthfulness of his words, "*I have come to you with a clear sign from your Lord,*" and then made his request, "*So let the Children of Israel depart along with me.*" The children of Israel are the servants of God; they should not be enslaved by Pharaoh. Whoever worships God has no master other than God. The opening statement that Moses (PBUH) made, "*Pharaoh, I am a messenger from the Lord of the worlds,*" established the logical foundation for the request, "*So let the Children of Israel depart along with me.*" The proclamation that there is only One God meant that Pharaoh cannot play the role of god. Moses' (PBUH) proclamation announced the end Pharaoh's reign. Pharaoh could no longer claim to be a god or that he has the right to enslave people.

Pharaoh and his chiefs wanted to embarrass Moses (PBUH), so they asked for a proof, "*If indeed you came with a sign, then bring it, if you are telling the truth.*" They expected to show the people that Moses (PBUH) is a liar, so his claim would be defeated. But, they were surprised by Moses' (PBUH) response, "*Then (Moses) threw his staff, and behold, it became a serpent, plain (for all to see); and he drew his hand out, and behold, it was white to all beholders.*" The staff became a serpent, and his hand became white. Moses (PBUH) had a dark complexion, when he brought his hand out of his pocket; it looked white with no obvious ailment that could have caused the change in the color of the skin. As soon as he put his hand back into his pocket, the skin of his hand went back to its normal color.

Pharaoh and his chiefs would not give up that easily. It is a major claim with disastrous consequences for Pharaoh's dominion. They accused Moses (PBUH) of being a magician, "*This is a knowledgeable magician. His plan is to get you out of your land.*" Pharaoh said, "*Now, what do you advise?*" The statement betrayed their real fear, "*His plan is to get you out of your land;*" they realized that proving the veracity of Moses' (PBUH) claim meant the end of Pharaoh's dominion. He will no longer be the legitimate ruler of the land and he has no right to enslave people. The advice was, "*Keep him and his brother waiting (for a while); and send heralds into the cities; to bring you every knowledgeable magician.*" Magic was a flourishing trade in Egypt at that time. The high priests practiced magic in the temples of Egypt all the time. It was easy to round up a group of the best magicians to challenge Moses (PBUH). These were professionals, they expected compensation from Pharaoh, "*And the magicians came to Pharaoh, saying, 'Surely there will be a reward for us if we are victors.'*" Pharaoh promised them not only a great reward but also a high rank in the royal court, as an enticement to use their utmost skill to defeat Moses (PBUH). Little they know about what they were up against.

*“They said, ‘Moses, either you throw (first) or we will throw?’”* They were quite confident of their ability to defeat Moses (PBUH), so they offered him the chance to start the show. Moses’ (PBUH) show of confidence was not less impressive than theirs, he simply said, *“You throw.”* He only responded with one word to show how little he cares about their apparent confidence. But when they threw, *“they bewitched the eyes of the people and they overawed them, and produced mighty magic.”* The magic was powerful, people were overawed, and their hearts were touched by fear. But, the truth is more powerful, *“We inspired Moses, ‘Throw your staff,’ and behold, it swallowed up all the falsehoods which they faked. Thus truth was confirmed, and all what they did was in vain. Thus they were defeated and were subdued.”* The balance was turned against them, truth was confirmed and falsehood was blown away. They realized that they were defeated and felt humiliated. They knew that Moses (PBUH) has more than magic working for him and they were in the best position to recognize the truth. Their position was turned around from daring challenge to complete submission, *“The magicians fell down prostrating. They said, ‘We believe in the Lord of the Worlds, the Lord of Moses and Aaron.’”*

*“Pharaoh said, ‘Did you believe in him before I give you permission? Most assuredly, this is a plot which you have planned in the city to drive out its people, but you shall soon know. Surely, I will cut off your hands and your feet on opposite sides, and I will crucify all of you;”* as if they should have taken his permission before their hearts could respond to the truth. Should they have suppressed the yearning of their souls to the light of guidance? Or should they have suppressed the fledgling feeling of faith that was growing inside them? But Pharaoh the arrogant tyrant could not understand. In his attempt to save his kingdom, he was in denial. The thought that he entrained was, *“this is a plot which you have planned in the city to drive out its people.”* Pharaoh and his chiefs were scared when Moses (PBUH) invited them to relinquish the lordship of Pharaoh and to believe in the “Lord of the worlds.” When the magicians submitted to the Lord of the worlds, they realized that they lost their last hope in saving Pharaoh’s kingdom. No other recourse was available except the threat, *“I will cut off your hands and your feet on opposite sides, and I will crucify all of you.”* It is the persecution and torture so that they relinquish their beliefs, but they had a deep rooted faith which helped them to stand up to the tyrant, *“We will certainly return to our Lord.”*

Those who understand the nature of the battle between the believer and the tyrant realize that in this battle there is no room for compromise. There are no middle grounds because the tyrant will not accept anything except for the believer to relinquish his/her faith. The recourse of the believer is only to God, *“Our Lord, pour out on us perseverance, and make us die in a state of submission.”*

The strong faith astounded the tyrant. He thought he could control the magicians’ hearts since he had control over their bodies. The magicians had already resigned themselves to the belief in God. The faith filled their hearts with peace and security. The tyrant felt that his power is unable to avail him of any control in face of their strong determination. This was one of these critical moments in history, when faith becomes dearer than life, when will power overcomes pain, and when humankind claims victory over Satan. This is the moment of the true liberation of humankind. True liberty is only attained when faith makes humankind beyond the control of the tyrants. Liberty is attained when spirituality overpowers materialism.

*“The chiefs of Pharaoh's people said (to the king), ‘Are you going to leave Moses and his people to make mischief in the land, and forsake you and your gods?’ He said, ‘We will slay their sons and spare their women, and surely we are will overpower them.’”* Pharaoh never claimed that he was the creator of his people and therefore they should treat him as god. He was their lord because he had the controlling power over them. He rules and he decides unopposed according to his whims and desires. The Egyptians had their deities to whom they performed rituals of worship, even Pharaoh himself performed rituals of worship to these deities. This is clear from the statement made by the Chiefs enquiring if Pharaoh was going to let Moses (PBUH) forsake him and his deities and worship only the One True God. They wanted to incite Pharaoh to act fiercely against Moses (PBUH) and his people. They insinuated that Moses (PBUH) intends to spread corruption in the land because they considered the destruction of the tyrant’s rule mischief-making. Pharaoh reacted savagely he said, *“We will slay their sons and spare their women, and surely we are will overpower them.”* This was a repeat of the persecution that the children of Israel suffered at the hands of Pharaoh when Moses (PBUH) was born. The Quran describes this persecution, *“Truly Pharaoh elated himself in the land and broke up its people into divisions, oppressing a small group among them. He slew their sons, but he kept alive their females. He was indeed a mischief-maker.”* (28:4).

Moses advice to his people, *“Seek help from God, and persevere. Surely, the earth belongs to God. He gives it as a heritage to whomever He wills from among His servants. The end is (best) for those who are God conscious.”* This was an advice motivated by the deep conviction of a prophet. He knew that there is only one Savior who can rescue his people. People should seek refuge with God, the Lord of the worlds. No one else would be able to save the people from the savage revenge of the tyrant. He asked his people to put their trust in God and persevere; victory will come at the time that God decides according to His knowledge and His wisdom. They should not hasten the results because they do not know what is best for them. The land is God’s land, Pharaoh is not immortal, and God makes whomsoever the heir of the land.

But his people were impatient, *“They said, ‘We have been persecuted before you came to us, and since you have come to us.’”* His answer was, *“It may be that your Lord will destroy your enemy and make you viceroys of the earth, that He may see how you will behave.”* He was aware of the divine plan. He understood that God’s law applies to all, believers and disbelievers. He was confident that God will support His believing servants who persevered in His way against their tyrant enemy. God’s favour that He bestows on His servants is actually part of the divine project of testing people, *“that He may see how you will behave.”*

The narrative moves to another scene, the scene of Pharaoh and his chiefs. It is a scene that describes how God fulfilled His promise to Moses (PBUH) and punished Pharaoh and his people.

*“We punished the people of Pharaoh with years (of droughts) and shortness of crops; that they may be mindful. But whenever good befell them, they said, ‘This is ours;’ and whenever evil smote them they ascribed it to the evil omen of Moses and those with him. Indeed, their evil omen was only with God. But most of them do not know. They said (to Moses), ‘Whatever sign you bring to bewitch us, we shall never believe in you.’ So We sent on them the flood, locusts, lice, frogs, and blood as detailed signs; but they were arrogant and criminal. Every time the plague fell on them, they said, ‘Moses, pray for us to your Lord, as He promised you, if you removed the plague from us, we shall truly believe in you, and we shall send away the Children*

*of Israel with you. ' But every time We removed the plague from them to a fixed term which they had to fulfill, they broke their word. Therefore, We took retribution from them; We drowned them in the sea because they denied Our revelations and were heedless of them. And We made the people, considered weak (and of no account), inheritors of lands in both the east and the west, lands which We have blessed. The fair promise of your Lord was fulfilled for the Children of Israel, because they persevered. And We destroyed the great works and fine buildings which Pharaoh and his people erected. "*

Pharaoh continued in his tyranny, he oppressed the children of Israel, killing their males and keeping their females alive. The children of Israel continued to suffer, waiting patiently for God's help. God's plan started to unfold, *"We punished the people of Pharaoh with years (of droughts) and shortness of crops; that they may be mindful."* The first warning sign was issued. The ever fertile land of Egypt became barren and the country suffered severe scarcity of crops. This should have been a wakeup call to Pharaoh. But the tyrant continued in his denial and the Egyptians followed him obediently. They could not comprehend that there is a connection between their attitude and behaviour and what is happening to them. They refused to believe that these are God's warning signs so that they may heed His commands. They refused to believe that there is a relationship between the unseen and real life. Pharaoh and his chiefs missed the signs of God's mercy which He bestows on His creation even when they go astray. Only believers are able to recognize God's signs, appreciate His mercy, and express their gratitude to Him. Only believers can recognize God's plan as it unfolds and heed the reminder.

Pharaoh and his people missed God's reminder. These reminders are signs of God's mercy. God sends these reminders so that people change their way of life before they are seized by the torment of God. Pharaoh and his people continued in their denial, *"Whenever good befell them, they said, 'This is ours;' and whenever evil smote them they ascribed it to the evil omen of Moses and those with him."* They continued to explain what is happening as natural phenomena. They believed that they rightly deserve all the good events that occurred. But, when an evil befell them they blamed it on Moses (PBUH) and his people. They did not realize that it is God who decrees all events. People are tested with good and bad incidents in life to identify those who persevere and pass the test, *"We test you by evil and by good by way of trial. To Us you will return."* (21:35)

Pharaoh and his people continued to obstinate, *"Whatever sign you bring to bewitch us, we shall never believe in you."* They were stubborn in rejecting faith no matter what proof Moses (PBUH) would bring them. The decision was made before examining the evidence. This is typical of tyrants who are bent on denying the truth.

The signs continued to arrive one after another, *"So We sent on them the flood, locusts, lice, frogs, and blood as detailed signs;"* detailed signs to remind and to test. The present narrative put all signs together in one verse because they all came to fulfill the same purpose and they all ended up the same way. However, in real life, these signs came intermittently at different times. Each time a sign came, they hastened to ask Moses (PBUH) to pray his Lord to remove the affliction, promising to free the children of Israel and let them go with Moses (PBUH). Each time the affliction was removed, they would renege on their promise, *"But every time We removed the plague from them to a fixed term which they had to fulfill, they*

*broke their word.*” The narrative describes how Pharaoh and his people were given many chances, one after the other, so that they may heed the warning and accept faith. When all these signs were rejected, they had to meet their dreadful doom, “*We took retribution from them; We drowned them in the sea because they denied Our revelations and were heedless of them.*” The verse describes the end very briefly, simply indicating that Pharaoh and his host were drowned. It is a forceful ending to have full impact on the reader. The sudden end was an appropriate response to Pharaoh’s arrogance, obstinacy, heedlessness, and denial.

*“And We made the people, considered weak (and of no account), inheritors of lands in both the east and the west, lands which We have blessed. The fair promise of your Lord was fulfilled for the Children of Israel, because they persevered. And We destroyed the great works and fine buildings which Pharaoh and his people erected.”* As humans, we speak of “before” and “after,” so we say that those who were weak were made heirs “after” the demise of Pharaoh and his host. But God’s knowledge encompasses everything. God’s knowledge spans the whole span of time, there is no “before” and “after” for God. The curtain finally falls down and the scenes of the demise of Pharaoh and his host and the salvation of the Moses (PBUH) and his people are juxtaposed. On one side, it is a scene of death and demolition and on the other side it the scene of flourishing life.

## **Verses: 138 to 171**

*138. We took the Children of Israel across the sea. They came upon a people devoted to some idols they had. They said, “Moses, make for us a god like the gods they have.” He said, “Indeed, you are a people acting ignorantly.”*

*139. These people’s practice will be destroyed and all what they are doing is in vain.*

*140. He said, “Shall I seek for you a god other than the (true) God, when it is He who has favored you above all people?”*

*141. And remember when We delivered you from Pharaoh's people, who afflicted you with the worst of torment. They slew your male children and spared your females; in that was a momentous trial from your Lord.*

*142. We appointed for Moses thirty nights, and completed (the period) with ten (more). Thus, he completed the term (for the meeting) with his Lord, forty nights. And Moses had charged his brother Aaron (before he went up), “Act for me among my people. Do right, and follow not the way of those who do mischief.”*

*143. When Moses came to the place appointed by Us, and his Lord addressed him, He said, “My Lord, show me (Yourself), that I may look at You.” God said, “You will not see Me, but look at the mount; if it remained standing in its place, then you shall see Me.” When his Lord manifested His glory to the mount, He sent it down crashing. And Moses fell down in a swoon. When he recovered his senses he said, “Glory be to You, I turn to You in repentance, and I am the first to believe.”*

*144. (God) said, “Moses, I have chosen you above the people, by the mission I (have given you) and the words I (have spoken to you). Take then the (revelation) which I have given you, and be of those who are grateful.”*

*145. And We wrote for him, upon the tablets, admonitions of every kind and explanations of all things. Hold fast to it; and enjoin your people to take hold of what is best thereof. I will show you the abode of the transgressors.*

146. I shall turn away from My revelations those who, without any right, behave arrogantly on the earth; and if they see every sign they do not believe in it, and if they see the way of righteousness they do not choose it as their way; and if they see the way of falsehood they choose it as their way. That is because they denied Our revelations and they were heedless thereof.

147. The deeds of those who denied Our revelations and the meeting of the Hereafter are in vain. Can they expect to be recompensed save as what they used to do?

148. The people of Moses made, in his absence, out of their ornaments a statue of a calf, (for worship). It gave a mooing sound. Did not they see that it does not speak to them nor guide them in anyway? They chose it, and became wrongdoers.

149. And when they feared the consequences thereof and saw that they had gone astray, they said, "Unless our Lord have mercy on us and forgive us, we will certainly be of the losers."

150. When Moses came back to his people, angry and grieved, he said, "Evil it is that you have done in my absence. Did you hasten to bring on the judgment of your Lord?" He (Moses) threw down the Tablets, seized his brother (Aaron) by (the hair of) his head, and dragged him towards himself. Aaron said, "Son of my mother, the people did indeed overpower me, and they were almost going to slay me. Do not make the enemies rejoice over my misfortune, and do not count me among the wrongdoers."

151. Moses prayed, "My Lord, forgive me and my brother. Admit us into Your Mercy; for You are the Most Merciful of all those who are merciful."

152. Those who took the calf (for worship) will indeed be overwhelmed with wrath from their Lord and ignominy in this life. Thus do We recompense those who fabricate lies.

153. But those who do wrong then repent afterward and believe, verily your Lord is thereafter All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.

154. When the anger of Moses abated, he picked up the Tablets on which there were inscriptions of guidance and mercy for those who stood in awe of their Lord.

155. And Moses chose seventy of his people for Our appointment; and when they were seized with violent trembling, he prayed, "My Lord, if it had been Your will You could have destroyed both them and me, long before. Will You destroy us for the deeds of the foolish ones among us? This is no more than Your trial; by it You send whom You will astray, and You lead whom You will to the right path. You are our Patron; so forgive us and bestow Your mercy on us; for You are the best of those who forgive.

156. "And ordain for us that which is good, in this life and in the Hereafter. We have turned to You." He (God) said, "I inflict My torment on whomever I will; but My mercy extends to all things. That (mercy) I shall ordain for those who are conscious of God, and pay poor dues, and those who believe in Our revelations.

157. Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, whom they find mentioned in the Torah and the Gospel; he commands them what is just and forbids them what is evil; he allows them as lawful what is good (and pure) and prohibits them from what is bad (and impure); he releases them from their heavy burdens and from the yokes that are upon them. So it is those who believe in him, honor him, help him, and follow the light which is sent down with him, those are they who will be successful."

158. Say (Muhammad), "People, I am sent to you all, as the Messenger of God, to whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth; there is no deity but He; it is He who gives both life and death." So believe in God and His Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, who believes in God and His words; and follow him so that you may be guided.

159. *Of the people of Moses, there is a community who guide and establish justice in the light of truth.*

160. *We divided them into twelve tribes (as distinct) nations. We inspired Moses, when his people asked him for water; "Strike the rock with your staff." Out of it there gushed forth twelve springs. Each group knew its own place for water. We gave them the shade of clouds, and sent down to them manna and quails, (saying), "Eat of the good things We have provided for you." They did not wrong Us, but they wronged themselves.*

161. *And when it was said to them, "Dwell in this town and eat therein as you wish, and say relieve us (from the heavy burden) and enter the gate in a posture of humility. We shall forgive you your sins. We shall increase (the reward of) those who do good."*

162. *But the wrongdoers from among them changed the word which had been given them so We sent down on them a plague from heaven because of their wrongdoing.*

163. *Ask them about the town that was close to the sea, how its people broke the Sabbath. For on the day of their Sabbath their fish used to come to them, openly holding up their heads, but on the day they had no Sabbath, they would not come. Thus, did We try them, for they were transgressors.*

164. *When some of them said, "Why do you admonish a people whom God will destroy or will inflict a severe torment on them?" They said, "To discharge our duty to your Lord, and perchance they may become conscious of God."*

165. *When they forgot that which they were commanded to be mindful of, We rescued those who forbade evil; and We seized the wrongdoers with awful torment because they were transgressors.*

166. *When in their insolence they persisted in doing what they had been forbidden to do, We said to them, "Be you apes, despised and rejected."*

167. *And when your Lord proclaimed that He would raise against them, till the Day of Judgment, those who would afflict them with grievous torment. Your Lord is quick in punishment, but He is also All-forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*

168. *We broke them up into separate nations on this earth. There are among them some that are righteous, and some that are far from it. We have tried them with both prosperity and adversity; in order that they might return (to us).*

169. *And a generation succeeded them who inherited the Scripture. They take the goods of this low life (as the price of evil-doing) and say, "We will be forgiven." And if there came to them (again) an offer of the like, they would accept it (and would sin again). Did they not pledge in the covenant of the Scripture that they should not say save the truth about God? And they have studied that which is therein. And the abode of the Hereafter is better, for those who are conscious of God. Why do you not understand?*

170. *As to those who hold fast to the Book and establish regular prayer; We will never squander the reward of the doers of good.*

171. *And when We shook the Mount over them, as if it were a canopy, and they thought it was going to fall on them (We said), "Hold firmly to what We have given you, and remember what is therein; perchance you may remain conscious of God." (7:138-171)*

These verses describe the scene of the children of Israel after they crossed the sea and escaped the pursuit of Pharaoh and his host, "We took the Children of Israel across the sea. They came upon a people devoted to some idols they had. They said, "Moses, make for us a god like the gods they have." Moses (PBUH) answered angrily, "Indeed, you are a people

*acting ignorantly.*” Moses (PBUH) did not specify what is that which they were ignorant about, indicating that asking to worship a god other than God is comprehensive ignorance. Ignorance leads to associating partners with God, while knowledge and wisdom lead to the belief in the Oneness of God. Moses (PBUH) continued to explain to his people the bad consequences of their request, *“These people’s practice will be destroyed and all what they are doing is in vain.”* Moses continued to rebuke his people for forgetting the blessings that God bestowed on them, *“Shall I seek for you a god other than the (true) God, when it is He Who has favored you above all creatures?”* God chose them to raise the banner of the Oneness of God in a time when associating partners with God was prevalent. He also chose them to be the heirs of the holy land which at that time was dominated by polytheists. Are there any blessings better than these? How can they forget these blessings and ask their Prophet to appoint for them a god other than the One True God?

Following the Quranic style, God continued the narrative which Moses (PBUH) started, *“And remember when We delivered you from Pharaoh’s people, who afflicted you with the worst of torment. They slew your male children and spared your females; in that was a momentous trial from your Lord.”* The continuation of Moses’ (PBUH) speech through God’s address to the children of Israel links God’s words with Moses’ (PBUH) speech. It is also an honour that God bestows on His Prophet. The verse reminds the Children of Israel of how God saved them from the bondage that they suffered under Pharaoh not long ago. This was a great blessing from God that they should have remembered. They should have expressed their gratitude for this great blessing.

*“We appointed for Moses thirty nights, and completed (the period) with ten (more). Thus he completed the term (for the meeting) with his Lord, forty nights. And Moses had charged his brother Aaron (before he went up), ‘Act for me among my people. Do right, and follow not the way of those who do mischief.’”* The first stage of Moses’ mission has been completed, the task of releasing the Children of Israel from their bondage to Pharaoh and his host and leading them on their way to the holy land. However, they were not ready yet to assume the great responsibility that they were assigned to undertake in the holy land. They needed education and training to be able to assume this responsibility. The education came in a detailed message. God appointed a time for Moses (PBUH) to meet Him and receive the message. Moses (PBUH) himself needed to be prepared for the meeting with God. The preparation took forty nights during which Moses (PBUH) went into seclusion. This time for seclusion gave Moses (PBUH) the spiritual training needed to prepare him for God’s appointment. Moses’ appointed his brother Aaron (PBUH) to be his deputy during his absence, *“Act for me among my people. Do right, and follow not the way of those who do mischief.”* Moses (PBUH) knew that Aaron (PBUH) is a prophet sent by God to help him with his mission. However, giving such an advice is a duty to be fulfilled by the advisor as well as a right to be expected by the advisee. Aaron (PBUH) expected and accepted the advice. Only those who are insecure do not appreciate a sincere advice.

Now, we come to another scene, the unique scene which only Prophet Moses (PBUH) was chosen to witness. This was the scene in which God addressed Moses (PBUH) directly, without the involvement of a mediator. It was a direct meeting between God and one of His

servants, a meeting between a mortal body having limited faculties and the eternal immortal limitless existence.

*“When Moses came to the place appointed by Us, and his Lord addressed him, He said, ‘My Lord, show me (Yourself), that I may look at You.’ God said, ‘You will not see Me but look at the mount; if it remained standing in its place, then you shall see Me.’ When his Lord manifested His glory to the mount, He sent it down crashing. And Moses fell down in a swoon. When he recovered his senses he said, ‘Glory be to You, I turn to You in repentance, and I am the first to believe.’ (God) said, ‘Moses, I have chosen you above the people, by the mission I (have given you) and the words I (have spoken to you). Take then the (revelation) which I have given you, and be of those who are grateful.’ And We wrote for him, upon the tablets, admonitions of every kind and explanations of all things. Hold fast to it; and enjoin your people to take hold of what is best thereof. I will show you the abode of the transgressors. I shall turn away from My revelations those who, without any right, behave arrogantly on the earth; and if they see every sign they do not believe in it, and if they see the way of righteousness they do not choose it as their way; and if they see the way of falsehood they choose it as their way. That is because they deny Our revelations and they were heedless thereof. The deeds of those who denied Our revelations and the meeting of the Hereafter are in vain. Can they expect to be recompensed save as what they used to do?”*

To be able to appreciate the impact that such interaction had on Moses (PBUH), we need to form a mental image of this unique interaction. We need to immerse ourselves completely in such a mental image. *“When Moses came to the place appointed by Us, and his Lord addressed him, He said, ‘My Lord, show me (Yourself), that I may look at You.’”* It must have been a tremendous experience that made Moses (PBUH) forget who he was and Who is talking to him to imagine that he can see God. Seeing God is beyond the ability of any human being. So, he is reminded firmly, *“You will not see Me.”* Then God, in His mercy, explains to him why he would not be able see Him. The explanation was visual, *“look at the mount; if it remained standing its place, then you shall see Me.’ When his Lord manifested His glory to the mount, He sent it down crashing.”* How did God manifest Himself to the mountain? It is beyond us mortals to be able describe or even to understand how did this happen. Moses (PBUH) was overwhelmed and he, *“fell down in a swoon.”* When Moses (PBUH) came to and realized what had just happened and realized the limitations of the mortal body he said, *“Glory be to You, I turn to You in repentance, and I am the first to believe.”* The Messengers are the first among people to believe in God and appreciate His glory. God asked His Messengers to pronounce this fact, as it has been told in the Quran.

God bestowed His mercy on Moses (PBUH) and gave him the glad tidings that he was chosen by God, *“above the people, by the mission I (have given you) and the words I (have spoken to you). Take then the (revelation) which I have given you, and be of those who are grateful.”* We understand from the narrative that God chose Moses (PBUH) above the people of his generation. But he was the only one among the messengers of God to have been spoken to directly by God. God commanded Moses (PBUH) to be grateful for the honour that God had bestowed on him. He should give the highest example to his people in expressing his gratitude to God for His blessings. So, Moses (PBUH) was given the Tablets

which detailed the message to the Children of Israel. God commanded him to persevere in propagating the message and to command the Children of Israel to commit themselves to it. In return, God promised to make them the heirs of the holy land, *“I will show you the abode of the transgressors.”* This verse carried the glad tidings that soon the Children of Israel will enter the holy land which was occupied at that time by polytheists. The Children of Israel did not enter the holy land during Moses’ (PBUH) life because they were not ready yet to carry on the task assigned to them. When they were asked to enter the holy land they said to their Prophet, *“Moses, in this land are a people of exceeding strength; never shall we enter it until they leave it; when they leave, then shall we enter.”* (5: 22) When, *“Two men whom God has blessed among those who were afraid said, ‘Enter upon them through the gate, for when you have entered you shall surely be victorious, and put your trust in God if you are true believers.’ They said, ‘Moses, we shall never enter it so long as they are in it; go therefore you and your Lord, and fight, surely we will stay here.’”* (5: 23-25) This episode indicates that the Children of Israel needed the education and preparation which were included in the message given to Moses (PBUH), this explains the divine command to Moses (PBUH) to, *“Hold fast to it; and enjoin your people to take hold of what is best thereof.”*

The scene ends with a description of the bad consequences that await those who are arrogant and those who turn away from the divine revelation, *“I shall turn away from My revelations those who, without any right, behave arrogantly on the earth; and if they see every sign they do not believe it, and if they see the way of righteousness they do not choose it as their way; and if they see the way of falsehood they choose it as their way. That is because they deny Our revelations and they were heedless thereof. The deeds of those who denied Our revelations and the meeting of the Hereafter are in vain. Can they expect to be rewarded save as what they used to do?”* It is God’s will that those who see the straight path but choose to turn away from it and follow instead the crooked path will not be able to benefit from His signs that He revealed in the Scripture or His signs which are all around us in the universe. They chose to ignore God’s revelations therefore; they were unable to benefit from them.

The verses provide an accurate description of these people. They are arrogant even though they have no right to be arrogant. Pride is one of the divine attributes, it is not befitting of a God’s servant to behave arrogantly. The worst kind of arrogance is for a human being to usurp god’s role on earth, control people, and force them to follow his way which contravenes the divine project. Such people are usually blinded by their arrogance. They are unable to see the truth even if the truth stares them in the eyes. God will treat them justly and will not wrong them. The recompense that they will receive is befitting to their deeds. They will be punished, *“because they deny Our revelations and they were heedless thereof.”*

*“The deeds of those who denied Our revelations and the meeting of the Hereafter are in vain. Can they expect to be rewarded save as what they used to do?”* The Arabic word which has been translated, “in vain” is the same one which is used to describe the condition which an animal suffers when it is poisoned; its belly becomes enlarged then it dies. The word depicts the meretricious growth and power of the falsehood before its demise.

While Moses (PBUH) was in the presence of God, a unique situation which every human being would yearn to be blessed with and a situation beyond the human imagination, his people were relapsing into a state of idolatry, worshiping the calf that had no life, *“The people of Moses made, in his absence, out of their ornaments a statue of a calf, (for worship). It gave a mooing sound. Did not they see that it does not speak to them nor guide them in anyway? They chose it, and became wrongdoers. And when they feared the consequences thereof and saw that they had gone astray, they said, ‘Unless our Lord have mercy on us and forgive us, we will certainly be of the losers.’”* When they saw people worshiping an idol, they asked their Prophet to get them a similar god to worship. Moses (PBUH) rebuked them for this request and explained to them the bad consequences of idol worship, but once he left them and went to meet his Lord, they were lured to the worship of the golden statue of a calf which the Samiri made for them using the jewellery they had brought from Egypt. It was a lifeless statue, but the Samiri managed to make it in such a way that it produced a sound similar to the sound of a bull. When the Samiri told them that this is their god, they forgot Moses’ (PBUH) warning and accepted the idol as a god. Prophet Aaron (PBUH) tried to talk sense into them but they would not listen. When the excitement abated and they realized their error they prayed God for mercy, *“Unless our Lord have mercy on us and forgive us, we will certainly be of the losers.”* This indicated that they still had some sense and faith which brought them back to the straight path.

*“When Moses came back to his people, angry and grieved, he said, “Evil it is that you have done in my absence. Did you hasten to bring on the judgment of your Lord?” He threw down the tablets, seized his brother by (the hair of) his head, and dragged him to himself. Aaron said, “Son of my mother, the people did indeed overpower me, and they were almost going to slay me. Do not make the enemies rejoice over my misfortune, and do not count me among the wrongdoers.”*

When Moses (PBUH) came back to his people and came to know what they had done while he was away, he became angry, *“He threw down the tablets, seized his brother by (the hair of) his head, and dragged him to him.”* These are the actions of a person who was very angry. He must have been extremely angry to throw the tablets which had the words of God written on them. Aaron (PBUH) tried to calm his brother, calling him the son of “my mother.” He explained to him that he tried his best to stop them but they would not listen, *“The people did indeed overpower me, and they were almost going to slay me.”* This shows how much the people were dazzled by the calf. Moses (PBUH) listened to his brother’s pleading, *“Do not make the enemies rejoice over my misfortune, and do not count me among the wrongdoers.”* Moses (PBUH) calmed down and asked God to forgive both himself and his brother, *“My Lord, forgive me and my brother. Admit us into Your Mercy; for You are the Most Merciful of those who are merciful.”*

The decree came down from He who has the right to judge, *“Those who took the calf (for worship) will indeed be overwhelmed with wrath from their Lord and ignominy in this life. Thus do We recompense those who fabricate lies. But those who do wrong then repent afterward and believe, verily your Lord is thereafter All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* It is a decree and a promise. It is a decree that those who, *“took the calf (for worship) will indeed be overwhelmed with wrath from their Lord and ignominy in this life,”* and a promise that

God forgives those who repent after they have committed a sin. God has forgiven the Children of Israel time after time.

*“When the anger of Moses abated, he picked up the tablets on which there were inscriptions of guidance and mercy for those who stood in awe of their Lord.”* The Arabic words used in this verse portrays “anger” as if it were a living being, a being that moved Moses (PBUH) around, influenced him, and motivated him. Moses (PBUH) was able to calm down once his anger stopped pushing him around. When Moses (PBUH) calmed down, he picked up the tablets which brought guidance and mercy to those who stood in awe of their Lord. Guidance opened up their hearts to receive God’s mercy. There is no heart more miserable than a lost heart. Nothing opens hearts for guidance like being in awe of God.

*“And Moses chose seventy of his people for Our appointment;”* There are different interpretations for the purpose of this appointment. The appointment may had been made to give the Children of Israel an opportunity to seek God’s forgiveness. It may had been an appointment to execute retribution against those who committed the transgression. But who were these people whom Moses (PBUH) chose? those who were *“seized with violent trembling.”* They may have been those who told Moses (PBUH) that they would not believe in him until they see God, face to face.

Moses (PBUH) on the other hand prayed, *“My Lord, if it had been Your will You could have destroyed both them and me, long before. Will You destroy us for the deeds of the foolish ones among us?”* Moses (PBUH) pleaded for his Lord’s forgiveness; his prayer expressed complete submission to the will of God. It also expressed the hope that they would not be punished because of the transgression of a few. Moses (PBUH) continued to express his knowledge of the moral behind the whole event, *“This is no more than Your trial; by it You send whom You will astray, and You lead whom You will to the right path. You are our Patron; so forgive us and bestow Your mercy on us; for You are the best of those who forgive.”* Moses (PBUH) indicated that they understood the lesson and they were seeking God’s guidance, support, and forgiveness.

God’s answer was, *“I inflict My torment on whomever I will; but My mercy extends to all things;”* a statement which underlines the absolute power of God. The law is decreed by the divine will, and is executed according to the divine will. The law is executed with absolute justice, because God chose Justice to be one of His attributes. His wrath is inflected on those who deserve to be punished; but His mercy encompassed everything. God’s mercy is immense; it reaches everything in this vast universe.

God’s statement continued to identify those who will receive God’s mercy, *“I shall ordain (My mercy) for those who are conscious of God, and pay the poor due, and those who believe in Our revelation. Those who follow the messenger, the unlettered Prophet, whom they find mentioned in the Torah and the Gospel; he commands them what is just and forbids them what is evil; he allows them as lawful what is good (and pure) and prohibits them from what is bad (and impure); he releases them from their heavy burdens and from the yokes that are upon them. So it is those who believe in him, honour him, help him, and follow the light which is sent down with him, those are they who will be successful.”* This is

a great announcement. It indicates that the Children of Israel received definite news about the mission of the unlettered Prophet of God. This Prophet, *“commands them what is just and forbids them what is evil; he allows them as lawful what is good (and pure) and prohibits them from what is bad (and impure); he releases them from their heavy burdens and from the yokes that are upon them.”* Those who follow this Prophet will be truly successful.

*“Say, ‘People, I am sent to you all, as the Messenger of God, to whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth; there is no deity but He; it is He who gives both life and death.’ So believe in God and His Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, who believes in God and His words; and follow him that (so) you may be guided.”* This is the last and comprehensive message. It is a message for all people, not restricted to a single nation, land, or generation. Divine messages that came before it was meant for specific people and specific times. Whenever a new Messenger came with a message it replaced the one revealed before it. Usually, a newer message embodied changes that made it more relevant to the time and place in which it was revealed. Humanity was being prepared for the last message. The last message came with a complete set of fundamentals that made it applicable to all nations at all times. It is the eternal message, a message that satisfies the requirements of the initial natural human disposition which is shared by all people. This is the message brought by the Prophet (PBUH), *“People, I am sent to you all, as the Messenger of God.”* This verse was revealed in Mecca, so it was revealed very early in the history of the message to defy the claim made by the enemy of Islam. They claimed that originally Islam was meant to be a local message but Muhammad (PBUH), encouraged by the success he met, changed it to become a universal message.

The verse established the fact that to God, *“belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth; there is no god but He; it is He who gives both life and death.”* Muhammad (PBUH) is a mere messenger delivering a message to humankind from God the owner of the dominion of the whole universe. God is the Lord of the universe, a manifestation of His power is the fact that He is in full control of people’s life and death. The Lord of the universe, the one who controls all creatures, is the only one who deserves to be worshiped by people. People, then should worship God according to the message which He sent to them through His Messenger.

The narrative continues to deal with the Children of Israel, by describing a group of them, *“Of the people of Moses there is a community who guide and establish justice in the light of truth.”* It is a group that was guided by the truth and ruled with justice.

*“We divided them into twelve tribes (as distinct) nations. We inspired Moses, when his people asked him for water, ‘Strike the rock with your staff.’ Out of it there gushed forth twelve springs. Each group knew its own place for water. We gave them the shade of clouds, and sent down to them manna and quails, (saying), ‘Eat of the good things We have provided for you.’ They did not wrong Us, but they wronged themselves.”* God was ever watchful over Moses (PBUH) and his people. God forgave them for worshiping the calf and He raised them again from the dead after they requested to see God face to face. They were divided into twelve nations. The people in each nation were the descendants of one of the

grandchildren of Prophet Jacob (Israel PBUH). God's care was manifested in assigning a water spring to each nation, in providing a cover for them during their passage in the desert, and in bringing down honey and quails so they can eat.

*“And when it was said to them, ‘Dwell in this town and eat therein as you wish, and say relieve us (from the heavy burden) and enter the gate in a posture of humility. We shall forgive you your sins. We shall increase (the reward of) those who do good.’”* They refused to follow the command which they received to enter a specific town, whose name is not mentioned, to dwell in it, and to enjoy all its produce. They were commanded to recite a specific supplication and to show humility at the entrance to the town. God promised to forgive the sinners and to reward the good-doers in folds if they obey the command. But a group of them twisted the wording of the supplication and did not show humility at the entrance as they were commanded, *“But the wrongdoers from among them changed the word which had been given them so We sent down on them a plague from heaven because of their wrongdoing.”* So, God punished them because of their wrongdoing.

*“Ask them about the town that was close to the sea, how its people broke the Sabbath. For on the day of their Sabbath their fish used to come to them, openly holding up their heads, but on the day they had no Sabbath, they would not come. Thus, did We try them, for they were transgressors.”* A group of people living in a village by the sea tried to get around the prohibition of fishing on the Sabbath. They erected enclosures to keep the fish that usually come on the Sabbath within these enclosures, so that they can catch it on Sunday. They thought that by doing this they can circumvent the rules of the Sabbath. But another group realized that what the first group is doing is a violation of the rules of the Sabbath. They warned the violators of the consequences of their actions. A third group realized that there is no use in admonishing the violators. Nothing will stop the transgressors to violate the rules of the Sabbath. They said, *“Why do you admonish a people whom God will destroy or will inflict a severe torment on them?”* The second group answered, *“To discharge our duty to your Lord, and perchance they may become conscious of God.”* They felt that even though they knew that the admonition may fall on deaf ears, they had a duty to perform: the duty of enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil. Thus, the people of the village were divided into three groups: a group who violated the rules of the Sabbath; the second group objected strenuously to the behaviour of the violators; and a third group who did not approve of the violations but did nothing to stop them.

When the admonition was not heeded nor the advice was listened to, God's wrath befell the violators. Those who objected to the violations and tried to stop them were saved. The Quran does not tell us anything about the third group, *“When they forgot that which they were commanded to be mindful of, We rescued those who forbade evil; and We seized the wrongdoers with awful torment because they were transgressors. When in their insolence they persisted in doing what they had been forbidden to do, We said to them, ‘Be you apes, despised and rejected.’”* Those who were determined to violate the rules of the Sabbath and continued to transgress, in spite of the fact that they were warned, were transformed into apes. They lost the main characteristic that makes people human: the free will. So God transformed them into animals having no free will. How did this transformation happen? And what happened to them after that? Neither the Quran nor the Prophet's (PBUH)

tradition gave answers to these questions.

*“We broke them up into separate nations on this earth. There are among them some that are righteous, and some that are far from it. We have tried them with both prosperity and adversity; in order that they might return (to us).”* These verses talk about the Children of Israel after the time of Moses (PBUH). They were divided into different groups: some were righteous, and others were not. God tested them with prosperity and adversity. God’s tests are forms of continuous warnings and reminders for people to heed God’s commands.

*“And a generation succeeded them who inherited the Scripture. They take the goods of this low life (as the price of evil-doing) and say, ‘We will be forgiven.’ And if there came to them (again) an offer of the like, they would accept it (and would sin again).”* The succeeding generations studied the Scripture but did not follow its injunctions. The study was an intellectual exercise that did not touch their souls. They succumbed to the pleasures of this life while entertaining the illusion that they will be forgiven. The verse berated them for twisting the wording of the Scripture which they studied and pledged to follow, *“Did they not pledge in the covenant of the Scripture that they should not say save the truth about God? And they have studied that which is therein. And the abode of the Hereafter is better, for those who are conscious of God. Why do you not understand?”* Faith is not simply an intellectual exercise. Faith has to rest deep in one’s heart and shapes one’s behaviour. The Hereafter is truly better for those who are God conscious. Only those who aspire to the goods of the Hereafter are able to resist the lure of the pleasures of this world. The verse appeals to the ability of the human mind to analyse and understand the importance of the two fundamental concepts of the Hereafter and God consciousness.

*“As to those who hold fast to the Book and establish regular prayer, We will never squander the reward of the doers of good.”* Holding fast to the Book implies understanding the Book and applying its injunctions in a way that does not allow any excesses or looseness, the moderate way that God likes His book to be applied. Holding fast implies firmness without allowing excesses brought about by extremes. Loosely applying the injunctions is as bad as being extremely strict. The fact that holding fast to the Book is coupled with establishing prayers sends a message that the Book plays two roles: a role in people’s regular daily life and a role in performing the rituals. People will not be able to lead a healthy way of life unless both their material and spiritual needs are satisfied using the ways described in the Book. People’s lives are corrupted when either need goes unsatisfied, or when the Book is not used in satisfying these needs. The Book provides a comprehensive plan for a healthy way of life.

This group of verses concluded by making a reference to the covenant between God and the Children of Israel, *“And when We shook the Mount over them, as if it were a canopy, and they thought it was going to fall on them (We said), ‘Hold firmly to what We have given you, and remember what is therein; perchance you may remain conscious of God.’”* The covenant was made in a dramatic circumstance. God raised the mount above them to show them His power. They were asked to solemnly pledge to take their covenant with God seriously and stay firm and steadfast in applying its injunctions. The dramatic circumstance which surrounded making the pledge to abide by God’s covenant was meant to make that

covenant ingrained in their memories forever. Thus, reminding them continuously of their connection to God.

## Verses: 172 to 198

172. *And when your Lord drew forth from the children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves (saying), "Am I not your Lord (who cherishes and sustains you)?" They said, "Yes, we do testify." (This), lest you should say on the Day of Judgment, "Of this we were never mindful."*
173. *Or lest you should say, "Our fathers before us have associated partners with God, but we are only (their) descendants after them; will You then destroy us because of the deeds of those who followed falsehood?"*
174. *Thus, do We explain the revelations in detail; and perchance they may return.*
175. *Relate to them the story of him to whom We gave Our revelations but he sloughed off them. So, Satan overtook him, and he went astray.*
176. *Had it been Our will, We would have elevated him with Our revelations; but he clung to the earth, and followed his own whims. His similitude is that of a dog: if you attack him, he lolls out his tongue and if you leave him alone, he (still) lolls out his tongue. That is the similitude of those who deny Our revelations. So relate the story; perchance they may reflect.*
177. *Evil is the example of people who deny Our revelations and wrong their own souls.*
178. *Whomever God guides is indeed on the right path and whomever He sends astray, these are the losers.*
179. *We have created for Hell many of the jinn and humankind. They have hearts that do not understand, eyes that do not see, and ears that do not hear. They are like cattle, even more misguided; for they are heedless (of warning).*
180. *The most beautiful names belong to God. So call on Him by them; but shun those who blaspheme His names. They will soon be recompensed for what they were doing.*
181. *And of those whom We created, there is a nation who guides with the truth and establishes justice therewith.*
182. *Those who deny Our revelations, We will lead them on from whence they do not know.*
183. *And I grant them respite; certainly, My scheme is effective.*
184. *Do they not reflect? Their companion is not seized with madness; he is but a plain warner.*
185. *Do they not consider the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and what things God has created; and it may be that they have approached their appointed term? What other revelation will they believe in, if they do not believe in this?*
186. *Whomever God sends astray, will have no other guide; He will leave them in their trespasses, wandering blindly in their contumacy.*

187. They ask you about the (final) Hour - when will be its appointed time? Say, "The knowledge thereof is with my Lord (alone). None but He can reveal when it will occur; it is momentous through the heavens and the earth. It will happen suddenly." They ask you as if you were well informed thereof. Say, "The knowledge thereof is with God (alone), but most people do not know."
188. Say, "It is not in my power to bring benefit to or to avert harm from myself except what God wills. If I had knowledge of the unseen, I would have an abundance of good things and no evil could have touched me. I am only a warner, and a bringer of glad tidings to those who believe."
189. It is He who created you from a single soul, and from it made its mate, in order that he might dwell with her (in love). When he covered her, she bears a light burden and carries it about. When she grows heavy, they both pray God their Lord, (saying), "If You give us a goodly child, we vow we shall (ever) be grateful."
190. But when He gave them a goodly child, they ascribed to others a share in the gift they have received; but God is Exalted high above the partners they ascribe to Him.
191. Do they indeed ascribe to Him as partners, things that can create nothing, but are themselves created?
192. And they cannot help them, nor can they help themselves?
193. If you call them to guidance, they will not obey. It is the same whether you call them or you hold your peace.
194. Verily those whom you call upon besides God are servants like you; call upon them, and let them respond to you, if you are (indeed) truthful.
195. Do they have feet to walk with, hands to strike with, eyes to see with, or ears to hear with? Say, "Call your 'god-partners', and scheme (your worst) against me, and give me no respite.
196. My Patron is God, Who revealed the Book, and He protects the righteous."
197. Those whom you call upon besides Him, are unable to help you, and indeed they cannot help themselves.
198. If you call them to guidance, they do not hear. You will see them looking at you, but they see not. (7:172-198)

*"And when your Lord drew forth from the children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves (saying), 'Am I not your Lord (who cherishes and sustains you)?' They said, 'Yes, we do testify.' (This), lest you should say on the Day of Judgment, 'Of this we were never mindful.'"* The verse discusses the connection between the initial natural human disposition and faith using the familiar theatrical Quranic style. The verse describes an amazing scene, a scene which depicts the whole human race being questioned by their Creator, at the time of the creation of Adam before any of them was yet born, "Am I not your Lord?" The whole human race answered, "Yes, You are." We recognize You as our sole Creator, we acknowledge Your Lordship, and we pledge to worship You alone. All human beings who were not yet born at the time of the creation of Adam (PBUH) participated in this dialogue with God.

Quran presented this scene more than fourteen hundred years ago. At that time no one knew about the human genes and how it keeps a record of the traits of each human being and

his/her lineage. Ibn Jareer narrated on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas (RA), “Your Lord wiped Adam’s back from which came out each and every soul that will be created till the Day of Judgment. God then took their pledge and asked them, ‘Am I not Your Lord?’ They said, ‘Yes.’” How did this happen? No one has the answer to this question. This is part of the unseen. Human beings are unable to understand the nature of God, consequently understanding how He does things is beyond our comprehension. We have to submit to the truth of the verses describing God’s actions without trying to explain the nature of these actions. Verses which describe God’s actions like, “*Then He turned to the sky, which was smoke,*” (41:11), “*Your Lord is God, who created the heavens and the earth in six Days, then established Himself on the throne.*” (7:54), “*And your Lord came, and His angels, rank upon rank,*” (89:22) should be accepted as true, even though we do not know how these actions occur. We do not need to ask how these actions occurred because the way God does things is beyond the comprehension of human beings.

However, this verse could be understood to mean that God created all people with an initial natural disposition that recognizes God as the sole Creator and this disposition provides the initial drive for the human being to seek and discover God. However, this initial disposition may be corrupted by external influences. Ibn Katheer said in his interpretation of the Quran that the verse means that the initial natural human disposition is inclined to the belief in the Oneness of God. We do not think that the scene described in the verse is implausible; God is able to do whatever He wishes. But, we also accept Ibn Katheer’s interpretation, God knows best.

Either way, we come to the conclusion that the initial natural human disposition is bent on the belief in the Oneness of God. Every human being is born with this disposition however, as the person grows up this initial disposition may be strengthened or weakened according to the influence of the external environment. The concept of the Oneness of God is not only part of the initial disposition of the human being but it is also intrinsic to the creation of the universe. The initial natural human disposition is part of the law that govern the whole universe. This law which governs the whole universe is based on the fundamental concept of the Oneness of the Creator.

*“Or lest you should say, “Our fathers before us have associated partners with God, but we are only (their) descendants after them; will You then destroy us because of the deeds of those who followed falsehood?”* God knows that the initial natural disposition may be corrupted by external influences. He thus, decided, as an act of mercy, that humans are held accountable only to the deeds they actually commit. God does not leave humans to decide on their own through the use of the intellect that He bestowed upon them, what is right and what is wrong; but He sends messengers to explain what is right and what is wrong. Had God known that the initial natural human disposition and the human intellect are sufficient to guide people to the right path, He would not have sent messengers with a message to guide people to the right path, “*Thus, do We explain the revelations in detail; and perchance they may return.*” There is no excuse for rejecting the belief in the Oneness of God, after

receiving the detailed revelations of God.

*“Relate to them the story of him to whom We gave Our revelations but he sloughed off them. So, Satan overtook him, and he went astray. Had it been Our will, We would have elevated him with Our revelations; but he clung to the earth, and followed his own whims. His similitude is that of a dog: if you attack him, he lolls out his tongue and if you leave him alone, he (still) lolls out his tongue. That is the similitude of those who deny Our revelations. So relate the story; perchance they may reflect. Evil is the example of people who deny Our revelations and wrong their own souls.”* The verses describe another amazing scene. A human being who received God’s revelations, blessings, and knowledge; he got the chance to be guided, to rise and become connected to God, but he chose to eschew all of this. The verse paints a picture of a human being who shed off these blessings as if he is shedding off the outer layer of his skin. These blessings were the protective cover that guided him on the right path and kept him safe from the temptation of Satan. When he shed off the protective cover he became an easy prey to Satan, who caused him to stray away from the path of guidance to the path of whims and desires, and he fell from the height of light to the bottom of darkness. His likeness is the likeness of a stray dog sitting close to the ground, afraid and insecure. This is an example of those who reject God’s revelations, *“That is the similitude of those who deny Our revelations. So relate the story; perchance they may reflect. Evil is the example of people who deny Our revelations and wrong their own souls.”* The signs of guidance were everywhere inside and around them. Their initial natural disposition as well as the signs in the universe around them pointed to the road of guidance, but they chose to ignore all these signs. They wronged themselves.

*“Whomever God guides is indeed on the right path; and whomever He sends astray, these are the losers.”* God guides those who strive to be guided, *“And those who strive in Our (cause), We will certainly guide them to our Paths.”* (29:69), *“Verily, never will God change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves;”* (13:11) similarly, those who choose to become misguided, God leaves them to pursue their crooked path, *“We have created for hell many of the jinn and humankind. They have hearts that do not understand, eyes that do not see, and ears that do not hear. They are like cattle, even more misguided; for they are heedless (of warning);”* (7:179) *“There is a disease in their hearts; and God has increased their disease.”* (2:10)

The divine will which controls the destiny of the human beings gave them equal propensity to guidance and misguidance. God created the human being with an initial natural disposition that is aware of the Oneness of the Creator. This disposition drives the human being towards seeking God’s guidance. God also gave the human being an intellect that allows him/her to differentiate between right and wrong. God also sent His messengers to deliver His message to people.

God has decreed that He will guide those who seek guidance and will leave those who want to stray away to dwell in their misguidance. In all cases, everything is decided according to the divine will. The divine Will is the only power in this universe. No event can take place unless it has been decreed by God’s will.

*“We have created for Hell many of the jinn and humankind. They have hearts that do not understand, eyes that do not see, and ears that do not hear. They are like cattle, even more misguided; for they are heedless (of warning).”* This verse confirms what we have mentioned earlier. It states that many jinn and humans have been created for Hell fire, they deserve that. Why is this? There are two reasons. First, God knows, in his eternal knowledge, that these creatures are destined to Hell fire. God’s knowledge of an event is not contingent on the occurrence of such event. God’s knowledge is comprehensive and independent of time and occurrences. Second, God’s eternal knowledge is not the cause that drives people to sin and thus deserve to be admitted to Hell fire. They are admitted to Hell fire because, *“They have hearts that do not understand, eyes that do not see, and ears that do not hear.”* They did not open their hearts to examine the cogent evidence of faith given in the divine messages. They did not open their eyes to see the signs of God in the universe. They did not open their ears to listen to God’s revelations that were recited to them. They were given these senses to use them to understand, to see, and to listen but they kept their senses isolated from all sources of guidance. They went through life heedless and with no reflection on the purpose of life. They were, *“like cattle, even more misguided,”* Those who are unaware of the divine signs in life and in the universe and those who never reflect on the divine intervention in their daily life are more lost than cattle. Cattle are guided by their instincts. Humans and jinn were given a heart that understands, an eye that sees, and an ear that hears. If they do not use these senses to observe, hear, reflect, and understand the purpose of life they would be more lost than cattle which are guided by their instincts. These are the ones whom God created for Hell fire.

*“The most beautiful names belong to God. So, call on him by them; but shun those who blaspheme His names. They will soon be recompensed for what they were doing.”* The idolatrous Arabs blasphemed God’s name. They distorted the name of God, “Allah” into “Allat” and used it as a name for one of their idols. They distorted God’s name, “Al-Aziz (the Eminent)” into “Al-Ozza” and used it as a name for another of their idols. The verse states that the beautiful names of God are His alone. The believers are commanded to use these names – without distortion- in calling upon God. The believers should not worry about those who blaspheme God’s names, God will punish them.

The command not to worry about those who blaspheme God’s name is not limited to this particular incident. This is a general command that should be applied to all forms of blasphemous acts. Claiming that God has a son, that God’s will is controlled by the law of nature, that God’s actions are similar to humans’ actions, or that God’s dominion is limited to heaven and He should not interfere in people’s life on earth are all different forms of blasphemy. Muslims are commanded to turn away from people who blaspheme God’s name in any form and do not worry about them. Those blasphemers will be punished by God.

*“And of those whom We created, there is a nation who guides with the truth and establishes justice therewith.”* Humanity would not have deserved to be honoured by God, had it not been for the few who form the group that God calls, “nation.” This is a nation which is united around the belief in the Oneness of God. It is a nation that is led by people who believe in the Oneness of God. It is a nation that lives according to the rule of God. It is the nation that has been appointed as a keeper of God’s trust on earth. It is the nation that has been appointed as a witness over all people.

Let us stop here and reflect on the characteristics of this nation: it is a nation that guides with the truth and establishes justice. This nation, which always exists no matter how few its members are, guides with the truth. The members of this nation are persistent in their efforts to guide to the truth, they will never stop. They do not live in seclusion and they do not hide the truth that they know. They assume the role of leaders who lead to the truth. Their role does not stop at knowing the truth and guiding people to it, but they endeavour to establish justice on earth. The truth was not given so that it would be treated as a body of knowledge to be gained through study programs nor it was given to be sermons for admonishing people; but it was given to establish the rule of justice in people's lives.

The truth was revealed to provide a holistic approach to life. This truth guides people in all aspects of life. It explains the essence of the articles faith, it delineates the way the rituals should be performed, and it controls all the activities that constitute the daily lives of people. It encompasses faith, rituals as well as ethics, traditions, and behaviour.

*“Those who deny Our revelations, We will lead them on from whence they do not know. And I grant them respite; certainly, My scheme is effective.”* This is the power that they did not consider when they launched their aggressive war against this religion and against the nation that believes in this religion. They never thought that God is simply giving them respite, so they thought that they were beyond His reach. They forgot that God's scheme is effective.

*“Do they not reflect? Their companion is not seized with madness; he is but a plain warner.”* The idolatrous Arabs used to say that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was a mad person. The Quran poses the question trying to bring them to their senses and make them think and understand. Muhammad (PBUH) lived among them all his life. They never doubted his sanity, his honesty, his truthfulness, and his wisdom. They accepted him as a judge and accepted his ruling in the conflict that arose when they were rebuilding the Ka'ba; and they had a disagreement about who should have the honor of placing the Black Stone in its designated place. They entrusted him with their valuables when they travelled. Even after he became a Prophet, they still entrusted him with their valuables. When the Prophet (PBUH) migrated from Mecca to Medina he entrusted his cousin 'Ali with the assignment to return back these valuables to their owners.

*“Do they not consider the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and what things God has created; and it may be that they have approached their appointed term? What other revelation will they believe in, if they do not believe in this?”* This is another question which tries to shake them up from their denial. The universe has the cogent evidence for anyone who is seeking the truth to realize the existence of a Creator. How long they think they will live? Are they not worried about what will happen after death? If they cannot believe in this, what other revelation would they believe in?

These different questions reveal the features of the Quranic style in addressing people. The questions address different aspects of the human being at the same time. They address the psyche, the intellect, and the feelings of the human being. The Quran does not approach humankind with a cold rational argument but it presents a dialogue that touches upon the

different aspects of the lives of people. This is the right approach for addressing humankind at all times.

*“Whomever God sends astray, will have no other guide; He will leave them in their trespasses, wandering blindly in their contumacy.”* Those who are misguided chose to be misguided because they refused to observe and reflect. Those who refuse to observe and reflect on the God’s revelations are left to go astray. No injustice is inflicted on them because they are the ones who chose not to see, reflect, and understand.

*“They ask you about the (final) Hour - when will be its appointed time? Say, ‘The knowledge thereof is with my Lord (alone). None but He can reveal when it will occur; it is momentous through the heavens and the earth. It will happen suddenly.’ They ask you as if you were well informed thereof. Say, ‘The knowledge thereof is with God (alone), but most people do not know.’”* Those who were unaware of what was happening around them ask the Prophet (PBUH) about the Hour (the date of the Day of Judgment), they were unable to see what can be seen and yet they want to know about the unseen.

The idolatrous Arabs were shocked when they were introduced to the concepts of life after death and the accountability of humankind. Although, these concepts were integral to Abraham’s (PBUH) faith but they were long forgotten by the Arabs. The basic tenets of the faith that Abraham and Ishmael (PBUT) preached were lost over the passage of time. It was quite a surprise that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) revived these concepts. The Quran records their reaction, *“The disbelievers say (in ridicule), ‘Shall we point out to you a man that will tell you, when you are all scattered to pieces in disintegration, that you shall (then be raised) in a new creation?’ Has he fabricated a falsehood against God, or is he mad?’ No, it is those who do not believe in the Hereafter, that will suffer torment, and they are in gross error.”* (34:7-8)

God knows that a nation which is destined to lead humanity and is assigned as a witness over it – such as the Muslim nation- would not be able to perform its required task unless it has a strong belief in the certainty of the Hereafter. A nation which believes that there is nothing beyond this worldly life cannot perform these major tasks. The belief in the Hereafter provides a wider perspective of life and it provides an extension of the worldly life necessary for the preparation of the human psyche to carry on these major assignments. A life beyond this worldly life provides an incentive for the human beings to guide to goodness and to perform charitable acts without expecting immediate rewards. It also provides a perspective for the human being wider than the one limited by material needs only. This is the rationale behind the strong emphasis on the belief in the Hereafter as an integral part of the faith of Islam. This emphasis was absorbed in the psyche of the Muslim nation in its early days when the nation provided a wise leadership for the world.

The Hour is part of the unseen. The unseen is part of the exclusive knowledge of God; no one is privy to it. The idolatrous Arabs came to Prophet (PBUH) to ask him about the Hour. The question may have been posed to test the Prophet’s (PBUH) knowledge; it may have been posed to express their surprise; or it may have been posed to ridicule the Prophet (PBUH). The Prophet

(PBUH) was a human being he did not claim that he was privy to the unseen. The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to leave the unseen to the owner of the unseen, *“The knowledge thereof is with my Lord (alone). None but He can reveal when it will occur.”* The Hour is part of the exclusive knowledge of God; He will reveal it when its time comes. The emphasis is then turned from its time to its nature, *“it is momentous through the heavens and the earth. It will happen suddenly.”*

It is going to be a tremendous event. They should pay attention to its nature rather than being obsessed by its timing. They should be busy preparing for its coming because it is going to happen suddenly and without warning. The verse comments on the ignorance of those who were asking the question, *“They ask you as if you were well informed thereof. Say, ‘The knowledge thereof is with God (alone), but most people do not know.’”* They do not understand the limitations of human knowledge, nor do they appreciate the nature of God.

*“Say, ‘It is not in my power to bring benefit to or to avert harm from myself except what God wills. If I had knowledge of the unseen, I would have an abundance of good things and no evil could have touched me. I am only a warner, and a bringer of glad tidings to the believers.’”* This proclamation defines the dimensions of the belief in the Oneness of God. It is a belief that is free of any form of associating partners with God. This is also a statement of the uniqueness of God’s attributes. No human being shares any of these attributes, even if he were Muhammad (PBUH) who was chosen by God to be His messenger.

Muhammad (PBUH) is only a warner and a bearer of glad tidings for all people. Only those who “believe” benefit from the warning and the glad tidings that he brought. They understand what he has and are aware of the truth of what he brought. They are the chosen ones. The true meaning of a word is not understood unless the heart is prepared to receive and understand. The Quran does not yield its treasures, secrets, and fruits except to those who believe. It has been narrated by some of the companions of the Prophet (PBUH) that they said, “We were given the faith before we were given the Quran.” The faith enabled them to taste and appreciate the Quran. It enabled them to understand its true meaning and objectives. This was the reason behind their tremendous achievements. That generation lived by the Quran and they lived for the Quran. It was a unique generation that never happened again. We see only individual examples appearing in the succeeding generations who emulated the first generation.

This is another round that deals with the concept of the Oneness of God. The narrative follows a story telling approach to depict the gradual deviation from the belief in the Oneness of God to the concept of associating partners with God. It is as if the verses are narrating the stages that the idolatrous Arabs went through in their deviation from the religion of their forefather Abraham (PBUH) to become idolaters. The narrative then confronts the idolaters by uncovering the irrationality of idol worship. The round ends by issuing a command to the Prophet (PBUH) to challenge the idolaters and the idols they worshiped and to proclaim God as his only helper and supporter. *“It is He who created you from a single soul, and from it made its mate, in order that he might dwell with her (in love). When he covered her, she bears a light burden and carries it about. When she grows heavy, they both pray God their Lord, (saying), ‘If You give us a goodly child, we vow we shall (ever) be grateful.’”* The verse displays the role of the initial natural disposition which God created in each human being, in shaping the behavior of the human being.

The first reaction of the human being in times of need and fear is to seek God's help. The verse refers to the first couple of the human race. The male and the female were created from the same soul. However, their functions were different. The difference is intentional so that the spouses can find comfort and tranquility in the company of each other. This is Islam's perspective of the relationship between human males and females. This is the original perspective that Islam introduced more than fourteen hundred years ago, at a time when distorted religions held that women were responsible for the misery of the human race and the idolaters treated women as chattel or at least as servants to men of no value or consequence.

Then the story starts, "*When he covers her, she bears a light burden and carries it about.*" The Quran uses a decorous expression, "*he covers her,*" to describe the intimate physical relationship between the spouses which is congruent with the atmosphere of tranquility referred to earlier. It is as if the verse describes the meeting of two apparitions rather than the meeting of two physical bodies. This alludes to the difference that should exist in the way the intimate physical relationship between the spouses is conducted in the human and animal domains. The humans' way is characterised by decency while the animals' way is characterised by pure physical lust.

Similarly, the early stage of pregnancy is described as, "a light burden," it is carried unnoticed. Then the second stage is reached, "*When she grows heavy, they both pray God their Lord, (saying), 'If You give us a goodly child, we vow we shall (ever) be grateful.'*" When the pregnancy became a reality and the love of the baby started to grow in the hearts of its parents, they started to worry about their baby. Is the baby going to be of sound body and mind? They sought God's help and support. They asked God to give them a goodly child, but, "*But when He gave them a goodly child, they ascribed to others a share in the gift they have received; but God is Exalted high above the partners they ascribe to Him.*"

"*Do they indeed ascribe to Him as partners, things that can create nothing, but are themselves created? And they cannot help them, nor can they help themselves?*" Only the Creator deserves to be worshiped. These manmade deities cannot create anything; they are created themselves. How can anyone worship these so called gods? Only the one who has the power to support His servants deserves to be worshiped. Power and Dominion are attributes of God. The so called gods have neither power nor dominion.

The use of the pronoun "they" in the second half of the verse indicates the possibility of having human beings among those who were appointed gods. We are aware that the idolatrous Arabs did not worship other human beings. But the verse alludes to the fact that the chiefs were given the authority to legislate and to establish social rules which no one disputed. So, they usurped the role of god in determining the norms and rules that organize the lives of other human beings. The Quran thus draws the similarity between this kind of associating partners with God and actual idol worship.

The Quran drives this point further, "*If you call them to guidance, they will not obey. It is the same whether you call them or you hold your peace. Verily those whom you call upon besides God are servants like you; call upon them, and let them respond to you, if you are (indeed) truthful. Do they have feet to walk with, hands to strike with, eyes to see with, or ears to hear with?*" The Quran tried to show the idolatrous Arabs that idol worshiping is illogical and irrational. An argument appealing to the reason is made: if these gods do not have feet to walk,

hands to fight, eyes to see, or ears to hear, how can they be worthy of being worshiped? How can a person, who has all these senses, worship something that does not even have any of these senses? If the idols are symbols of humans or angels, they still represent servants of God who have been created and have no power to create anything. They cannot help themselves let alone help anyone else. The pre-Islamic idolaters used idols to symbolize holy humans and angels. This has been captured in the verse above by the use of pronouns that point to living as well as non-living things.

At the end of this round, the Quran commanded the Prophet (PBUH) to challenge them, “*Say, ‘Call your “god-partners”, and scheme (your worst) against me, and give me no respite. My Patron is God, who revealed the Book, and He protects the righteous.’*” This was the challenge, the Prophet (PBUH) asked them to do their best and to scheme their worst, because the true God is his supporter. He (God) will protect His Messenger.

The idolaters of Mecca used to assault Abu Bakr (RA). They would hit him with their shoes and mutilate his face. During these torture episodes, Abu Bakr (RA) never stopped repeating, “*Lord, You are so Forbearing.*” He knew deep in his heart that God is able to destroy these idolaters and he was certain that God will never let His close servants down. The idolaters of Mecca used to assault Abd-Allah bin Maso’ud (RA) for daring to recite the Quran near the Ka’ba. When they were finished with him he would not be able to walk. At the end of each of these torture sessions, he would say about those who tortured him, “*By God, they never seemed to me to be more abased.*” He was certain that God humiliates those who fight Him therefore; those who fight God should look petty in the eyes of the close servants of God.

These examples reflect the way this generation of Muslims – the generation that followed closely the Quran – understood and practiced the command, “*Call your ‘god-partners’, and scheme (your worst) against me, and give me no respite. My Patron is God, who revealed the Book, and He protects the righteous.*” They suffered patiently the torture inflicted on them by the idolaters, and sought God’s protection. The history is a witness to the victory that they achieved afterwards. God gave them victory, and those who tortured them ended conquered and abased.

God commanded His Prophet (PBUH) to challenge the idolaters and to explain to them the absurdity of worshipping these idols, “*Those whom you call upon besides Him, are unable to help you, and indeed they cannot help themselves. If you call them to guidance, they do not hear. You will see them looking at you, but they see not.*” This command should always be remembered by those who are involved in the call to Islam. The days of idolatry may be over, but there are still little deities being worshiped by their followers. These little deities will try to inflict harm on those who oppose them and challenge their authority.

## **Verses: 199 to 206**

199.        *Hold to pardoning; command what is right; and turn away from the ignorant.*  
200.        *If a thought from Satan assailed your (mind), seek refuge with God; for He is All-Hearing, Omniscient.*

201. *Those who are conscious of God, when a thought of evil from Satan assails them, they remember God and then, they suddenly see.*
202. *But their brethren (the evil ones) plunge them deeper into error, and never desist.*
203. *If you do not bring them a revelation, they say, "Why did you not choose it?" Say, "I only follow what is revealed to me from my Lord. This is (nothing but) a light from your Lord, guidance, and mercy, for those who believe."*
204. *And when the Qur'an is recited, listen to it and pay heed that you may receive mercy.*
205. *And do remember your Lord within yourself humbly and with awe, below your breath, at morning and evening. And do not be of those who are heedless.*
206. *Surely, those who are with your Lord are not too proud to worship Him, and they praise Him and prostrate before Him. (7:199-206)*

*"Hold to forgiveness; command what is right; and turn away from the ignorant. If a thought from Satan assailed your (mind), seek refuge with God; for He is All-Hearing, Omniscient. Those who are conscious of God, when a thought of evil from Satan assails them, remember God and they suddenly see."* Forgive people and accept their shortcomings. Do not expect people to be perfect and do not burden them with tasks beyond their capacity. These rules are acceptable in interpersonal relationships but they are not acceptable in matters of faith or religious duties. Matters of faith, Islamic law, and religious duties should be taken very seriously. However, when it comes to daily dealings between people, tolerance and forgiveness are encouraged. Command what is right. What is right includes things that have been accepted as good. These are things which are neither controversial nor are they contested. These are the things which have been deemed right by the sound initial natural human disposition. We need to train ourselves on commanding what is right until it becomes a natural and integral part of our psyche. Turn away from the ignorant. Ignorance is the opposite of wisdom and knowledge. One should ignore such people and avoid getting into arguments with them. Arguing with such people is a waste of time and energy. Ignoring them may allow them time to reflect on their positions and choose to rectify their error; and if they continue in their stubbornness and ignorance, they will be ignored.

*"Those who are conscious of God, when a thought of evil from Satan assails them, they remember God and then, they suddenly see."* When Satan assails people, he causes them to be blind. They can no longer see the truth. When they remember God, they are suddenly healed. Their sight is restored and they are connected with God. God consciousness provides a protection against Satan. Satan has no power over those who are conscious of God. This is how God conscious people deal with Satan: they remember God.

After this short digression about the role of God consciousness in protecting people against Satan, the narrative returns to discuss the ignorant, what motivates them in their ignorance and who drives them to be ignorant, *"But their brethren (the evil ones) plunge them deeper into error, and never desist. If you do not bring them a revelation, they say, "Why did you not choose it?" Say, "I only follow what is revealed to me from my Lord. This is (nothing but) a light from your Lord, guidance, and mercy, for those who believe."*

Their brethren who support them and encourage them to go deeper in their error are Satan's host. They are also human beings who have been recruited by Satan to perform the same role. They

continue tirelessly to lure them into error. The idolaters continued to ask the Prophet (PBUH) to come up with a miracle. They were ignorant of the nature of the message and the role of the Prophet (PBUH). The verse provides an example of these requests, *“If you do not bring them a revelation, they say, “Why did you not choose it?”* a request that reflects their misconception of the Prophet’s role and manners. The Prophet’s (PBUH) role is only to deliver the revelation not to concoct it, *“I only follow what is revealed to me from my Lord.”*

Then the Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to explain the nature of the message, *“This is (nothing but) a light from your Lord, guidance, and mercy, for any who have faith.”*

The verses continue with directives to the believers, *“And when the Qur'an is recited, listen to it and pay heed that you may receive mercy.”* The Sura started with a verse talking about the Quran, *“A Book revealed to you - let there be no heaviness in your heart there from;”* and ends with a verse explaining the etiquette of listening to the Quran.

There is a difference of opinion among the scholars about when to comply with this command. Some think that when in a prayer behind an Imam who is reciting Quran loudly, a Muslim should not raise his voice with Quranic recitation. This is the opinion of Imam Ahmed. This opinion is based on a Prophetic tradition narrated by Abo Hurriera (RA), *“The Prophet (PBUH) asked his companions, after he had just finished a prayer in which he recited Quran loudly, ‘Did anyone of you recite Quran, while I was reciting?’ One of them answered, ‘Yes, I did.’ The Prophet (PBUH) said, ‘I say, no one should recite while I am reciting.’ So, people stopped this practice after they had heard the Prophet’s admonition.”*

Ibn Jareer also mentioned that Ibn Mas’oud (RA) was leading the prayer once and he heard people reciting the Quran while he was reciting, he said to the people, *“Do you not understand that when the Qur'an is recited, you should listen to it and pay heed that you may receive mercy.”*

Another view indicates that this verse came down to disallow talking while one is praying. Ibn Mas’oud (RA) said, *“We used to greet each other while we were praying until the verse, ‘And when the Qur'an is recited, listen to it and pay heed that you may receive mercy.’ was revealed, we then stopped.”* Qatadah (RA) said, *“A man would come while people were praying, and ask, ‘How many rak’a have you prayed? and how many is left? When this verse was revealed, we stopped talking while praying.”*

Al-Qurtobi quoted Al-Naqash, who said, *“It is the opinion of the scholars who wrote Quranic interpretations that this verse applies to all prayers.”* This has been agreed by Al-Nahas who cited a linguistic rule indicating that the verse should be applied in all situations since it was written in a general form and no exceptions were cited.

We believe then that the command in the verse should be generalized. It should be followed whenever the Quran is recited. This is the proper etiquette and it is the way to receive God’s mercy. We base our opinion on the rule which states that commands issued in general terms should be complied with irrespective of the specific situation which surrounded their revelation. Listening to the Quran being recited brings comfort, understanding and awareness to the listener. Reciting Quran instils in the heart and mind of the reader greater insight, it invigorates the imagination, and builds up the determination. Reciting Quran opens the mind and heart to the

truth of existence and the facts of life. It brings an understanding of human nature, with all its weaknesses and strengths, and it opens up the way to remedy spiritual ailments.

The Sura ends with a general command to the believers to remember God in all situations, “*And do remember your Lord within yourself humbly and with awe, below your breath, at morning and evening. And do not be of those who are heedless. Surely, those who are with your Lord are not too proud to worship Him, and they praise Him and prostrate before Him.*” Ibn Katheer mentioned in his book on the interpretation of the Quran that God commanded His servants to remember Him at the beginning and end of every day, as He commanded them to worship Him at these two times, “*Celebrate the praise of your Lord before sunrise and before sunset.*” (50:39) The remembrance of God is best done in secret or with a low voice while entertaining feelings of hope in God and fear of Him, “*And do remember your Lord within yourself humbly and with awe, below your breath.*” It has been reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim that Abu Musa Al-Asha’ari (RA) said, “One time the Prophet (PBUH) heard people saying supplications in a loud voice. The Prophet (PBUH) said, ‘People, be kind to yourself (do not raise your voices with supplications) you are not calling upon one who is deaf or far away. He whom you call upon is near and He hears. He is even nearer to you than the neck of the camel you are riding.’”

The remembrance of God is not merely a lip service. It is an exercise which engages the heart, the soul, and the psyche of the human being. It has to resonate with the feelings of hope in God and fear of Him. One has to experience the magnificence of the presence of God within one’s heart. One should attain the spiritual transparency which connects the person to God. The decorum of the occasion should be preserved even when the tongue moves in unison with the heart and the lips in unison with the soul.

Believers should remember God not only at the beginning and end of the day. They should do it every minute of the day. However, the mention of the beginning and end of the day has significance because these are times when the cosmic phenomena of the succession of day and night remind us of the power of the Creator. It is a time when the believer can join the whole universe in celebrating the praise of God.

“*And do not be of those who are heedless.*” Remembrance of God is not only done using the tongue and the lips. Remembering God should be a task of the heart and the soul to control the senses and stop them from committing anything that displeases God. This is what is meant by remembrance of God in this verse: the remembrance which leads to obedience, hard work, and ethical behaviour following in the footsteps of the Prophet (PBUH).

God gave the example of those who are beyond the assault of Satan. These are the angels whose nature does not make them subject to the temptation of Satan, “*Surely, those who are with your Lord are not too proud to worship Him, and they praise Him and prostrate before Him.*” The angels are a creation of God which is beyond Satan’s reach. They are created to celebrate God’s praise and to perform the tasks God assigns to them. They have pure nature which is safe of any satanic invasion; they do not entertain evil thoughts or desires. However, they busy themselves always with celebrating the praise of God. Humankind who can be easily lured to evil thoughts and deeds by Satan is in greater need to celebrate God’s praise to be protected from Satan assaults.

Rituals and remembrance of God are fundamental concepts in the Islamic project. The Islamic project is not meant to be a project for academic study or religious discourses. It is a project that aims at changing people's way of life from a way of life which is based on distorted beliefs and crooked traditions to a way of life based on the divine project. This transformation is a difficult feat that requires hard work and perseverant effort. The person who takes up such a responsibility is a human being with limited resources. Not only knowledge is needed but also other forms of help are necessary. Engaging in the rituals of worship provides the person with a supply line connected to God. Through this supply line come the support, the help, and the provision that enables him/her along this difficult road. It is therefore, quite appropriate to end this Sura with a command to worship God. It is the provision needed for the road.